

Samson Slays a Lion

by John Follette

The sermon explores Samson's encounter with a lion as a metaphor for the struggles of the flesh in the pursuit of spiritual inheritance.

Scripture: Judges 14:5, Matthew 4:4, John 4:34, Romans 8:32, Galatians 5:16, Colossians 3:3

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Overcoming Flesh"

Description

John Wright Follette preaches about the spiritual journey of Samson encountering a lion on his way to Timnath, symbolizing the flesh that opposes spiritual growth. He emphasizes the importance of not getting stuck in one spiritual experience but continually seeking deeper spiritual possessions and understanding. Follette highlights the need to face and conquer the 'lion' of the flesh, relying on the Spirit's power rather than human efforts. He encourages believers to focus on their spiritual objectives, not getting distracted by past victories or ongoing conflicts, and to trust God to turn every battle into a source of spiritual nourishment and ministry.

Transcript

Out of the Strong

Up from the vineyards of Timnath

A young lion came one day--

The flesh in its strength and beauty--

And roared as he sought his prey.

Snarling and growling from hunger

He moved down life's dusty road,

And roared as he saw a Christian

Alone and near no abode.

The Christian stood without weapons,

No carnal strength did he know,
But clothed with Jehovah's power
He fearlessly met the foe.
The Lion of flesh then gathered
All powers that he could bid,
But the Spirit was triumphant
And rent him as though a kid.
A helpless heap by the roadside
The vanquished young lion lay;
Under the hot, eastern sunshine
His beauty turned to decay.
His roar became but an echo
The Christian at times could hear
As he journeyed on to Timnath--
God's love casting out all fear.
The sun continued its shining;
The flesh all rotted away
Exposing a dried-out carcass
Where the honey bees came to stay.
Bees make no honey in lions
That roar in the flesh and cry,
Nor still in dead lions rotting,
But in carcasses bleached and dry.
Often returning from Timnath,
The Christian new homeward bound,
Turns off from the dusty roadside
Where a place of spoil is found,

And humbly gathers sweetness
Where his roaring flesh once died,
Enough for himself and others
From a carcass bleached and dried.

-John Wright Follette

For our lesson this afternoon I want to bring to our remembrance an Old Testament story, familiar, I am sure, to all of us. I trust there shall be conviction and also inspiration and help in the analogy we may draw from a dramatic incident in Samson's life. I wish to talk about Samson and the lion he slew. The story is recorded in Judges, fourteenth chapter.

First, let us notice that the slaying of the lion is not the main objective toward which Samson is moving. It is rather an experience he encounters as he travels toward his objective --Timnath and a wife. One may be helped here. Do not interpret any single experience in the Christian life as final. No one experience, no matter how graphic, arresting and profoundly moving it may be, should be counted as the final objective of Christian living. Life is made up of a series of crises and telling experiences, but all are in turn to lead one to a more comprehensive understanding of, and spiritual approach to the consummation.

Samson is looking toward and desiring to reach Timnath and a wife. The meaning of the word Timnath is possession, or inheritance. And is that not just what every wide-awake, spiritually-minded Christian is seeking? To receive Christ as a personal Saviour and the mighty Baptism of the Spirit and the gifts, are all initial and make an equipment, as it were, with which to move out by faith and so actually possess' what Christ has freely given us, and what the Holy Spirit longs to lead us all into.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)! Is that not wonderful? It is revolutionizing to receive Christ as a gift, but the text says that with Him we are also to receive all things that come with Him--the possession for Christian living. In the normal life of man, the wife is the complement or completing factor. The full meaning and significance of the normal life as planned by God is in this plan and union. So in the normal life of the Christian, the complete, normal and perfect life is one made up of proper adjustment and understanding between the natural expression demonstrated in the physical life and the correct meaning and use of the spiritual significance of life.

I cannot take time here to develop this glorious, spiritual truth, as suggested by Christ Himself, in the answer He gave Satan when tempted in the realm of the natural: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Here Christ is taking the place of the ideal man, or the last Adam and as such, makes a difference between the sources of life and power. Even as man (the perfect thought of God) the first suggestion is above the natural to God; He does not say Christ or angels, but man is not to live by bread alone. In other words, the normal, properly adjusted life of the person is not only human and material, but there is the spiritual side to be cultivated and trained to make a perfect balance in living. He is to live first by a spiritual touch and communion with God, the vital and supreme source of all life.

