

The Person God Uses

Faithfulness of God

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel 16 in the Old Testament. And you may be with us today as a guest or visitor or maybe we have had the privilege of being with you in some time, I want to welcome you to a journey not just through the book of 1 Samuel but really a journey of seeing two competing ideologies clashing, not just 3,000 years ago historically as the story is taking place but really one of the things that we've discovered, and we will so again today, that what's happening in the life of Samuel and the Israelites and Saul and David is really happening before our very eyes today: what does it look like when a group of people, when a culture, when a community allows themselves to, shall we say, navigate life or migrate from the sacred to the secular.

The beginning of 1 Samuel, the Israelites were under the judges, the God-appointed rulers for them. They listened to, they obeyed his word, his will and his way but in chapter 8, they made the erroneous decision they wanted to look like everybody else. They wanted to look like other countries, sound like other countries, so they demanded, "Give us a king." They went from being and doing it God's way to doing it the world's way. At the same time, this other ideology that we continue to see, the faithfulness of God in spite of the environment around, the faithfulness of God in spite of what is happening collectively. That faithfulness is to those individuals, those individuals who heed his word, who obey his will for their life.

No better picture than today. Today in 1 Samuel 16, we're going to see the calling and the anointing of a young man who we collectively know as King David. However, in chapter 16 he's not a king yet. He isn't wearing the crown. He isn't donning the powers. In fact, he's going to be in the back lot of the house while the seven brothers are being looked at, at who should serve. Today is the story of what does it look like, or shall I say, who is it that God is looking for? Who is the person that God uses? And we're going to discover that it looks completely different than not just Saul who preceded him but the standards of the world even this day.

Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 16 it says,

1 And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. 2 And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. 3 And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee. 4 And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? 5 And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. 6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him. 7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. 9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. 10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. 11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. 12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. 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 brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. 14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

It's a very famous story in scripture. This is the recognition of the calling and the anointing of David to be the king of Israel that, by the way, this day if you were to go on the other side of the world, what they called the old city of Jerusalem still bears his name, the City of David, a name that has resonated with humanity for thousands of years and is synonymous with authority and power, victory, and as we'll see in a moment, and oftentimes temptation. And yet we see a parallel, we see a picture for our own lives today.

I want to ask just a series of pretty rudimentary basic questions but they're really going to unpack the story for us, particularly when we get to the end of the message today. So let's begin with the "when." When does this story take place? And I know chronologically it's pretty simple to look at but I want to focus your attention on the perspective that God has that we don't.

Notice it says, "I have rejected Saul from being king." Those of you that were with us last week will remember that there was a great victory that Saul led the Israelites in. The Amalekites, I mean, they had been a constant thorn in their side. From the days of Esau unto the days of the exodus, they were those people who were always trying to take advantage of the Israelites, they were always trying to hit them when they were down. And what happened? For the first time in a real long time the Lord brought victory. Now we know that Saul was disobedient by the fact that he did not sacrifice or he did not eliminate all of the cattle and the sheep and the oxen, and particularly King Agag who Samuel slays at the end of chapter 15, which is why the people in Jerusalem said, "Hey, man, have you come in peace or are you going to do to us what you did to King Agag?" But nonetheless here's the perspective you need to understand: from the outside it looked like Israel was doing great. They had a king who was head and shoulders above everybody else. They had just won a victory over an enemy that they hadn't beaten in a long long time. Economically they were prosperous. Militarily they were fortified. Other nations were frightened of them. Remember in chapter 15 the Kenites, Saul came and said, "Hey, man, if you don't get out of the way we're going to take care of you too." And they got out of there.

Why is this important? Because oftentimes and more often than not when we think things are going well from an outside perspective God says, "I see what's lying underneath. I see what's really happening." And what was happening? There was a man by the name of Saul who had a rebellious spirit. He had a stubborn heart. As we're going to see in a moment, God is not impressed with your outward victories. God is not impressed with your proudness and your strength and your speed and your cunning intellect. God wants your heart and when he has your heart he can do more with a feeble body than you can do with one of great power and strength.

So the next question we have to ask ourselves is where did this happen? It's interesting in verse 4 it sounds so expectant for us. He says, "Oh, go down to Bethlehem." We know Bethlehem because every year around Christmas time we sing songs about Bethlehem. We do a nativity set about Bethlehem. I mean, we do all kinds of things because Bethlehem to us, I mean, it's the fulfillment of the prophecy in Micah 5. That's where Jesus Christ came in the flesh. You do understand that the place known as Bethlehem was what we call a one-horse town back in these days. You say, "A one-horse town?" Here's a fascinating demographic study. What we know as the city of Jerusalem, that major metropolis of its day and understand the numbers are obviously going to be smaller because of the day and the time, Jerusalem boasted about 4,000 residents. Now in those days that was a big city. I mean, that's the New York City of the Middle East in those days. That's a big one. Bethlehem probably had somewhere in the neighborhood of about maybe 200 residents. That's about it. Now if you do some quick math and you look at the numbers here, that means that Jesse's family was 5% of the entire town. This was a small place. I mean, this is one of those entities that you wouldn't think twice about.

