

MORE IMPORTANT THAN STRENGTH

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Sometimes when the Lord lays on our hearts to do something for Him, we feel that we lack the strength for it. That is, not necessarily *physical* strength, but the necessary aptitudes, knowledge, or means. However, there are factors that are *more important* than “strength” of *any* kind. If God calls us to do something for which we feel that we lack the “strength,” His purpose might be to show what is more important.

The moment a person who knows the Bible, hears the name “Samson,” he immediately thinks of strength, as Samson was the strongest of all biblical characters. God called him to “*begin* to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5). Yet when we read the story of Samson, we scarcely find any indication of a way in which he *even began* to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Since God said he *would* begin to deliver Israel, we must take it on trust that God saw some way in which he did. Perhaps his killing a thousand Philistines (Judges 15:15, 16), or the slaughter he accomplished by pulling the arena down (Judges 16:25-30), made somewhat of a contribution toward Israel’s deliverance, and it is for that reason that Samson is listed with the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11:32). However, whatever beginning Samson made at delivering Israel from the Philistines, it certainly was a *bare* beginning.

Israel *was*, though, eventually delivered *completely* from the Philistines; and God’s instrument in that deliverance was David (2 Samuel 19:9). Furthermore, *one particular battle* was decisive in that deliverance. Though it didn’t complete the deliverance, it turned the tide once-for-all that from then on, Israel was on the winning side. In fact, the Philistines *even requested* that that battle be decisive. They cried out to Israel, “Why should these wars between us drag on and on? Let’s fight *one* battle that will settle once-for-all who is the winner.” Which battle was that? It was David’s fight with Goliath, before which Goliath cried out: “Why have you come out to set your battle in order? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants to Saul? Choose a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your slaves. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our slaves and serve us (1 Samuel 17:8, 9).

It *cannot* be a mere coincidence that Samson, the strongest man in the biblical record, only made a bare beginning of delivering Israel from the Philistines— whereas David, in the weakness of his youth, was God’s instrument to fight the decisive battle and settle once-for-all that Israel would be victorious over the Philistines. God must have designed that, in order to show us what’s more important in His sight than strength— something that David possessed but that Samson did not.

One qualification for God’s work that’s more important than strength is a matter of motive. Why did Samson want to slaughter the Philistines in the arena, who were more numerous than all he had killed during his lifetime? Here’s his reason— “Samson called to the LORD, and said, Lord GOD, remember me, please, and strengthen me, please, only this once, God, *so that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes*” (Judges 16:28). What kind of motive was *that* for wanting to do a work for God— especially considering that Samson had lost his eyes because of his careless revealing of the secret of his strength to Delilah? On the other hand, what was *David’s* motive for wanting to fight Goliath? “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26). That is, he couldn’t stand to hear anyone blaspheming God’s name. That certainly was a much worthier motive; and God wants servants who have worthy motives for wanting to serve Him. That is more important to Him than strength.

Another qualification that's more important than strength is a matter of responsibility. Samson revealed a very *irresponsible* attitude by his "playing around" with childish uses of his strength, especially in the trick he played on the Philistines with torches tied in foxes' tails (Judges 15:1-6). God had given him his extraordinary strength to use in serving Him, but instead he used it mainly to amuse himself. In contrast, David showed himself *very* responsible and reliable. When his father sent him to take food to his older brothers in the army, and bring back news about them, he made sure that the sheep he was responsible for were cared for by a reliable substitute (1 Samuel 17:17-20). David's older brother, Eliab, tried to *accuse* him of irresponsibility (verse 28), but he was *wrong*. God wants servants who care about their work for Him and take it seriously, and who take responsibility to be sure that it is done well. That is more important to Him than their strength.

One more qualification for God's work that's more important than strength is a matter of confidence. Samson's confidence for his victories was in his *own* strength. That showed when, even though he had allowed Delilah to eliminate the source of his strength, he expected still to be able to get away from the Philistines (Judges 16:18-20). He knew *in theory* that his strength depended on faithfulness to his Nazirite vow, but *in his heart* he believed that he had the strength *in himself* and could keep it even if the vow were broken. David, on the contrary, trusted in the Lord's strength to give him the victory. He told Saul, "The LORD who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Then we read, "Saul said to David, Go, and the LORD shall be with you" (1 Samuel 17:37). Then, when he arrived on the battle field, and Goliath tried to discourage him with insults, he answered: "You are coming to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin: but I am coming to you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will deliver you into my hand; and I will strike you, and take your head from off you; and I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky, and to the wild animals of the earth; so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD doesn't save with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and He will hand you over to us" (verses 45-47). It couldn't have been clearer that David's trust was in the Lord to enable him to defeat Goliath.

These three qualifications for God's service are more important than any kind of strength, whether physical, aptitude, knowledge, or means. Certainly God *uses* the various forms of strength, but He places greater value on the other qualifications.