So Samson has come to a great awakening--he desires Timnath and a wife. But you must remember that the desire is one thing and the possession quite another. The desire moves on to a stage of faith and

great adventure, and he starts down the dusty road toward Timnath.

Next in order is the lion--very true to life. And what is the lion? you ask. One does not need to press very far toward possessing his rights in Christ before he finds who or what the lion is. It is nothing less than the flesh or nature which always resists and opposes the Spirit and hinders any approach toward spiritual possessions.

The Scripture says it was a young lion. This is very suggestive indeed. It is not an old, worn-out lion with teeth gone and nearsighted. He is young, agile, strong and beautiful. His skin is soft and tawny, his limbs are nimble and sure as he moves along--a picture of grace and beauty. Is he not the king of beasts? What a picture of the natural man, the human heart! We are quite mistaken if we restrict the meaning of the word flesh to ugly, out breaking forms of sin such as murder, pride, adultery and selfishness. The word flesh in the New Testament is sarx, and means the whole natural man---his fine and splendid powers for natural expression, his gifts in the realm of nature, his good, religious desires and commendable features are all natural--sarx or flesh.

As we have moved on with God into deeper fellowship I am sure we have discovered this truth. The word flesh, when used in the Bible with a moral meaning, refers not only to the physical body, but means the whole of the unregenerated person--spirit, soul and body. The life impulses and desires are called "lusts of the flesh." "If by the Spirit ye are walking, ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Also see Eph. 2:3; 2 Peter 2:3; Rom. 13:14; 1 John 2:16.

Note that the Bible use of the word lust is not restricted to inordinate desires, for the Holy Spirit is said to lust against the flesh. Gal. 5:17, also Jas. 4:5. The word flesh does not necessarily mean anything vile and vulgar. The Bible speaks of fleshly wisdom, fleshly tables of the heart, fleshly mind. Paul does not say his body or nature alone is fleshly. He says, "I am fleshly" (Rom. 7:14), and also "in me (in my flesh, sarx) dwelleth no good thing." Flesh is self. In other words, anything in my natural make-up or disposition which opposes the Spirit and the development of spiritual life, is flesh. How beautiful and attractive the young lion is at times. But alas! He wars, and is hungry and seeks his prey. A Christian does not have to move hr down the dusty road toward Timnath before he hears the roar and is conscious of the presence of the young lion. Flesh and spirit are diametrically op. posed and shall ever be so.

Let us now consider another bit of truth suggested by the story. Samson knew the wife was in Timnath and also that there were vineyards of refreshing grapes there, but he also knew he did not actually, experimentally possess them. He desired and anticipated both. Many Christians forget that truth is both objective and subjective. One may contemplate and be blest while meditating upon and refreshing his heart with objective aspects of truth--what we sometimes call judicial truth. But there is the subjective side also--how much of the truth so refreshing in contemplation is actually by experience, ours? One may sing himself into a glorious, ecstatic state of bliss, singing about a starry crown and white robes, but how much of the spiritual quality of life does he now possess which in turn will make the crown a real possession ? Samson might have become quite enthusiastic saying, "Isn't it all wonderful! I have a wife in Timnath! Oh, how delightful are the grapes and how refreshing!" And all the time he is clean this side of Timnath, and a lion between. It is very inspiring to sing, "I am walking in the light," but are we sure our feet are not stuck in the mud?

Samson has a great, noble desire, but that young lion says, "No !" Samson is alone and has no carnal weapons. You see he did not start out to slay a lion; he thought he was going right down to Timnath. And

is it not just so in the Christian life? The vision (when we are in the Spirit) is so real, so glorious and so overwhelming that we never think of a battle--we are too blest for that. All we think about is the lovely presence of the adorable Christ. And how good God is to let us move down the road alone and without natural help. How jealous God is over His own! He so desires to develop and make His people spiritual and strong. He purposely takes away the helps and crutches just to get us alone on the roadway.

There are times and certain crises when each soul must stand alone, naked and stripped before his or her lion. God so orders our steps. Were it otherwise, our flesh would call to our help all our friends, neighbors, and saints. There are times, of course, when God uses friends to counsel and help and pray for us, but in time, the very helps and crutches which served so beautifully once, only clutter the way and become dangerous to one who is called to walk by faith alone. Do not be afraid when God directs the traffic. He will send the help which you think you simply must have, off on another road, and send you down the road alone. Why ? To bless you and to help you meet your lion.