Do you know what's a fascinating study? All of us at some level in our culture have celebrity syndrome. There's athletes we hold in high regard. There's musicians and actors

and actresses that, for some reason, we think much of. Have you ever done a study of where most of these people are from? Most of them didn't grow up in New York, Chicago, L. A., Nashville, Dallas, Orlando. Do you know where they're from? Muscles Shoals. I mean, where is it? If you haven't been there you don't know. I've got one for you: Opelika. Oh, just travel outside of UCLA, the upper corner of lower Alabama, and they'll call it Opeleka, Opelika, Ohpelika. So you know what's interesting is you get outside of our small Bethlehem here, most people don't even know how to pronounce the place where you're from which makes this story real personal, doesn't it? How many times have you made this statement, you may have said it growing up and even now as an adult, "Man, I just need to get out of here. I just need to get to somewhere else. I need to be where the action is taking place." Isn't that funny that the action in this story isn't taking place in Jerusalem, it's taking place in Bethlehem. And you see, God always moves differently than we would ever expect. What we think on the outside is so different oftentimes than what's happening on the inside.

Which brings up the "who." Who's the person here? We know him well. His name is David. It's interesting in verse 7 the description that the Lord gives us of who he's chosen. He says, "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." Now there's a very famous statement a couple of chapters to the left in chapter 13. It was at this point that Saul was in the midst of his rebellion and even though the crown had not formally been rejected, the Lord said it was going to go away. In chapter 13, verse 14, there's this famous statement that we've utilized so much with David but I think there is so much misunderstanding to it. It says the Lord is looking for a man after his own heart. Now that's what we see happening here in chapter 16, verse 7, that in spite of the circumstances, in spite of being in Bethlehem, there's a young boy who has a heart for the Lord.

Now let me state what this doesn't mean. This doesn't mean that David was perfect. I think oftentimes we look at these biblical characters such as David and Moses, the Apostle Paul, whomever they may be, and we put them on an undue platform when we realize that when you've taken inspection of their lives there's great victory, there's great trust, but can we agree with David there's also great failure? 2 Samuel it says there was a day where the kings went out to war but David stayed home. It would be that night in the middle of the night when he thought nobody was watching that a young woman by the name of Bathsheba would take his life down an exit ramp that he would never recover from. Later on, the devil would tempt him to number the army and he fell for the trap, and if you've read the end of his life, not all his children turned out the way that we hope and pray. There were some extreme prodigals in the group which begs the question: if God is looking for the heart and he's looking after a man with God's own heart, then how do we rationalize, how do we justify referring to David this way when we know about his failures, when we know about his mess-ups, when we know about all the struggles in his life?

You know, it's interesting when you get to the book of 1 Kings and if you've read through it, there's just this laundry list of this king serves, then that king, this one was good, that one was bad. It's just almost like an expanded genealogy, so to speak. Did you know that three very specific places in 1 Kings in chapter 11, chapter 14, and chapter 15, do you know what the Lord says? It says that that king had a rebellious heart and was not like David. Isn't that interesting that David has set the bar for us for what it means to have a heart after the Lord. You say, "Well, how do we reconcile this? How do we somehow reconcile this man who failed with this man who the Lord lauds as faithful? I think the answer lies in Psalm 51. Now you may not be familiar with Psalm 51 but it is a very personal confession of sin. David calls himself out. He doesn't blame anybody else. He says, "I am the one who is guilty. I am the one who has failed." And he begs the Lord, "Please, God, don't take your Spirit from me, don't take your favor from me." You want to guess when David wrote Psalm 51? As soon as he realized what had happened with Bathsheba.

You know, all of us one day barring the Lord's return, all of us are going to come to that point where there is a service of some kind in remembrance of a memorial of our lives, and a lot of times we talk about obituaries, eulogies, but you know, there is that epitaph that for some reason just garners my attention. You know, an epitaph sometimes it's on a tombstone, a headstone, sometimes it's just written down in the family heirloom Bible, whatever it may be, is just a short statement about one's life. It's a summary statement. You know, oftentimes they're not more than 3, 4, 5 words; usually they're not even a complete sentence. It's interesting that epitaphs are usually not written by the person in the grave, they're written by the family or the friends or the co-workers. Have you ever thought what somebody else might write for your epitaph?

