

**“I Believe in God, but Don’t Go Overboard”**

As John was passing out the bottles of water, most of you got to feel the refreshing lukewarm water. Some of you might have even taken a swig or two. But if you are anything like me, unless you are seriously dehydrated, you didn’t take any more. My wife loves hot tea, hot coco, hot coffee, hot apple cider. Me - I’m more of an ice cold drink kinda guy. Ice water with a little lemon, a frosted mug of root beer, and Brad Jones will tell you that on a hot day nothing quenches my thirst more than a cold glass of grapefruit juice.

But a lukewarm glass of root bear, or a lukewarm cup of coffee or milk, one that’s been sitting out all day? YUCK! Yes, you just gotta spit it out.

There is a passage of Scripture that actually uses this as an illustration. Jesus was talking to the church in Laodicea and spoke strong words against it, saying:

**Revelation 3:19 NIV**

*<sup>15</sup>I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

Today we move into the second part of our series on Practical Atheists with the topic of those who say they believe in God, but don’t want to get all fanatical about it. We want to be Christians but still sorta blend in with the rest of society. Let’s not take this Jesus thing too far. Lukewarm Christians, is that even possible? That would be like me asking for a warm ice cream cone at Dairy Queen.

The Prophet Isaiah put it like this:

**Isaiah 29:13 NIV**

*<sup>13</sup> The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.*

"I believe in God, but don't go overboard"

In Judges, Chapter 13, we read one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. As a matter of fact, as a boy growing up reading the Bible, there were very few stories that captured my attention more than this one. The Guinness Book of World Records couldn't even top this story, because all of us 6<sup>th</sup> Grade boys knew that no matter how much weight was pressed, or how far the train car was pulled, no man was ever as strong as Samson.

It begins with Manoah's wife getting a message from God:

### **Judges 13**

*<sup>1</sup>And then the People of Israel were back at it again, doing what was evil in GOD's sight. GOD put them under the domination of the Philistines for forty years.*

*<sup>2-5</sup> At that time there was a man named Manoah from Zorah from the tribe of Dan. His wife was barren and childless. The angel of God appeared to her and told her, "I know that you are barren and childless, but you're going to become pregnant and bear a son. But take much care: Drink no wine or beer; eat nothing ritually unclean. You are, in fact, pregnant right now, carrying a son. No razor will touch his head—the boy will be God's Nazirite from the moment of his birth. He will launch the deliverance from Philistine oppression."*

A Nazirite, Samson was to be a Nazirite. For those of you who may not know what that means let's look it up. Numbers 6, gives us a description of this.

### **Numbers 6 NIV**

#### **The Nazirite**

*<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite,*

*Verse 3. He/she must abstain from wine or anything that comes from the grape vine*

*Verse 5. He/she must never put a razor to their hair*

*Verse 6. He/she must never go near or come in contact with a dead body or carcass.*

From the time Samson was born God, had set him apart from others to do a special work, a work He says that would bring about the beginning of the end for the hated Philistines, who had oppressed them for forty years.

I always wanted to imagine what it must have been like growing up with Samson as a child. The story doesn't really say much, but it alludes to the fact that God had empowered him with super strength even before we read of the accounts here in these few chapters.

I mean, wouldn't it be cool to have Samson push you on the merry-go-round? "Ok everyone hold on tight"! Or what was it like to have him around the house? You can almost hear his mom complaining, "Manoah, you've got to make Samson stop showing off. He's lifting up the side of the house now to impress the neighbor girl".

On one side he had everything going for him, yet on the other, he was so different that it made it almost impossible to fit where he wanted to.

No doubt, his popularity was wide spread about his strength, but to avoid becoming freak-like, he probably made other compensations - compensations that would surely be against the wishes of his parents.

I'm sure it started with questions to them: "Mom, why can't I look like the other kids in my class?" Later it came to, "Dad this whole grape thing makes no sense to me at all!" Maybe as a teen he started to keep things from them. For him, it seemed easier and less of a hassle. What his parents didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

Finally, we pick up the story where he and his parents are on their way to meet a girl he saw from one of the "other" cities.

He's already become too physically powerful to refuse. You get the impression that he's almost "hulk-like". No one wants to get him ticked off. Not even his parents.

His words to his dad are, "Get her for me now!" So here they are on the way to Timnah.

Samson was no stranger to this area. For years now he had run with those who hated his people. He had played with those who had no use for his

God. And now, against his parents' wishes, he was going to marry one of the very daughters of the people he was promised at birth to overthrow.

Well, Samson took a detour away from his parents and wound up, of all places, "In the vineyard" near Timnah. It says that, while he was there, a lion came at him. With hardly any effort, Samson rips the lion open as if it were a goat. But of course, he never tells his parents.

Probably within the month they are making that same trip and Samson takes the same detour just to see what happened to that lion, that "Dead Lion".

Guess what:

***Judges 14: 8-9 NIV***

*<sup>8</sup> Sometime later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, <sup>9</sup> which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.*

In these two instances we start to realize that Samson's Nazirite dedication is down to the last "hair".