Oh, yes, I know you are saved, sanctified and baptized and have the gifts---but remember, you have a lion also. And, listen, because Samson was alone no one else ever saw his lion. And if you stay alone with God when He directs your steps, no one will see your lion either. Now isn't that grand ? Let us say, "Amen!" The Lord knows, and so do you and I, that we all have lions, but He does not ask us to lead them around in a circus parade. No doubt many .of them are evident enough without our doing that.

So Samson stands there, without a weapon or anyone to call upon, facing this great issue in his heart and life. He meets h/s lion and no one else's. Perhaps the same issue or question some of you are facing today in your desire for a deeper fellowship and richer possession. In the walk of the Spirit, let us remember the greatest problem (or enemy) is not, "Where will I get the next month's rent? How shall I make the next payment on the car ?" Your greatest enemy or lion is nearer and far more intimate than that. God will force you into a place where you will stand alone in the dusty road of life, conscious of one fact: that none other than you yourself is causing the greatest difficulty. Stop placing the blame on everyone else and everything under the sun; you are your greatest enemy. I personally fear myself more than the devil. The devil is already conquered--but, are all the finer, subtle points of my strange personality conquered?

Then we read that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and under the inspiration and power of that Spirit, he laid hold of the lion and rent it as though it were a kid, with a grace and power that startled even him-self. For he well knew that he could not have done it. You will find that, over and over again this truth is taught in both Old and New Testaments, by Christ, and also by Paul, who elaborates on the teachings of Christ. The conflict is always a conflict between Spirit and flesh--not flesh and flesh. "The Spirit warreth against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit." Does Christ not ask, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

Here is a rich field, dealing with methods and principles and a basic theme for Christian living. Flesh cannot kill flesh. Were it not so pathetic, it would be musing, to see, in some assemblies, the flesh trying to kill and over-come other flesh. All flesh, but of different types. I wish we might learn the lesson of letting God by the Spirit do what we so many times in the energy of religious flesh try so hard to do. God says, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." So many times the Christian becomes overanxious (in the standing still period) and then starts a salvation all his own. The self-reformation, by self-will and resolutions, makes a make-shift salvation which in turn comes clattering down over our heads.

God does not want us to depend on any powers of the human or natural man, lest we partake of them. He says, "Let me get hold of you and I can take care of the lion. I can roar through you and slay it." You see, when one uses any other method than God's way, the lion resurfaces all the time. One may put up a stiff battle and fight and "the fur may fly," but after the battle the lion gets up again, shakes himself, and starts roaring. But don't miss the point--Samson did not stand off on the side of the road and look on; he was most wonderfully exercised and much occupied. He became clothed upon with the Spirit and thus he was empowered. It took both he became the instrument--a divine intervention.

What does Samson do with the slain lion? He pushes it off on the side of the road and goes on to Timnath and the wife. This is his real business and he attends to it. What a very sensible and spiritual thing to do! But do not think that is the end of the story, or the one and only lion. This lion is representative. He stands for all the lions of the natural man. Most people have found there is a regular menagerie--enough for all the zoos in the country !

And now for a word of encouragement. What happened to Samson's lion is truth and happens to all the other lion manifestations. Remember that judicially, objectively, the whole old Lion (tail, claws and all) is dead right now. The Scripture tells us so: Col. 2:20; 3:3; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; 5:24. This is true in experience as far as we by faith reckon, yield, mortify (count to be dead), put off, put away, deny self, abide, walk in the Spirit, etc. We do not fight; we reckon.

What a glorious and liberating truth! Paul found it and lived in the power of it--and I am sure he knew a lion when he met one. Gain the victory and go on. So many times I have told my students, "Never let the glory of the present victory so dazzle your eyes that you cannot see the conflict or battle just down the road." Just as sure as you slay one lion there will be its mate and all the little cubs. I know, as all of us do, there is a crisis in experience when, up to all the light we have, we say an eternal No to flesh and nature, and, as it were, slay the lion and really consent in our wills, to its death. God takes us at our word and proves us by letting us meet as many lions as He sees good to let out. So do we show our surrender to God and He clothes us with His Spirit and gains the victory. Let us remember what Samson did--he put the dead lion off the road and let it alone. Will you please try to remember to do that?

