

1. God looks on the heart

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[0 : 00] Now, before we look at 1 Samuel 16, let's have a moment of prayer. Come then with faith and contemplation, see how in Scripture Christ is known.

Father, we praise you for this book you have given to us, the words of the apostles and the prophets, the words which lead us beyond the sacred page to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And we pray indeed that our hearts may burn within us, that our eyes may be opened, that you will send us out into the world with that glorious message of redeeming grace. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I imagine that every adult in this room has several times in their life written personal statements or written their CVs, and those of us who are younger will sooner or later have to do that.

Now, when you're writing a personal statement, or when you're preparing your CV and application for a job, you emphasize the good points, don't you?

[1 : 17] You emphasize your qualifications, you emphasize your experience, you emphasize your talents. Because after all, nobody's going to know unless you inform them.

If you're wise, you don't tell lies, but you make a great deal of the truth. You emphasize your strengths. But you know each of us could write a different kind of personal statement, couldn't we? I tell lies. I'm spiteful. I'm selfish. I don't love others the way I love myself. I often cheat. I'm big-headed and concisen. I'm sorry. Which of these statements is true? The reality is they are both true, aren't they?

The reality is these qualities, if we've been honest, actually are part of us. The other reality, of course, is our sinful hearts are also part of us. So as we begin the story of David, what's the personal statement we're going to make about him?

[2 : 23] David, the shepherd boy. David, the psalmist. David, the warrior. David, the Lord's anointed. David, the great king. What about David, the adulterer?

David, the murderer by proxy. David, the one who poured out his heart in terrible penitence in Psalm 51. Which are true?

Once again, the point is they are both true. That's why I'm calling this series God's flawed but faithful servant. And the key, it seems to me, to David's story is not just in this chapter, but throughout the whole of it is verse 7, which I've chosen as my title this evening.

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.

It's our title for this evening. We'll come back to it. And this runs all through the story of David and indeed beyond it. When you read in 1 Kings 11, much, much later in the story, the tragic decline and apostasy of David's son Solomon, you read this, Solomon's heart was not devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been.

[3 : 50] The Lord looks on the heart. It's important to realize this is not going to be a character study. The danger of doing that is that we can simply isolate the story from the rest of the Bible.

And as we'll see in a few weeks time, we'll look at the story of David and Goliath, instantly begin to apply it to ourselves. This is the story of God. This is the story of how God works in one of his greatest and very imperfect servants.

That's true. We are not David. So don't instantly start applying what's said about David to us, or we're going to go wildly astray. But David's God is our God.

And the way that God dealt with David does give us insights into the way God deals with all his people. And after all, his story is part of the great story.

As I said, a name that rings down the Bible to his greater son. And in heaven, in the book of Revelation, there is the throne of David. And as I've said already, the root and descendant of David, the line of the tribe of Judah.

[5 : 01] So as we're going to look at this great story, we're going to see how God, in his grace and in his wisdom, used this imperfect but chosen man.

And I want us to look this evening at three movements in this story, in chapter 16. First of all, God's coming disturbs.

This is verses 1 to 5. The national scene is perplexing. The scene among God's people is confusing, as we know it is in our own day.

Even the great prophet, who had begun his life after all, back in 1 Samuel 3, hearing the Master's voice, he is confused. God's coming always disturbs.

I wonder if when people ask for a vision of God, or ask for the coming of God, they realize what they're asking for. When God comes in Scripture, it is a terrifying experience.

[6 : 03] Remember John in Patmos, when I saw him, I fell down at his feet, as though I were dead. When Isaiah sees the Lord in the temple, it doesn't make his hands clap, it makes his knees clap.

He is terrified. He is frightened at the greatness and majesty of the holiness. And so it is here. God's coming disturbs.

First of all, there is the perplexity in the prophet himself. The Lord said to Samuel, How will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him? After all, Saul had made a promising start.

Saul had seemed the right person. Would the nation fall apart now? Samuel had done what he believed God was calling him to do, and earlier, he had anointed Saul.

And, as has been pointed out, indeed was pointed out at that remarkable meeting here on Friday, which some of you were at, and most of you will have heard of, that it was right for him to grieve for Saul, because Saul had been God's choice, and had begun so promisingly.

[7 : 13] It is important, though, to notice how seeing is going to be important. The Lord sees the heart. In verse 1, I have provided myself a king.

Literally, that says, I have seen for myself a king. The idea of providence in this chapter. God, God is not perplexed, in other words. The prophet is perplexed, but God is not perplexed.

Already, in chapter 13, verse 14, the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. And in 1528, he says to Saul, I have chosen a neighbor of yours who is better than you.

Samuel cared deeply. Samuel realized the danger to the nation. Samuel cared what was going to happen. But, because this is not Samuel's story, because it's not David's story, God is not going to be blown off course.

