

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
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Ordinary People – Extraordinary God Small Steps Toward Big Destruction

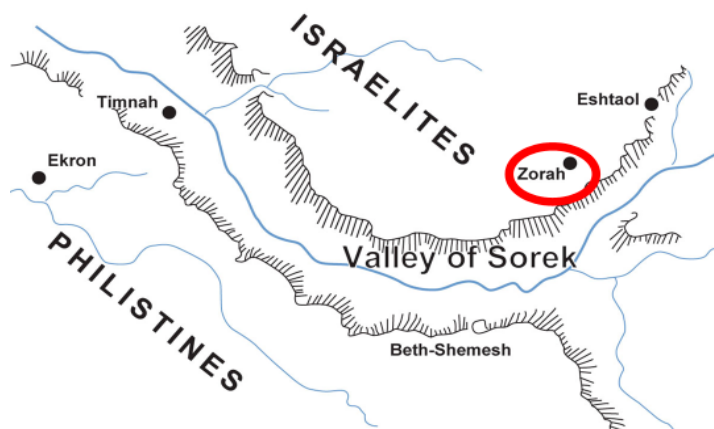
Judges 16:1-22

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. ² The people of Gaza were told, "Samson is here!" So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, "At dawn we'll kill him."



³ But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."



⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

⁷ Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man."

⁸ Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. ⁹ With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied."

¹¹ He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man."

¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, "All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied."

He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric ¹⁴ and tightened it with the pin.

Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength."

¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

¹⁷ So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. ¹⁹ After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.

²⁰ Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!"

He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

21 Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison. 22 But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Small Steps Toward Our Own Destruction

In last week's lesson (Judges 14), we saw Samson as a hot-tempered womanizer. Our lesson for today depicts him as a fool. What kind of fool goes deep into enemy territory, 50 long miles from home, to sleep with a prostitute? What kind of fool doesn't see that Delilah doesn't truly love him?

Samson didn't see himself as a fool. He was so strong that he knew that the warnings didn't apply to him. It is easy to see that Samson was a fool. It is harder to see that we too are fools.

Step 1: The Warnings Don't Apply to Me

Look at some of the warnings from God. How often don't we say to God, "Thanks for the warning, but that really doesn't apply to me. I'm strong enough to resist"?

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Do we take that warning to heart? Or do we step as close to sexual infidelity as we can, either in person or online, in actions or in thought?

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). You don't even need the Bible to know this. Paul quoted from a non-Christian author. But how often haven't we known better than God and joined with people we know are not good influences on us?

Jesus warned: **"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold"** (Matthew 24:12). The Spirit said the same through the Apostle Paul: **"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil"** (Ephesians 5:15-16).

"Thanks for the warnings, God, but my faith is so strong I won't be influenced by the wicked world around me. My love for you will never grow cold."

How many people do you know who have taken that step? "I still believe, even though I never open the Bible." Church can be trumped by sports or just a beautiful day outside. And the devil laughs as another person doesn't think the warnings apply to them, and they take another step away from Christ.

"In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

How many footholds does Satan have in our congregation this morning? How many of us have an abiding anger toward someone, perhaps even in this sanctuary right now?

Samson got warnings! Don't go down to the Philistines! Don't consort with prostitutes! But the warnings didn't apply to Samson. He knew he was strong enough always to stop.

It is just a few small steps that led to Samson's destruction. The same is true for us.

Step 2: I Will Always Have the Strength to Stop

And when Samson was with Delilah, every time Delilah tried to bind him, it was a warning.

"Soon you will have no strength." But Samson knew that he would always have the strength to get away. But one small step led to another and another, until he lost his strength to resist.

We have received those warnings as well.

"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Read 1 Corinthians 10. It is a sobering reminder that God's people often enjoy great spiritual benefits like we do. They think they are strong enough to stop their steps away from Christ. But they lost their lives and their faith.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). Remember who you are fighting! You are no match for Satan and his evil angels.

"Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ **How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"** (Hebrews 10:28-29). Remember what our steps away from Christ are doing. We are treating the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing.

In a chapter of sin and gloom like Judges 16, where there is so little gospel, often the place to find good news is in the name of God, the LORD in all capital letters. But in this chapter, even that is lost. For the LORD's name isn't found on Samson's lips. It is only found in one place.

"He did not know that the LORD had left him."

When my wife or I leave the house, we give each other a kiss goodbye and call out to each other when we leave. We know when one or the other of us is leaving.

But the LORD's leaving isn't that way. If we ignore his warnings, if we think that the warnings don't apply to us, or that we will always have the strength to resist, the LORD slips out of our lives and we aren't even aware of it.

Samson's small steps led to his destruction. And so do ours.

But there is an odd "good news" verse right at the end of our lesson. **"The hair on his head began to grow."**

Small Steps Toward Satan's Destruction

Samson's hair was the sign of the Nazarite Covenant between him and his God. As a Nazarite (Numbers 6), Samson didn't cut his hair. He ignored the warnings and fell out of that covenant relationship with the LORD. Then his hair began to grow. Imagine Samson rubbing the stubble on his head and remembering the covenant that he had enjoyed with God. The hair began to grow. Samson began to remember. This was his first step back to the LORD.

