

Introduction to the Life of David
1 Samuel 16
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CenterPoint Church

Read 1 Samuel 16

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Introduction

May 15th will mark one year since we ordained and installed our three newest elders. When we went through the nominating process, we looked to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as our guides for who would be eligible and appropriate to bring into leadership. We looked at qualifications such as being self-controlled, hospitable, sober-minded, and above reproach. We specifically did not take into consideration such attributes as how well they dress, how much money they make, or how attractive they or their wives and children are. We assessed their characters and their Christian virtues because we were following Paul’s advice in choosing our leaders. We were not doing what most people do when they need to choose leaders: vote for the best-looking, most impressive and imposing people who just “look the part.” I’m not implying that our elders are ugly, unsuccessful, or anything like that, I am saying that we attempt to choose people the way that God does: *“man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”* We cannot see hearts, but we can judge from the fruit that appears in a person’s life, and I thank God that the elder training process brought us godly, qualified men, and that we have a wonderful, full, vibrant Session!

Our Scripture passage this morning is the beginning of our study of the life of David, who went from being an insignificant, no-name shepherd to the High King of Israel during its peak around 1,000 BC. He did not inherit the throne nor did he have to overthrow the previous king. David was plucked from obscurity by the true King of Israel, Yahweh God, and gradually brought into leadership, where he would excel and impress his countrymen at every step along the way. I’ve already quoted the main theme of the morning from this passage – God’s choosing him based on inner character and unseen qualities. Psalm 89:19-29, is a wonderful overview of David’s life from God’s point of view:

“I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found David, My servant; with My holy oil I have anointed him, so that My hand shall be established with him; My arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him. I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. My faithfulness and My steadfast love shall be with him... And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and My covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.”

One writer called David “the original alpha male, the kind of man whose virile ambition always drives him to the head of the pack... He is the first superstar... the quintessential winner.”¹ So, he would develop into the kind of leader that everyone respected, but he was a most unlikely choice to be named future king in the first place. Not only did his village and his family have no business offering up a king, but he was the eighth choice out of eight brothers, the least likely in his own family to be chosen as king. But God’s ways are higher than our ways, and He chose this man, whose name means “beloved.” Let’s settle into the text as we are introduced first to the prophet who was sent to anoint David:

¹ Jonathan Kirsch, *King David: The Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel* (New York: Ballantine, 2000), p. 1.

I. Samuel's Task (vv. 1-5)

¹ The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' ³ And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

Parachuting into this book at chapter 16 means that we've missed a lot of background. What we need to understand going into this story is that God had set up Israel coming out of Egyptian slavery under the leadership of Moses hundreds of years before this. Moses was the human leader and prophet that God spoke to, but God was the King of the nation. The human leadership of Israel transferred to Joshua after Moses' death, as they came into the Promised Land. After that, there were a series of Judges, which you can read about (oddly enough) in the book of Judges. At the end of the time of the Judges, the people of Israel cried out for a human king so that they could be like all of the other nations around them. So in 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel approached the prophet Samuel and demanded that he appoint a king for them. Which Samuel didn't want to do, but God said, "go ahead and do it." They both knew that it was a bad idea and that it was evidence of the nation's disobedience, but God allowed a human king to be established in Israel for the first time, so a man from the tribe of Benjamin named Saul was chosen.

Saul looked every bit the king that Israel needed, but looks can be deceiving. He was tall, he was tough, he could win battles, he was able to lead the nation and bring stability. But he disobeyed God. By the end of his reign, Samuel had caught him in three serious acts of disobedience. Saul admitted his big weakness in 1 Samuel 15:24: *"I have sinned... because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."* Saul stopped fearing God and listening to Him, and instead did whatever he thought his people wanted from him. So God put the events in motion to remove him from the throne and set up a new king.

Samuel was still grieving the fact that Saul wasn't the king he had hoped he would be. God rebuked him in the first verse: *"How long will you grieve over Saul?"* In other words, stop living in the past, get it together because I've got the next king picked out and you've got a job to do to anoint him, so head over to Bethlehem. Samuel would have to pass through Saul's town of Gibeah on the way to Bethlehem, that's why he was particularly nervous about Saul finding out. So the Lord gave him a cover story, Bethlehem would have a worship sacrifice and Samuel went to officiate. When he showed up, though, the elders of the city trembled because prophets of God don't just stop over for tea to shoot the breeze, right? The last two times that Samuel had shown up, he had pronounced judgment (13:10 and 15:13) and hacked a foreign king to pieces. They were worried that they had done something wrong, but he put them at ease and said, "I brought meat, let's have a cookout!" OK, it's a little more formal than that, it was a worship service to sacrifice to the Lord and deal with the people's sins. And one family whose dad's name was Jesse was focused on and consecrated by the prophet because the Lord indicated that the new king would come from that family. One of the most amazing things about David's life is that he was almost passed over as the future king! But the next eight verses record

II. David's Anointing (vv. 6-13)

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him."⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these."¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here."¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he."¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