Right here let me speak of several groups of people suggested by this story. First, there are Christians who seem to know nothing about the lion or possession with Christ at all. They seem to park on salvation, the baptism, healing or some wonderful experience, and stay put. They no doubt will land in heaven (for we are not doubting their salvation) yet they are weak and have little to offer that is vital and helpful. But if they once really dared to make a move toward their spiritual possessions, I am sure they would discover a lion too. He is now taking a nap and not bothering them. Since they have no special conflict with the lion of greed, pride, or lust, they are deceived into thinking they are all finished and now ready for translation.

But you see, the lion of flesh may be in the subtle, un-dreamed-of, latent powers of the human heart, never yet given a chance to come out. Jeremiah gives a good description of the lion. Jeremiah 17:9, in the Hebrew, reads, "The heart is deceitful above all things and it is desperately sick." Some render it--incurable. A very good picture of the lion. This first group of people are often sweet and lovely but sort of useless and uninteresting.

Then we have a group who are very conscious of their possessions, of the wife at Timnath and the vineyards. They are in a continual, energetic struggle to possess these--in an eternal warfare, always in some kind of conflict, having a time of it with the world, the flesh and the devil. Their general theme,

testimony, prayer and life, revolve about one matter--the flesh and overcoming: "This is flesh"; "that is flesh"; "he is in the flesh," and "that was so of the flesh," etc. They have become so involved in the conflict, they forget the Spirit is to do the warring; they war and roar and take on in general, until, should you see them in the conflict, tumbling around on the floor "doing conflict," you could scarcely tell the lion from the person. The dust is thick and one hears groans and a desperate prayer for possessions. But I am sure Samson did not fight all day. There is an end to all things. He got through (and with grace) and so do we.

Often in assemblies, we find still another group. These have slain the lion and now see him in death. Their theme is, death, death, DEATH. I am dead, you are dead, he is dead, we are dead. Yea! all are now dead. The atmosphere is that of a graveyard or a morgue. I can't do this or the other, for I am dead. I must die, you must die, he must die. Please remember, that by-and-by dead things smell, and if you are not careful the whole atmosphere will tell it too. You see, these people have discovered a phase of truth very real and true, but have developed a sort of complex in the matter and have failed to know the life and resurrection to follow. Truth is balanced and often there are different phases to even one truth.

But praise God, there is another group, and I trust we may all be found in it. They do as Samson did. When he pushed the lion off to the side of the road, instead of watching it, or commenting on it, or poking it, or feeling sorry for it, he went about his business, which was Timnath and a wife. He became occupied with his inheritance, and not the lion. The wife and Timnath hold his interest and not the conflict or dead lion. I can almost hear him, "Even though I have met this lion along the way and slain him, my objective is Timnath and a wife--not this lion." He has awakened to a very vital and powerful truth. Always keep your objective before you and in correct perspective to all else in the landscape.

A man driving his car in traffic along the highway recently, suddenly discovered that all the cars ahead of him were turning right into a dirt road. He thought, of course, there was a detour ahead and so followed the traffic. After driving for some miles he hailed a farmer and asked, "Where does this detour end? Aw! this ain't no detour," replied the farmer. "You are following a funeral procession to a cemetery."

Make your own application and draw your own conclusion. Where are you going? So many, although they do not know it, are really following some funeral procession to the cemetery, just to think you are getting somewhere is not enough. You are, but where? Many are in the cemetery and parked there, for they never kept their objective before them.

Of course the rotting is a very necessary part of the process in preparing the carcass--it must be clean, dry, and merely suggest the lion. We slay the lion and leave him. One is not terrified if the lion wiggles its tail or if it rolls its eyes. Samson knew the philosophy of the matter and left it alone, even though the lion switched its tail and groaned. He is dead.

Some do not seem to know or understand this truth. They are all at sea if the lion snorts or rolls its eyes in death. Can't you hear them? "Do you suppose I got the right kind of experience? I wonder if I am really saved? Was that the Baptism or some sort of emotional experience? Dear, dear, where am I anyway? What is this experience all about? Shall I tell anyone, or will he think I am backslidden? Yes, I am sure the lion wiggled his tail! Can he really be dead?" Yes, the lion is really dead. But if you fool around looking at him and poking him to see how dead he is, you will surely lose out. Reckon and go on to Timnath. The lion likes all the attention and pity you can give him, and will hold you as long as you are willing to reason. Don't reason---just reckon!

Shall we ever learn this lesson ? Let the penetrating rays of the sun do the work and the sun will dry out the carcass. Do not be so occupied with the process; the sun completes it. There is a subtle danger in hanging around the thing--the pretty fur and fine form may arouse your sympathy and you will enter into a compromise and spoil the whole thing.