If this were David's story, or if it were Samuel's story, then it would be more than perplexity, there would be panic. And of course, that is exactly what happens. There is panic among the Bethlehem elders.

[8 : 20] Verse 4, Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and says, Do you come peaceably? You see, if we don't actually believe in God who arranges the times and seasons, who raises up his people and places them where he needs them, then we are going to panic.

And that's what these elders did. Because, just as at the beginning of the book of Samuel, spiritual life had burned low under the decent but feeble priest Eli, so here it's burning low again because the king has gone off the rails.

And therefore, people are panicking. The elders of Bethlehem are panicking. The air is emotionally charged. But a sense of something significant about to happen.

God is on the move. And his spirit is on the move. As I say, in spite of what some people say, that is never a comfortable thing.

Because it's unpredictable. Unpredictable to us. So that's the first of the three movements in the story. God's coming disturbs. But in the next movement of the story, the heart of the story, really in verses 6 to 13, God's choice perplexes.

[9 : 39] And this tells us the danger of relying on false impressions. Verse 6, When they came, that's Jesse's son, Samuel looked on Eliab and thought, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.

But notice, of course, what is said of Saul, what's been said of Saul, is also said of Eliab. I'm pretty certain Eliab would have thought he was the Lord's anointed as well.

Eliab was those kind of guys who would have looked in the mirror with considerable satisfaction. Every time he passed a plate glass window would have looked into it with that probation. But these words, I have rejected him. He is, Don't look on his appearance or the height of his stature. If you read on in the story, you'll find that these are exactly the words going to be used about David's rebellious son, Absalom.

So, then comes this central verse. Do not look on his appearance, for the Lord sees not as man sees. Incidentally, this is a rather terrifying verse.

[10:42] I used to think it was an enormously encouraging verse. You can always do something about the outside. You can always smarten yourself up, get a haircut, turn, do the best you can.

If you think the outside isn't up to much, my goodness, you ought to see the inside. God looks on. God looks on the heart.

But, don't fall into the error that some of the commentators do, saying, Eliab is rejected because he was tall and handsome. That's not the point of the story at all.

Look down at verse 12. What's said about David? He was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And as we'll see down in verse 18 later on, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech and a man of good presence.

God is not saying, look, I don't want anybody tall and good looking, athletic and all the rest of it. I want somebody, I want somebody miserable and small and ugly.

[11:43] That is not what's being said. And for that, many of us can take great heart. God is not tied by our conventions.

You see, sometimes, sometimes I've seen children's talks. When I was young, I used to be on flannel graphs. Nowadays, of course, it's on PowerPoint. And you see this, you see in the story of David and Goliath, this gigantic, hulking side of a house, Goliath.

And you see a tiny little wimp, David. David was not a tiny little wimp. David was the kind of guy who nowadays would have run marathons, played rugby. And so on.

David is a strong, powerful, powerful lad. After all, he's going to tell Goliath, or Saul rather, he'd tackle the lion and the bear. The point is, God is not interested in our conventions.

God is not looking on the appearance. God is looking on the heart. And remember, the heart in the Bible is a bigger thing than it is to us. The heart is you, the very essence of you.

[12:47] Your heart is what you are and who you are. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.

The son who was keeping the sheep has to become the future king. But how is this sealed? This is sealed by the anointing in verse 13. The Lord said, first of all in verse 12, Arise, anoint him, for he is the one.

This is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. We're not told anything about any unfelt about this. Samuel probably felt every kind of fool at this moment.

And the brothers were undoubtedly bristling with indignation. But notice, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David. Very vivid word. And as David emerges from the shadows, the point is, it's not because he is handsome and tall and muscular.

It's because the spirit has come upon him. And surely it is pointing forward to the day when on Jordan's bank his greater son will be baptized and the spirit will descend from heaven.

[13:56] And notice, it's verse 13 before he's named. He hasn't even been named up to this point. The Lord rushed upon David. First, for the first time, this man is named.

He chose, and later on in Psalm 78, the psalmist says, he chose David, his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds.

In a time like this, in a time of perplexity, in our church, in our nation. It's right, and this was said as well at the meeting on Friday, it's right to grieve.

It's right to mourn. But grieving and mourning will simply end up in wallowing in nostalgia, won't it? Wishing back to some golden age in the past, whether that's the golden age of the Covenanters or the days of the Billy Graham Crusades.

God used all these people and used them mightily. But what needs to happen today is the anointing of God to come on others.

[15:01] The young people whom God is going to call, whom he's going to anoint, and whom he's going to use in the building of his kingdom. This is he, verse 12 and verse 18, the Lord is with him.

Now, as I said, we are not David. We are not called to David's role in salvation history. But we are called to look to the future, to look to the Spirit of God, who is not perplexed, who is not panicking in these circumstances, but who is still calling people for his name.

And that's our hope for the future. Our hope is not dwelling in the past. Our hope is looking to the future and looking up to the Lord, to his Spirit.