So the next king was going to come from Jesse's house and he had many sons. Samuel's first thought when he looked at the oldest one, Eliab, was, "He's the oldest, he's tall, he's good-looking, he's gotta be the one." But they'd been down this road before of picking the tall guy who looked the part of the king, and it hadn't worked out so great. The Lord reminded him that He would choose the next king based on different criteria - what was in his heart, not what was in his outward appearance. When Samuel got to the end of the line of the seven sons that Jesse had brought out, he was not moved by the Lord to choose any of them. Was this all of the sons? Well, no, there was a baby brother who was out tending the sheep, but why would we even bring him forward? There's no way he's the next king. He was the most insignificant, the one that no one even thought to bring to the lineup of sons. It's not that they thought he wasn't big enough or tough enough, it's that David was just not in the conversation, no one even considered him as a possibility. Chuck Swindoll called him "a nobody that nobody noticed."² Maybe some of you feel that way in your family. I'm sorry if you do, but remember that God sees you, God knows you.

There's a comment in verse 12 about David's handsome features, but it doesn't necessarily mean what you think it means. One commentary explains that we "may be tempted to read about David's beautiful eyes and handsome appearance as if these were complimentary attributes. They are not. The author points them out to show that David looks more like a cute kid than a possible warrior. The text intends to show us that David is outwardly unimpressive, even to those who knew him best; yet this is the one God chooses."³

The Scriptures talk often about God knowing our hearts and prioritizing inner character/integrity:
Psalm 44:20-21 - "*If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.*"
Proverbs 21:2-3 - "*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.*"
Jeremiah 17:9-10 - "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.*"

Let me suggest a few areas where we may need to be challenged because we prioritize the outward appearance and not inner character:

-Do we spend too much time working on our appearance, dieting and working out to get our bodies looking right, and spending a fortune on our hair and clothing to look just right, while

² Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1977), p. 25.

³ Heath Thomas, J.D. Greear, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (Nashville: Holman, 2016), p. 122.

we neglect the things that lead to inner beauty? Like cultivating a life of serving others, of studying God's word, growing in wisdom, of learning how to speak kindly to others and making others feel important? It's easy to carefully craft your image for social media, but it comes at such a cost, doesn't it? It's exhausting work to always look beautiful and impress people.

-As we parent our children, do we only take pride in them when they achieve and look good (and thereby make us look good), or do we look for evidence that their hearts are kind, thankful, and godly?

-For those who are not married yet, as you look for a husband or wife, I don't think you need to look for someone who is repulsive to you, but if your criteria are all about looks, body shape, and how he or she turns other's heads, you may have a very disappointing marriage when you find out that you have a shallow or ungodly spouse, or that you have nothing in common.

-What is racism but looking on the outward appearance and not at the heart? As Dr. King said, can we judge a person by the content of their character and not the color of their skin?

-What is pornography but looking on the outward appearance and using that for your own pleasure, and not caring about the person that is being exploited?

-As we come to worship God, is it about "keeping up appearances" and looking like we have it all together, or do we actually engage our hearts in praising Him, confessing our sins, and learning His ways?

This one idea of inner character versus outer appearance can radically change your life in so many different areas if you rise to the challenge that it poses.

God had been preparing David. He was a shepherd, and that would serve him well in the future when he was called to lead a whole nation, because God expected his leaders to protect and tend their flock; which for him would be the people of Israel. 2 Samuel 5:2 – *"And the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel.'" Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear's commentary said that, "God was using the pasture to prepare the king... the pasture was where David honed some of the most vital skills in his life. It was where he sharpened his slingshot accuracy. It was where he grew in courage, fending off lions and bears from his helpless flock. It was where he learned humility... A pure heart and a shepherding attitude come from the pasture, not the palace."*⁴

David was anointed by Samuel, oil placed on his head to indicate that he was being chosen and tasked for office even though it would be many years before he would sit on the throne. Verse 13 says, *"the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward."* Simultaneously, as we will find out in the next verse, the Spirit had deserted Saul. The Spirit was given to empower the new king and taken away to show God's disfavor with the old one. Now, clearly having the Lord's Spirit inside of you in those days helped God's people do amazing things, but it was no guarantee of spiritual obedience. Saul was evidence of that, as was Samson, who was enabled by the Spirit with great strength but was still unfaithfulness throughout his life.

David had been anointed the future king, but he soon found himself in the chambers of the current king who was unaware of this anointing.

III. Saul's Favor (vv. 14-23)

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him.

¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." ¹⁸ One of the young

⁴ Thomas, Greear, p. 125.

men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him."¹⁹ Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep."²⁰ And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul.²¹ And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer.²² And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight."²³ And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.