Now I don't mean to be somewhat personal here but Tracy and I, we've talked about this. Now I know statistically I'm going to go first. I know that, but I told her I'm going to outlive her just to spite her. But nonetheless, and we're halfway tongue-in-cheek when we discuss it but do you know what we've jokingly seriously said we want as our epitaph? "He tried. She tried." You know, that's what King David's epitaph would be, "He tried." Did he mess up? Oh, yes. Did he really send things sideways in his family? Oh, did he. But do you know what makes David the bar and the standard is he didn't wallow in it. He didn't stay in it. He got up and said, "God, I am a wreck right now. Please, God, can you make something of this mess of my life?" Do you know what our problem is? We want to blame everybody else. We want to say, "Well, if there had been a different circumstance or a different situation. Or if I hadn't of had a this or I hadn't a that. Or if that person hadn't been involved." You know that David never blamed anybody but himself and that's why he's called a man after God's own heart. That's why because do you know what? God can work with somebody who will own it. God can work with somebody who says, "I'm not perfect but I'm willing to try."

So what happened? What's the procedure here for his anointing? I want you to pick up the story in verse 8. There's this interesting scenario where Samuel comes and says, "Congratulations, Jesse, one of your sons is going to be the king." Now let me put this in contemporary context, that would be like you dads getting a phone call from the

commissioner of the Not For Long league known as the NFL. Some of y'all will get that later. Calling you up and saying, "Congratulations, one of your boys is the number 1 draft pick this year." The moment I said that, guys, you knew exactly who it was. Why? Because that's the way that we work. That's how we operate. And you notice in verse 8 it says, "Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass," after he'd called Eliab, the oldest, before. Do you see the procedure? Jesse, much like you and I, says, "Well, if one of my boys is going to be the king, it's going to be the biggest, the fastest, the strongest, the smartest. Eliab, come here, boy." Nothing. "Well, I'm glad I've got a few more. Let's try the next one." And he goes and he proceeds until finally he gets to the end of the line and Samuel says, "I'm sorry, none of these are it. You've got to have another boy because I'm going to anoint somebody." And he says, "Surely you don't mean the runt out back, the one who I didn't even bother calling to the sacrifice, the one who is shorter, younger, weaker and looks a whole lot different? That one, the one who's only resume exists in the fact that he's pretty good with a slingshot and can deliver cheese?" For those of you that don't understand that, read the next chapter and you'll understand why I said it. That's his resume.

Now I want you to think of the procedure here. What do we do when it comes to evaluating humanity? There's several metrics we use, right? You know, oftentimes we say, "Well, it's because of their age." And today we're a culture that's obsessed with age and the lack of aging. We all, for some reason, we want to be younger than we really are. And God does not dismiss that because David is young, Timothy in the New Testament was young, but let me remind some of you, at least in this service, that Moses was 80 when he delivered the Israelites and Noah was 500 when he started building a boat. And how many times do we say, "But at my age God can't"? Do you know what I've discovered about this excuse? We use it for every age. Why? Because every age and every stage of life we're busy, we're exhausted, and we're torn and, adults, you'll testify to this, how many times do we say, "When I get to the next stage, then..."? Or a famous statement I've heard throughout the years, "When things slow down." When's the last time things have ever slowed down?

But we base things on age and appearance. Now I'm going to share with you some statistics that you think are going to be self-gratifying and edifying but I hate to tell you that facts are just the facts. Did you know that statistically taller people make more money than shorter people do in the same job? Look it up. You've got Google. It's there. Did you know statistically that the taller candidate gets elected President in the United States? Do you know why? Because we've got Saul syndrome, don't we? Give us the guy that'll fight our battles. Give us the one who looks good on the outside. But you and I have the beautiful perspective of hindsight. Looking back 3,000 years, who would you want to lead you, Saul or David? It's a real easy decision, isn't it? The problem is if you go back to chapter 16, you would have done the same thing Jesse did and most of us would have as well.

Do you know what's fascinating about the story of the procedure is that we expect Jesse to miss it, right? I mean, Jesse's just minding his business out in Bethlehem and hanging out and doing his thing, and when Samuel shows up he just says, "Hey man, don't do to

me what you did to Agag. I'm interested in living another day." But what do we expect? Samuel, the man who could see right through Saul, the man who could discern the plight spiritually of the Israelites, don't we really expect him to get it? But what did he do? He missed it. Why? Because even Samuel can get caught up in Saul syndrome. It happens to every single one of us.

Now do you understand when you go back to the time where Jesus is walking and he's teaching and he's doing miracles and he's healing people and he's opening the scriptures and he's explaining them, how many times have you made this statement, "How did they miss it? How? The Son of God walked across water. He healed blind eyes. He rose from the grave. How did they miss it?" Can I ask you the same question, "How did Samuel miss it?" It was right there at the property. Do you know why? Because the overwhelming majority of the time we're not really interested in the heart, are we? We're interested in performance, ability, stat sheets, and quarterly returns, whatever works in your area of expertise.