Today, those warnings have convicted me. I too have thought I was above the warnings and have forgotten the strength of Satan. I too have mistreated the blood of Christ that was shed for me as an unholy thing.

So I am rub my head in despair. But I too can notice "The hair on my head has begun to grow." I too remember that the LORD has made a covenant with me.

Step 1: The Step to the Communion Rail

That's why I so glad this lesson falls on a communion Sunday. Like Samson, we are in chains of sin and guilt because of our own folly. But the first step is remembering. The communion table has Jesus' words, "In Remembrance." Let's take the first step, not toward our destruction, but toward Satan's destruction. Take a step to remember the Lord's covenant with you.

Do you feel unworthy? That is excellent! For we all are. But Jesus is the one who said, **"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"** (Matthew 11:28). About him the prophet sang, **"A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not put out"** (Isaiah 42:2). He welcomes the unworthy, those burdened by the remembrance of your steps away from Christ. "In Remembrance" is not written here to remind you of your burden, but to remind you of the covenant God made with you.

In our communion liturgy the pastor speaks these words:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ." Why do we speak these words? The salvation and power and kingdom of our God isn't evident as we speak these words. Why here in preparation for the sacrament? Listen to the rest of the vision. Satan has been cast down out of heaven and this is the song of triumph:

"Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,

and the authority of his Messiah.
For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.
¹¹ They triumphed over him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;
they did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:10-11).

Step up to the communion rail today to claim Jesus’ triumph over Satan. You too have triumphed by the blood of the Lamb. That’s why we announce this victory just before communion. Satan is hurled down when we receive Jesus’ body and blood in the sacrament and claim his complete and full forgiveness.

Yes, “the hair on his head began to grow again.” Kneel here and feel and taste that our God has renewed the covenant with you.

Step 2: The Step of Sharing the Gospel

There is another place in the Bible that talks about Satan’s defeat. After the disciples come back from a missionary tour, Jesus said, “**I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven**” (Luke 10:18).

There are people all around you who are bound by Satan. But Satan is defeated when we take the step to share what we have experienced.

This past week Jane spoke to me on the way out of the Dollar Store. For 40 years she was bound by Satan. She was an alcoholic, a drug user, promiscuous. But when she was 40 years old, she read a Bible pamphlet and began to understand that Jesus died for her. As she told me her story, I saw Satan had fallen like lightening from heaven that day.

In another conversation this past week a man shared with me that I had made such a difference in his life. I was astounded. I hadn’t done anything special. We didn’t have great deep theological discussions. But God was using me... and Satan was falling like lightning from heaven.

Take the first step, be involved in the lives of those around you. Share what you have experienced in Christ. It is just one small step toward Satan’s destruction.

Step 3: The Step on Satan’s Head

The last step I’d like to talk about is the step that Paul speaks of in Romans 16:20: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

The first promise of the Savior was to our foolish parents in the Garden of Eden. The child born of the woman would crush Satan's head. That's how Paul ends his letter to the Christians in Rome. The God of peace, the God who has every reason to judge and condemn you, is at peace with you. Romans 5:1 says, **“Therefore having been justified by faith in Christ Jesus, we have peace with God.”** This God who is at peace with you will allow you to see the victory is yours.

So in faith, let's do a snake stomp. Satan has won many a victory over us. He has led us to make many a step away from Christ. But Christ in his mercy has held out his arms to us. Christ in his mercy has helped us remember that his blood has won the ultimate victory for us. We are forgiven. Christ in his mercy even uses Samsons like us to draw others to Christ and so defeat Satan. And when Jesus comes back, we are going to see Satan's defeat.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. In Christ, let's do the snake stomp as one small step toward a big destruction... not ours but Satan's. Amen.

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My Next Steps Toward My Extraordinary God and His Victory over Satan

- **Look back at your steps over the past week:** Where has Satan led you to step away from Christ this past week? Use “Personal Preparation for Holy Communion” on page 156 of *Christian Worship*.
- **Take a step toward Christ:** What is one thing that you would like to do differently this next week to step closer to Christ and his victory over Satan? Read the Bible daily? Begin or end your day in confession and prayer?
- **Step on Satan's head:** Memorize Revelation 12:10-11 so that you can remember it every time you step up to the Lord's Supper. See Satan hurled down as you kneel before the cross.

Group Work

1. What was an “ahha!” or a question that you had as you listened to the message this week?
2. Read Judges 16:1-22. Great spiritual leaders of today have often fallen into shameful sins just like Samson. What makes them so vulnerable to Satan’s attacks? What can we learn from their failures?
3. Read Matthew 11:28-30. How can this passage encourage us when we feel unworthy to take the step toward the communion rail and a closer relationship with Jesus?
4. Read Revelation 12:7-12. What do you think led the authors of our communion liturgy to include verse 10 in our communion liturgy?
5. Compare Genesis 3:15 and Romans 16:20. What gives you confidence that, in spite of the times that Satan has led you into sin, you will crush Satan’s head in victory in the end?
6. Break up into pairs or triads to pray for each other. Ask the person next to you to pray for someone on your heart that appears to be taking steps away from Christ.