Music therapy has become very popular recently. There is an American Music Therapy Association that has 3,500 members who, according to their website, are committed to the "use of music interventions to... promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, express feelings... promote rehabilitation, and more."⁵ You can earn a bachelor's degree in music therapy from many colleges, then complete supervised hours of training, and become a licensed music therapist. I've never looked into any of that, but I have been asked several times to play my guitar in hospitals. One time I played and sang hymns for a woman who was dying in the hospital, with her daughter weeping next to the bed. Another time, a woman who had cancer asked me to play fun, upbeat songs with her family singing along. Another time, a family asked me to just play guitar for their son who was on life-support, coming in and out of consciousness. So I did for close to an hour as nurses were coming in and out adjusting things for him. I don't know how much he heard, but the nurses appreciated it.

Music has the power to soothe us in our distress, and the writer says that Saul was a troubled man who needed music therapy for relief. The Lord had withdrawn His Spirit from the king, and in His place, verse 14 says that a harmful spirit tormented Saul. Does this mean that God sent a demon into Saul? That's a very difficult thing to harmonize with the rest of the Bible – God does not utilize evil spirits, Satan does. This spirit was a punishment from God, but though it did harm, it was not evil.⁶ Like Pharaoh before him, Saul was hardened and actively opposed by the Lord. Luckily for Saul, he was surrounded by perceptive servants who recognized that this harmful spirit was from God. So they recommended finding a lyre. Not a liar, who tells untruths, but someone who plays the lyre. According to the internet, that would be called a lyrist. One of the servants said that he knew of a lyrist in Bethlehem. Not only was he a skilled player, but he was a brave warrior, a man of "good presence," and the Lord was with him. This is a twist that sounds like it comes right out of a Shakespeare play, doesn't it? The boy who has been anointed the future king in secret is now asked by the current king to come to his palace to play for him. Saul's successor stood right in front of him and he didn't even realize it. And verse 21 says that Saul loved David greatly! David enjoyed Saul's favor, was appointed his armor-bearer; all because he could calm him down when Saul was being tormented; music soothed the savage beast. I imagine David singing the psalms that he had been composing. Even though David was going to replace the king, Saul was dependent on him for his sanity! Rather than being a threat to the old king, the new king kept him from falling apart.

Conclusion

When a king is replaced before his life and his reign are over, usually there is a violent struggle, and his successor has to kill him or imprison him in order to take the throne. Not so with Saul and David. The author of 1 Samuel goes to great lengths to show that the change in king was all God's

⁵ <https://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy/>

⁶ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), p. 112.

idea, and that David was willing to do whatever his heavenly King or his earthly king asked of him. He was loyal and obedient. Yes, there will be some violence to come before the throne is passed on, but it will not be initiated by David. Saul will turn vicious as he goes from loving David to jealously hating him, but that is for future sermons.

We see clearly in this text that God chooses the weak things of this world. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:
"²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

He chose David and He chooses you! There's nothing special about you just like there was nothing particularly noteworthy about David. The theological concept of "unconditional election" says that God chooses His people not because they're smart enough, charming enough, loving enough, and certainly not holy enough. He chooses them for the mere pleasure of His will and divine purposes! That should humble any Christian who is tempted with pride. You don't think you're smart enough, that you know enough Scripture to be used by God? Great, now He can use you! You don't think you have your life together, that you haven't cleaned yourself up enough to please God? Great, then you can start with spiritual humility and not pride. Just as God placed His Holy Spirit inside of David to empower him, He gives us the Holy Spirit as our helper and a guarantee of our salvation. He guides us all the days of our lives, sanctifying us, making us more like Jesus, and helping us accomplish spiritual things that we could not accomplish on our own.

But even greater, God chose another man who, like David, was born in Bethlehem. Like David, He was a most unlikely person to be God's anointed from the world's eyes: "*He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him*" (Isaiah 53:2). People doubted He could be important because He grew up in Nazareth, the backwaters; nothing good came from there. His parents had a scandal around His birth because his mother got pregnant with Him before they were married. He was a peasant carpenter, for Pete's sake, He had no formal studies or theological training. He ate and drank with the wrong people. But, in Luke 4:18, Jesus declared, "*the Spirit of God is upon me because He has anointed me.*" 1 Peter 2:4 says that He was "*a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.*" Like David, everyone else would have passed over Jesus of Nazareth.⁷ But God chose Jesus because He was His beloved Son, He was Himself part of the three person God. He was also a shepherd, the spiritual "Good Shepherd" of His people. And God chose Him to inherit the throne of David, the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah, the anointed. But He would not be an earthly King, His kingdom was not of this world. And He would not win His throne through violence either, but He submitted Himself to the violence of those who opposed Him. And He allowed Himself to be killed by His enemies because He knew that it was the way that God the Father had designed for Him to atone for His people, just as Samuel's heifer had died as a sacrifice in Bethlehem for the sins of the people. Jesus died in our place to pay the price for our sins; that's what God bases His salvation on. We are cleansed and forgiven and inherit the kingdom because of what Jesus did on our behalf. Amen.

Benediction - 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - "*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.*"

⁷ Adapted from Dale Ralph David, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), p. 140.