He has made light of every part of his calling, and yet he still has every bit of his massive strength.

Deep inside he could recall his lessons from his mother about his birth and that God had a plan for him, but that was a boring life and this was so much more fun. Besides, who wants to follow a God who makes so many demands on your life? It was just too overboard.

But even though Samson had mingled with the Philistines, they were leery of him and not sure what he was capable of doing. Usually, weddings back then lasted about a week, so right away the first part of the week, they had 30 big guys just sort of "hang" with him. Now Samson was always up for a little levity, so he presented a riddle to them that would ensure a new wardrobe of about 30 suits - one from each of them. But as we will see from this story, even though Samson was extremely strong physically, when it came to the pleading of a woman, he was like milk toast.

The 30 men threatened Samson's future wife and her family if she didn't get the answer to the riddle out of him, and when all was said and done, he gave in to her nagging, and he had to go find 30 suits for them.

Well, where does a man who can rip apart a lion get 30 suits? You guessed it. He kills 30 men from the next town over for their suits and fulfills his bet.

Fuming with anger, he leaves the wedding feast and goes back home to sulk for while. After he regains his composure, he returns to Timnah to claim his bride only to find out that her father, in the mean time, gave her away to his best man.

Do you see a little domino effect starting to happen here? And it gets crazy.

I don't think Samson was ever taught how to really fight. Not once does it mention a sword or spear, not even a sling.

When he hears that his wife is given over to another man, he just decides to go out and catch 300 foxes and tie their tails together. Now if that wasn't crazy enough, he ties a torch in between and then lights it on fire.

The Philistines go ballistic. They take revenge on the family from Timnah, and of course then Samson follows up with revenge on them, until finally even his own people don't know what to do. The Philistine army is ready to attack Israel unless they give up Samson.

The Israelites find Samson hiding out in a cave, and they say, "Hey, listen Samson, the Philistines are already bulling us enough, and now they're ready to slaughter us. What's with you making it even worse?"

So he agrees to have them tie him up and deliver him into their hands. And just when they think they've got him, he breaks the rope and, well, you can guess the rest.

Every time they thought they had him, it says, "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him," and he overpowered them.

Every time . . . except the last time.

I can remember as a boy reading this story. I thought, "Samson how can you be so naive?"

The name Delilah goes down in history as the woman who brought down the strongest man who ever lived.

Three times she pressed him to give her the secret of his strength, each time he's lied to her. But what's worse is that, each time she's given the information, she's proved that she's not really on his side. Don't do it Samson - don't tell her the truth!

You see, this is the problem with Lukewarm. This is why it says in Revelation that we get spit out. Because we think that being lukewarm is not "too" bad. I'll follow God and get some things done for him, but don't make me lose all of me for it. We look at it as if it were some kind of gauge. That as long as I'm in the safe zone, then I'm ok.

But faith is not a safe zone kind of deal. Faith is an all-or-nothing kind of deal. What happens in that "Safe Zone" is that you begin to believe that you can take it from here, that you really need to be in control, and that all your talents, strengths, and your life is of your own making. It's the great deception that Satan finally gets us to fall for when we decide that our all is just too much.

Samson is lying there with Delilah, after all the lines he's crossed, all the vows he's broken, and all the wrong paths he's taken. Yet he's always found a way out - a way to get back home. But tonight, he finally gives in and crosses that line that he's never crossed before. Not because he couldn't take the nagging, not because he wanted to get his hair cut, not even because he wanted to give up on God. No, he truly believed that God was not really needed in his life. He had come to a point, after all the lies and all the deception, that he truly believed he was lord of his strength - not God. So he whispers his fun little secret to Delilah and falls asleep in her lap.

As his long locks of hair fall to the floor, our hearts sink with agony, as we look at this story like Superman who's just been stabbed with kryptonite or Popeye, who's been kept from his spinach.

But this is not a super hero story; this is God at work in the life of a man who will see the results of living half in and half out. You lose a perspective that makes you honest with who you are. And that is what Samson was missing.

**Judges 16: 20 NIV**

*<sup>20</sup> 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.*

Samson had been so oblivious of God's presence that, even when He left, he had no idea.

This, of course, would truly be a tragedy if it ended there, but the story picks up a few verses later where the Philistines have brought out the now blind and helpless Samson to make fun of him. It was at a party that was provided for about 3000 of the top Philistine officials to celebrate Dagon, their god who they believed had overpowered the God of Samson.

What they didn't know was that God wasn't finished with His Nazirite. With both of his eyes gone now, Samson was seeing clearer than he had ever seen. God was truly the one who was Lord.

Even though Samson, had trampled down every oath that God had set for him to follow, he was now at a point where he could truly accept and understand the power of God in his life. And he prays this prayer:

**Judges 16:28-29 NIV**

*<sup>28</sup> Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." <sup>29</sup> Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, <sup>30</sup> Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it.*

As we read this story now, we see it so much differently than the Jews who read it in Christ's time.

We not only get to read it in its context, but we also get to see it through the eyes of Christ who was not there just to deliver Samson or even His People. But he truly wanted us to understand that the only real life is the life that is lived wholly and solely for God.