

Seeing What God Sees

Did you know that God knows how to tell a story? Our Bible has it's hard spots, like long genealogies, detailed descriptions of how the temple should be built, and how sacrifices should be made. There are hard things to understand in Paul's theology and wild pictures in parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, and in the book of Revelation. Nevertheless, the larger part of our Bible is quite engaging. The Creation account, the history of Israel and the history of the early church are told with precision and with a flair for the dramatic. The Psalms are lyrical and their pictures beautiful. The writings of the Prophets are compelling. The Gospels lay out the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in a way that makes it hard to stop reading and if you do have to stop, you can hardly wait until tomorrow to see what happens next.

A good example of how engaging the Bible can be is found in our reading this morning from I Samuel 16 which gives us the call and anointing of David. Saul, the first king of Israel has turned out to be a disappointment. Though he started out well enough, he soon let his early successes and power go to his head. He disobeyed God and when God's favor was taken from him, rather than repent and turn back to God, he became paranoid, reckless and out of control. Saul became a menace to himself and to the nation.

So God chose a leader to replace Saul and to deliver the young nation from impending disaster. In I Samuel 16, we read the introduction to how David is selected to become Saul's successor: I Samuel 16:1-3 say, *"The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.' But Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.' The Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.'"*

Even in this brief introduction, we can begin to feel the drama. Samuel has reason to believe that it will put his own life at risk to anoint a new king while the old king is still alive and on the throne. The old king, Saul, is already paranoid, fearful of being deposed from power. The mission to Jesse's house needs to be carried out with a cover-story. Samuel will say that he is in Bethlehem for religious purposes, to

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attend to a sacrifice. Knowing that God has chosen one of Jesse's sons but not which one, to be the next king, Samuel invites Jesse and his sons to attend the sacrificial observance.

Proud of his sons and eager to show them off to Samuel, Jesse introduces each of his sons present to Samuel. If we are reading this account for the first time, there is great suspense in these introductions. Unbeknownst to anyone else, Samuel is in town to choose the next king. We know it's going to be one of Jesse's sons but we don't know which one. And, since Jesse has eight sons altogether, there are a lot to choose from.

I Samuel 16:6-7 say: *"When they arrived, (that is, when they arrived for the sacrifice), Samuel saw Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"*

From what the Lord tells Samuel we can safely gather that Jesse's son Eliab looked good. All the women here today would agree. Eliab was tall, muscular, and handsome. He looked like a good catch and his regal appearance assured Samuel that Eliab must be the one God had chosen. But, Samuel was mistaken. The Lord said, in effect, *"Eliab looks the part but he's not the one I've chosen. Keep on looking."*

Thus, I Samuel 16:8-10 say: *"Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, 'The Lord has not chosen this one either.' Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, 'Nor has the Lord chosen this one.' Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has not chosen these.'"*

The process here is almost identical to the one found in Genesis 2, where God provides a helpmate for Adam. Rather than tell Adam about Eve from the beginning, God parades all the other living creatures he has made before Adam and allows him to name them. Genesis 2:20 says, *"So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found."* With all the other options eliminated, it sets the stage for the creation of Eve, with whom Adam was instantly pleased; she was

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obviously far superior than anything else he had ever seen.

In the case of selecting the second king of Israel, however, there is a twist in the story. To the human eye, the first seven sons appeared more desirable than the one chosen. The first seven sons were bigger, more mature, and looked like they would be more likely to succeed than the one God ultimately appointed.

We can only imagine what Jesse thought, when, after introducing his seven fine sons to Samuel, Samuel asks, in verse 11, *"Are these all the sons you have?"* We can almost hear Jesse say, *"Are you kidding me? What more do you want?"*

Nevertheless, Jesse answered Samuel, *"There is still the youngest. He is tending the sheep."* Samuel says, *"Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."*

Verses 12 and 13 finish the story: *"So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah."*

This account brings up more of Israel's history, reminding us how Jacob the younger twin was chosen over Esau and renamed Israel to father God's people. It reminds us of how Jacob's son, Joseph was chosen over his older brothers to save his family during a time of famine.

But the main thing we need to see in this scripture is the way God selects His champions. The key verse is verse 7b, which says again, *"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* This truth about how God sees things in comparison to how we see things, is demonstrated throughout Scripture and throughout the history of the church.

One of the things we did to celebrate my birthday last week was to go to the movies to see "The Shack." This movie, based on the book by the same name, is controversial among Christians. The

characters chosen to portray the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are, for the Father, a black woman named Papa, Who also appears as an older Native American Man named Papa—Jesus is portrayed as a slight mid-eastern looking young man wearing a flannel shirt, work pants and a tool belt—and the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a very beautiful oriental looking young woman named Sarayu who sometimes glows and sort of fades in and out of the picture. You can see why this movie might be controversial.

But one of my favorite scenes in the movie is a scene where the man visiting the Shack is led by Sarayu into a beautiful but appearing to be quite unkempt garden of wild flowers. Sarayu asks the man what he thinks of the garden to which he replies, “It’s a mess.” Later, toward the end of the movie, the camera returns to the garden, which from ground view is still a beautiful mess. But then the picture zooms out to show what the garden looks like from high up above. Viewed from above, the garden is not a mess at all, but has the perfect order and symmetry of a royal English garden.

The message this conveys is that God’s ways are above our ways. His thoughts are above our thoughts. His view of things encompasses much more than we can see from where we stand. And where things may look all out of kilter from our perspective, God has all things under control.

When the real Jesus was born into the world and began to minister in Galilee, the people were divided. Some weren’t impressed by what they saw. From their perspective Jesus was too local, too ordinary, too blue collar. After all, what can a carpenter, a fisherman, or a bricklayer be expected to know about God? In John 6:41-42, John tells us: *“Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, ‘I am the bread that came down out of heaven.’ They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’”*

They rejected their Savior because He looked too much like them. He lacked the worldly credentials they were looking for. Psalm 118:22 puts it this way: *“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”* King David was the runt of the litter from man’s perspective, but from God’s perspective, he was *“a man after God’s own heart.”* Jesus was viewed with suspicion by the leaders of Israel,

but from God’s perspective and from the perspective of those who have come to believe in Him, He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, our Savior and Savior of all who call upon Him. Jesus is God’s Son, who perfectly pleased God because His heart was fully surrendered to the Father’s will.

But I have another focus I want us to visit for a moment this morning. The question is, how should we view ourselves; that is, in light of what God has said about us and done for us, how should we regard ourselves? What are the chances that God has chosen us to be His champions on earth and to feast at His banquet table in heaven?

Seeing ourselves with human eyes, we may not hold out much hope. We’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We don’t have a lot of standing among men. We are not great scholars. We don’t have the looks or the bodies to get us on the cover of Vogue Magazine, Sports Illustrated, or even in the Tabloids. We are not among the rich and famous of this world. We are not successful politicians or world renowned humanitarians. Why would God concern Himself with us?

But here again, God doesn’t look at what man looks at. Paul testifies in I Corinthians 1:26-31: *“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”*

God chooses whom God chooses. And, if God has spoken to your heart, giving you the desire to be His, and if you follow that desire to follow Him, then you are His. And nothing can deny you your place in His Kingdom. The blood of Jesus has completely covered and paid for all your sins both now and forever. The Lord knows your heart better than you do, and if your heart is open to His heart, then nothing else matters; He chooses you to be His child and His champion. And, from now on, whatever He calls you to do, He will give you the wisdom and the power to accomplish it. All you need do is say “Yes” to Jesus.

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Sermon for March 26, 2017

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**I Samuel 16:1-13; John 6:37-42;
I Corinthians 1:26-31**

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