So Samson goes on and enters into his inheritance, his possessions--wife, vineyards, and Timnath. Now let us follow him as he makes a return trip to visit his old home. It is so in the life of the Christian. Walking along the dusty highway he becomes conscious of the past victories and he remembers the days of conflict and teaching. He is reviewing some of the precious lessons of faith which God taught him as he pressed on to Timnath. He thinks again of the love, mercy, patience, grace and faithfulness of God in dealing with him and his life. How wonderful is this adorable Lord as he goes over some of the lessons of reckoning, faith and identification---all so necessary to spiritual life and culture. Suddenly he comes to the very spot where one great battle took place---even the slaying of the lion. Yes, he is where he leanest to stand still and let God do the roaring. He just had to, for there was no other way. How clearly now he sees he is not the lion--he is a new creature in Christ Jesus. He is not the old Adam he once thought he was, struggling to make him look and act like God's last Adam. No, he is a new man and he now reckons, has faith and counts and does not trust his feelings.

Suddenly he sees something along the side of the road, off near the brush---a dry, clean, weather-beaten carcass. Yes, that is all that is left of the lion--that strong, beautiful lion. No struggle, no stench, no lion! He finds but the suggestion of a lion. It is like the echo of a voice-but not the voice.

And as he looks at it, he hears in the warm, sunny air the sound of bees, humming and buzzing as they pass and repass, going and coming. He is interested and notices that they come and go to and from the carcass. Down he gets upon his knees (an excellent place for discovery) and there, hidden in the depths of the carcass is honey--sweet, luscious honey. He tastes it and finds it is most refreshing.

Is this not true to type? It is the spiritual experience of those who go on, and on and on with God. Not only does one slay a lion and move on to Timnath, but he also learns to gather honey from the conflict. Does the Word not say, "Nay, in all things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us"? Praise God, that is true! He has become a partaker first, of the fruit. To slay the lion is to conquer, but to gather the honey from the dry carcass is to be more than conqueror. Hallelujah!

Samson does not enjoy the honey alone--the life of the truly spiritual Christian is not self-centered. Out of the abundance of a life and heart (which for necessary delays often seems to be self-centered) there flow power and life and food for hungry hearts. He has some for his mother and father and friends. And when they ask him where he got it, he does not tell them. That is his secret with the Lord. The heart knows, and God knows and that is enough. There is a lovely spiritual truth suggested in the fact that there was plenty for the household. The secret of its power and source is in the heart of the one who is exercised and moved upon by God. Remember that in the miracle of turning the water into wine, the same truth is found. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine he knew not whence it was I But the servants which drew the water knew. I like that, for I believe it is a bit of revelation as to the source of spiritual ministry. It is only those who serve who know; and when you truly, or spiritually serve, you will also know.

"But what are the bees?" someone asks. I believe they are the secret desires and purposes of the Lord for one who is to slay a lion. They are tokens of God, centered in the very thing that has caused you so much

trouble, the thing over which you have gained the victory. He will make that very lion a place of witness---that out of it you may have fruitage. But remember, the bees never made any honey in the lion while he roared. It was too busy roaring. The bees of God's desire for fruitage never come in a carcass while the flesh is rotting. But when it is dry, dean, bleached and weather-beaten, He says, "Now, bees, you may go in."

Are you discouraged today ? Are some of you still roaring? Are you saying, "It doesn't seem as if I shall ever get any honey out of this lion"? Let me tell you something: Every one of you has reached into the carcass of some lion and taken out of it some sweet, I am sure. And as we move on with God He will make it still more possible.

So many times in the lives of Christians (and especially workers) there is a lack of real spiritual ministry and food because the dear souls have no message. They have an experience but no message that is vital, fruit-bearing and helpful--no honey. They cannot wait and pay the price of rotting and dying. They think it is too self-centered and not active enough. So not only do they miss much, but their ministry is hampered or light because they have not learned this precious, costly truth. So many are trying to gather honey when the lion is roaring or when they are slaying it. Or being over-anxious to teach and preach, they reach in their hands, only to find the lion is rotting and there are no bees, and of course no honey. The carcass becomes even weather-beaten. I like that so much--it is so true.

Trust God to make every lion the nesting place for His bees, and with joy (a secret and sacred joy) you will reach in and gather the honey. God is with you for this very thing--trust Him and sing!

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