

God Vision

A Sermon in the Perfectly Imperfect Series by Pastor Rob Hamilton
Delivered on January 16, 2022

1 Samuel 16:4-13 New Revised Standard Version

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 He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.”[a] 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 does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. 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 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” 11 Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Preamble

Greetings! I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor at the United Methodist Church of Geneva. Thank you for choosing to share your time and energy with us via our online worship.

If you are joining us for the first time, typically we broadcast live from Hamilton Street where we’ve been located in Geneva, IL for nearly a 150 years, but for the next few weeks our building is closed for renovations until the end of January. For our regular’s, renovations are moving along well but a little slow with staffing shortages, but its gonna look new and fresh when we return in person.

Today, we are starting a new series that focuses on on the Old Testament legendary figure of David - shepherd boy, tribal leader and eventually one of the most renowned kings of Israel. I want to point out that for as much as these seven sermons are about David, David is just the lead actor in these stories. God is the director of the divine drama we are going to read, study and explore together. Case in point:



today as we launch this series, David doesn't even have a single line in the story. Our story is about how God acts in the world and launches this whole series on how God can use ordinary people, like you and me, to do God's extraordinary work in the world.

Let's dive deeper today by joining in prayer, will you please pray with me and for me?

Prayer of Illumination

Almighty God,

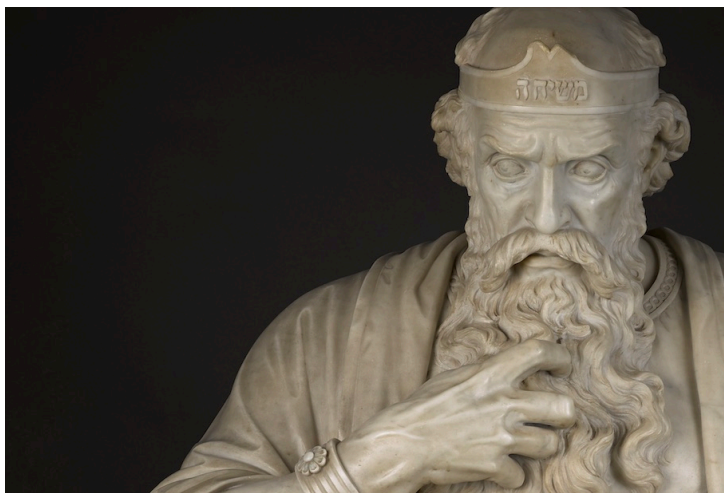
Speak to us today with the word you need us to hear. Speak to me and through me that those who have gathered via their devices might feel your Holy Spirit moving and stirring in our lives. If possible, open our eyes and fill them with your vision so that we might be able to see the world and each other as only you can see and then give us the courage to live as those who see the world differently than most. Amen.

Sermon

We begin this series in the 16th chapter of Samuel - that's about half way through that book of the Bible, so I think we need a little context to get started. It's the 11th Century BCE and the Israelites - God's chosen people- who had entered the promised land about a 150-200 years earlier, where transitioning from a tribal society -beleaguered by anarchy and barbarism- to a monarchical society characterized by bureaucratic self-aggrandizement¹. It's in this 11th century that the dozen kingdoms of Israel had come together into a United Monarchy that was ruled by three primary kings, Saul, David and David's son Solomon over the course of 115 years or so.

In the Iron Age in the Hebrew culture to become king was a divine appointment. There were not campaigns, super-PACs, algorithms spreading questionable information, ballots or electoral colleges required in order to seat a king. Instead, prophets sent by God identified and anointed a king. Now don't get me wrong there was likely a fair amount of politics involved, especially as kingdom divides in the late 10th century BCE.

So at the time of our story today, the United Kingdom's first solo king, Saul, is in charge. As Old Testament scholar and teacher, Walter Brueggemann suggests, "Saul was anointed king at



God's behest, but was so consumed by the old way of how they were organized as a kingdom and consumed with personal conflict that Saul never really effectively or faithfully ruled."² Saul recognized his ineffectiveness was was terribly anxious and reactive because of it; which comes into play later when interacting with David.

But because of Saul's ineffectiveness and faithlessness, God has decided to anoint a new king. So God sends the

¹ Brueggemann - History of the Old Testament.

²² Brueggemann - History of the Old Testament.



old prophet Samuel who is renounced for making kings. In fact, king Saul was anointed by the prophet Samuel. Because the prophet Samuel is loyal to God and not king or country, Samuel gets word to search for a new king in the little town of Bethlehem. Bethlehem is not yet the famous town for being the birth place of both the greatest king of Israel (David) and the birth place of the Messiah (Jesus) we just sang about a few weeks ago. At

this point in history Bethlehem is just this tiny agrarian village and its here, not in the halls of power or the magnificent mile, that God begins the search for a new king.

The people of Bethlehem are worried that Samuel is bringing trouble to their little town, but he assures them that he comes in peace and to share in a sacrifice or worship. Samuel invites a leading family of the tiny town headed by Jesse to be sanctified (made clean and holy) in order to share in the sacrifice together. Samuel is being a bit coy here. Samuel's orders were clear to anoint a king from the sons of Jesse, but Samuel hasn't let on about this yet.