So the procedure was so different than the world's procedure. It didn't matter what the age was. It didn't matter what the ability was. It didn't matter what the experience was. God says, "Just give me somebody who has a heart for me and watch what I can do with them." Then we get to the "why." Why is this so important? Well, as many passages in the Old Testament, particularly in 1 Samuel, it's pretty prophetic. I want you to notice verse 13, "Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David." Look in verse 14 what happens, it says an evil spirit is upon Saul.

You say, "Why is that prophetic?" Because as we read through the rest of 1 Samuel do you know what the Israelites are going to do? Not listen to David. In fact, the next chapter is probably the most famous in the whole book of the Bible. It's the famous battle of David and Goliath. When David shows up and says, "Hey, I'll fight this guy," his brothers made fun of him. They laughed at him. The armies laughed at him. Even Saul mocked him. Nobody would pay attention. Nobody would listen. They said, "What is this kid going to do with a slingshot and five stones. Surely this is a mistake from the beginning." You keep reading, it is many many chapters before finally the truth of Saul comes out and the heart is revealed.

Why is this prophetic? Because you and I today biblically, prophetically, we're living in the last days. Do you know what the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 2? It says in those last days before his coming there will be a great falling away. We become more interested in preachers and teachers who look good and who sound good and who have mega-ministries than just the cold hard truth of "Thus saith the Lord." We're being told that in order to reach this generation today, somehow we've got to water down the Bible, we've got to compromise truth, we've got to care about people's feelings. I've got news for you: God doesn't care about any of that stuff. David stood true and he looked at Goliath straight in the eye and he says, "How dare you come to me cursing the Lord. I come in the name of the Lord." David didn't say, "Oh, I understand. It's a different day. We need

to get some terminologies. Goliath, how are you? What's your preferred pronoun?" I have a feeling he would have said, "Him."

Do you understand the prophetic aspect of this? The whole culture just kept running with Saul and all along there was this little young guy, mocked, made fun of, ridiculed, told why did you even bother to show up. How did Samuel miss it 3,000 years ago? How did the Jewish people miss it 2,000 years ago when Jesus is standing next to Barabbas and they said, "Give us Barabbas"? Let me make the question real personal: how are you missing it today? Let me tell you how most of us miss it: we want a Jesus who solves every one of our problems, we want a Jesus who fixes every one of our messes, we want a Jesus who covers all of our missteps, but we don't want him to have our heart. And that, my friends, is the person that God uses.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you're here in person, maybe you're watching online or even listening on the radio, and you're that person who said, "You know what? It doesn't matter what others do or don't think, I've got a heart problem." The Bible says in the book of Romans whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I want you to notice what the Bible doesn't say. It doesn't say whoever joins a church. It doesn't say whoever serves in this ministry or that ministry. It doesn't say whoever knows this verse by memory or that verse by memory. It just says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today you're that person saying it is time to call on the name of the Lord. Before you do so, let me remind you the Bible says that the wages of the result of sin is death. What that means is you've got to own it. You've got to own that you've got a sin problem and you've got to confess that Jesus Christ is the only one who can fix it.

So if you're here today, in your words, your prayer, your conversation, not mine and not necessarily out loud, maybe today is the day you call out, maybe you're calling out from the heart would go something like this, "God, I'm a wreck. My life may look good to others but on the inside I'm torn up, I'm twisted, I'm in turmoil. God, I know I have sinned. God, I've been places I should have never been. God, I've done things I should have never done. God, I've spoken words that should have never left my lips. And God, you and you alone know I've had thoughts that should have never been between my ears. God, today I own it. I've sinned. I realize the wage of my sin is death and I deserve every aspect of it. But God, I believe, I believe what you said you said in your word, but the gift of life, eternal life is in Jesus Christ. So God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to come on my behalf, he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross on Mount Calvary he was bearing the punishment and the pain and the wages of my sin. And God, today I believe when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, yes, it was miraculous, yes, according to Matthew 12 it was a sign, but more than that it meant my sin could be forgiven and my soul could be saved. And so, God, I'm resting it all upon Jesus today. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who for the very first time cried out to the Lord. In a moment, I'm going to pray over us and we're going to stand and sing. Let me invite you just to step out and step forward. We'd love the privilege of praying with you, for you, and just hearing what God's been and is doing in your life. But maybe today you say, "Pastor, I'm already a David. I'm already a child of the Lord. I'm already saved. I'm born again but I'm in a bad place." Maybe today is not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is about leaving here and writing your own Psalm 51. Maybe today is about leaving this service and crying out to God your own condition before him.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, thank you that no matter who we are, where we've been and what it looks like that your hand of mercy and your arm of grace is greater and stronger than even our worst transgression. God, helps us today to not listen to the outside voices or maybe in some cases the inside voices. God, may we only listen to your voice. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.