So, first of all, God's calling disturbs. Sorry, God's coming disturbs. Secondly, God's choice perplexes. And to the final section of the chapter, verses 14 to 23, God's call leads to danger. Now, it doesn't lead to danger immediately in this chapter, but it is going to lead David, the Lord's anointed, into very terrible danger, danger of his life. And notice how this section is introduced by a contrast.

[16:16] Verse 14, Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. Is that unfair?

Well, of course not, because Saul himself had rejected the Word of God. But Saul had stopped listening, as Dick was saying this morning in the Jeremiah passage, that people didn't listen. Saul didn't listen. Saul thought he knew better. When we think we know better, when we reject the call of the Lord and of his Word, we create a vacuum.

And into that vacuum come seductive voices of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And so it happened with Saul. And then at the end of the section, then verse 23, the evil spirit departed from him.

So you see verse 13, the spirit rushed on David, the evil spirit comes on Saul, and then departs after the ministry of David.

[17:21] Now you notice, and this is typical of biblical narrative, of biblical story, how there's so much suggested under the surface. There is the irony of the rejected needing the help of the anointed.

It's almost as if David is chosen again, this time by Saul. Now that's absolutely full of irony. In other words, David is not only God's choice at this point, he appears to be Saul's choice as well.

Now we know from later in the story how fickle that was, and if David had depended in any way on Saul's choice, he would have ended in disaster, assaulted. Look at verse 18.

One of the young men answered, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, skilful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, a man of good presence. Almost a summary of David's life.

He is a person, he is musical, he is skilful with the lyre, a man of valor, and a man of war. He is tough. Not somebody you can brush aside.

[18:26] He is prudent in speech, he talks well, and he talks wisely, and he is a man of good presence. The kind of person you notice when he comes into a room.

Now, that's all very well. Musician, brave fighter, good speaker, kind of person with presence. It begins to sound like a celebrity website with blogs, doesn't it?

This young man blogging, I've met a new celebrity, he's called David. How wonderful he is. Hasn't the blog sphere actually terribly increased our evangelical obsession with celebrities?

Not that these things are bad in themselves, man of valor, skilful in speaking, but the most important thing of all, the thing that's usually ignored, the Lord is with him.

That is the secret of David's life. That is the secret of David's psalm calling. The Lord is with him. And ultimately, that's the one thing that we need if we're going to serve God.

[19:33] All these other things God can use, God does use, God will use, and if they're received as gifts from him, they're great, but ultimately, none of them will achieve anything unless the Lord is with us.

And how does David, first of all, show his qualities? I think they're very important in these last few verses. Verse 21, David came to Saul and entered his service, and Saul loved him greatly.

He became his armor bearer. Now, David provides, if you like, moral integrity in Saul's court.

Remember, God's people are salt in society, providing, preventing society from simply disintegrating.

Think of all the things that God's people have brought into the life of the Western world. First of all, think of universities, of schools, of medicine, and so on.

All these things that come fundamentally from Christian influences. That's individuals. In your school, in your university, in your office, at home, at leisure, providing the presence of Christ before

you see anything.

[20 : 49] Of course, words are necessary. You have to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we don't tell, then we're giving no clue as to why our lives are the way they are.

But even before the words are spoken, and allowing the words to be spoken, there is the fragrance of Christ that comes from the presence of his people. Not because we're brilliant or clever or accomplished.

Many people have great gifts. But, because the Lord is with us. So you see, at the beginning of this study of David, we need to grasp the big picture.

We are not David. I'll be repeating that during this season until you're fed up hearing it. Cornhillers, presently, have heard it many times. We are not David. And we mustn't simply apply in an unimaginative way what's said about David to us.

But David's God is our God. And I want to finish by making two particular observations. One is, we cannot serve God perfectly.

[22 : 00] We are all flawed. But by his grace, we can serve him acceptably. And that's one great lesson from this story of David. Not perfect, but acceptable.

And the second thing is this. David comes to prominence at a time of great national crisis. But if you read the story, you'll find that after the spectacular victory of Goliath, about twelve years pass, a long time, before he comes to prominence again.

and spends those twelve years hunted by Saul, harassed, and living in caves, pursued over the mountains, and into ravines, and so on.

To be called by the Lord is not like receiving something, saying you've won a holiday for two in the Caribbean. To be called by God is to be called to suffer for him, to be called to fight for him, but to know with a deep and unwavering certainty that the Lord is with us as he was with David is the key to this story.

Amen. Amen. Let's pray. God our Father, we are not David, we know that, but you are our God as you were the God of David.

[23 : 38] And we pray that in our lives, in our ministries, in our work, in our leisure, with our friends, and going about our business, that we may know with certainty that you are with us and rejoice in that and thus, like David, not only start but finish and hear the words one day, well done, good and faithful servant.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.