Now Jesse has no obvious pedigree for kingship. He's even a mud-blood as Jesse's grandmother was Ruth, the Moabite. Who was unexpected person that saved God's people.

If it hasn't yet, the lights on your spiritual dashboard should start going off, God isn't clearly acting outside of convention here. Typically, kings in other kingdoms come from a line of biological succession or coup. Samuel should be looking at Saul's sons, but none of them have a heart for God. And instead of looking for a king in the academy or promoting from within the monarchy, God is looking outside of Saul's family for someone who has the right heart to serve God as the king of God's people. This isn't to say that God doesn't work in conventional ways, but God does have a track record of working outside of convention to bring about God's purposes. Now another reason your spiritual dashboard lights might be going off is that if God has a track record of calling and using people in unconventional ways anyone who doesn't consider themselves on the bench for being used by God, is now potentially in the batting line up for God to use.



Let's see how this plays out starting in verse six. Samuel starts eyeballing Jesse's sons trying to guess which of the 7 of Jesse's sons who were present for the sacrifice would be God's favored one for anointing as future king. When Samuel sees the eldest son who was probably dark tall and handsome, Samuel assumed that he was the oldest and looked the part that Eliab must be the next king. (Buzzer sound effect) Nope. God says in verse 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 does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

God makes it plain that God doesn’t look at conventional signs like outward appearance, but rather God sees the human heart and pursues those who have a heart for God. Now the kind of seeing God is doing here is not the kind of seeing Santa or his elves on the self do that watch outwardly like some kind killer surveillance network. Here the word for ‘see’ is the Hebrew word is ra-a. When God ‘sees’ it means discern.³ This isn’t a pure data, market, traditional or conventional driven choice. Ra-a means spending time carefully tuning one’s heart and life to the will of God.

How does one tune their heart to God? In some ways that is simple, but not easy. It’s learning to put God at the center of your life and not yourself. We do this through faithful practices like: worship, prayer, studying the Bible, serving others, giving generously, sharing what God is doing in our lives with others and many of the other spiritual practices handed down from generations of faithful people. So what ra-a does’t mean discernment is pursuing career, success, or the air of perfection at all costs. Apparently 7 of 8 sons of Jesse, did not have their hearts tuned to God. God looked not at their physical appearance or their CV but their heart to know the will and character of those first 7 men would not faithfully follow God.

So Samuel inquires if there are any other sons. It turns out the youngest is out tending the sheep. He’s already a servant leader at the age of 15 and as soon as David, the youngest (and not bad looking) son of Jesse comes in from the pasture, God tells Samuel to anoint David as the



next king of the United Kingdom of Israel. Now as we're about to find out through this series David isn't perfect, a holy roller per se. We are going to see how David is both pious and pragmatic, idealistic and self-serving, fearless and calculating.⁴ And God uses David despite his lack of moral perfection because when it comes down to it, David's heart is tuned into God's own heart.

This is one of the first take aways for us in this series. That **God doesn't require perfection**. God doesn't measure success or worth based on the metrics our culture determines as valuable. God isn't even interested in having a perfect, sinless life. Instead God looks to the heart of a person.

Let me expand on a story I shared last week. Back in college, I had spent a lot of time growing as a Christian. I was in my second Disciple Bible Study. I was studying to be a pastor. I was in a small group. I had accountability partners all to help me grow toward perfection. At one point, I thought that if I stayed on course, that I would live a sinless life and God would be

³ New Interpreters Bible Commentary

⁴ New Interprets Bible Commentary

pleased. The problem was two fold. 1) Despite my best efforts, sin still would win the day and trying to defeat sin of my own accord in the pursuit of perfection is a futile task - after all if we could live without sin we wouldn't need the cross. And 2) the pursuit of a more holy life, while noble, put myself at the center. I didn't need God's help. My heart wasn't tuned into God. It was tuned into trying to follow the law perfectly. I had put myself at the center and pushed God to the margins. Eventually, that all came crashing down and led to an existential crisis, but that whole process helped me to tune my heart to hear God's grace and opened my heart and life to God's Spirit. Which is a key second take-away today: **once God discerns that the human heart is tuned in to God, God's Spirit is active in a person's life.** We see in verse 13 that the Spirit of the Lord rested mightily on David from that day forward.

This is the same Spirit that was poured out upon all flesh on Pentecost. All of us have God's Spirit present and available to us we just have to tune our hearts to God's grace. In a way the old hymn *Come Thou Fount* has it all right...

Jesus sought us as stranger when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, rescues from from danger,
bought us with his precious blood.

And because God's vision isn't based on appearances nor does God measure our worth by how good or bad we think we are or even the world tells us we are, but by grace does God look upon us, we are free to join in the hymn sing:

Oh, to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee:
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.

Praise be to our God, who looks upon all hearts.

This week I pray you feel God's Spirit moving in your heart and tuning it to the will of God.
Amen.