

Seeing the King

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Preacher: Hunter Nicholson

[0 : 0 0] Now, I know I'm going to disappoint at least one person tonight because I know someone during that reading was thinking, I can't wait to hear him explain those harmful spirits in chapter 16, but I'm only actually going to look at the first half of chapter 16 because really what we read in that chapter was two different stories.

And so what we're going to look at tonight is the anointing of David, which is verses 1 to 13. And like Corey said, we're starting a new service tonight on the life of David.

A number that I always keep in my head that's really helpful is the year 1000. The year 1000 was in the middle of David's rule, so that's a great way of navigating the Old Testament.

You know 1000, you know where David was. And as I'm sure many of you know, David was the second king of Israel, but he was Israel's greatest king in the ancient world before Jesus came.

And the funny thing about this passage that we read, which is David's introduction in chapter 16, is that you actually don't hear David's name until the very last verse. And so in one sense, what we're going to talk about tonight is hardly about David at all.

[1 : 2 4] And in another sense, it's all about David. And historically, there's two things that we learn in this passage. Number one, why God saw that David should be king.

And number two, why Samuel couldn't, or at least why he couldn't at first. And of course, in one sense, the answer comes to us very simply in verse seven, where God says to Samuel, the Lord sees not as man sees.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Man sees on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. And I don't know about you, but to me that is a painfully non-specific statement.

Because what God could have done is he could have looked at Samuel and he said, when Samuel made the wrong choice, he could have said, Samuel, that is just like you. You shallow little man, you chose Eliab.

But what he says isn't Samuel, you are uniquely sinful. He says, Samuel, you are like all people. And in a sense, that's a word to Samuel, but it's also a word to the reader saying, when you look at Samuel, in some sense, you're meant to see yourself.

[2 : 3 5] Because what Samuel does here is not a sin unique to him. It's a propensity in all of our hearts to look to the outward appearance. And so what you have in this story is God exposing Samuel's heart and in doing so, exposing our hearts, but then he doesn't leave Samuel there because he walks alongside Samuel and he shows him a better way and he shows us a better way.

And so what I want to do tonight is three things. I want to talk about, number one, why Samuel could not see the true king. Number two, how he was meant to see the true king.

So why did he go wrong and how should he have gone right? And then finally, what does this story tell us about seeing our king? So number one, why couldn't Samuel see the true king?

And again, in one sense, the answer's obvious and I don't want to overstate the point because God says Samuel was looking to the outward appearance. But there's a specific reason when you read the story that we're supposed to understand, even though he's committing the sin of all people, there's a specific reason why he does that and the text wants us to see it.

And the way that the text wants us to see it is to see Samuel's life and to see what has brought him to this point.

[3 : 55] And you see it in verse one. What you need to know about Samuel is even though we come to this as the beginning of a new series saying we can't wait to see David revealed, for Samuel coming into chapter 16, this doesn't feel like the beginning of a story.

It feels like the end of a story. And Samuel in chapter 16 verse one is a man who lacks hope, who is downtrodden, who is sick with grief.

And all he can think about, literally all he can think about is how his life and his nation has gone wrong. And the reason is, aside from David who appears in the last verse, there's a man who appears in the first verse here, who lurks in the background of Samuel's life, which is Saul.

And it had been, it had been Samuel's task in life to raise Saul up and to present him to the country as the first king of Israel.

And for a time, Saul was really the hope of a nation. Saul was a great man. You looked at him and you were impressed with him, but it wasn't just his looks. Saul actually did things like subdue Israel's enemy.

[5 : 04] And so you looked at Saul and you thought to yourself, this is a hero. But then as Saul's life develops, he falls. And what you see is this repeated pattern of a man who on the outside looks strong, but on the inside won't listen to God.

He's not obedient. And ultimately God looks at Saul and says, I have rejected you from being king over Israel.

And when that happens, no one was more devastated than Samuel. Just a few years before Samuel had literally held Saul up to the people. And this is a quote.

He looks at Saul in front of the people and he says, there is none like him among the people. And you get this sense that Samuel had fallen for Saul.

I mean, he was in on Saul being the great hero. Samuel was the one who anointed Saul as king. He was the one who officially made him king. And when God comes to Samuel and says, I'm rejecting Saul, first Samuel 1511 tells us that Samuel, his response to what God said was that Samuel was angry.

[6 : 13] And it says that he cried all night, all night long. And I don't know if you've ever been so sickened with the circumstances of your life that all you knew to do was to cry out all night long to God.

But that's what Samuel did. It's how devastated he was with what had happened in his life. And that's where our story begins. All that baggage of how grieved Samuel is comes into this passage.

And in verse one, God comes to Samuel and he says to Samuel, Samuel, it's time to stop grieving. Why are you grieving over the man that I have rejected? It's time for you to choose, for me to send you to choose a new king.

And so for the first time in Samuel's life and perhaps a few years, there's hope because God is going to raise up another king where Saul failed. And the obvious obstacle as the passage goes on is how will Samuel know the right guy?

How will he choose the right guy? But there's other obstacles in the passage, which we read over lightly, but they're very serious. Like, Samuel looks at God when he tells him to go to Bethlehem and he says, God, I cannot go to Bethlehem because if I go, I will be killed because Saul is still the king of Israel.

[7 : 31] And if Samuel gets caught going to anoint a new king, there's a word for that and it's treason. And Samuel could be executed. And so this is a covert operation.

And God says, when you go, bring a cow with you so that if someone stops you on the road, you can tell them, well, I'm making a sacrifice. That's why I'm going to Bethlehem.

And I don't think Samuel would be lying there. I think he really did go to make a sacrifice, but he had this other motive of going to choose a new king. And so God says, take this cow, go to Bethlehem, which would have been about a 10 miles journey.

And when he gets there, he meets these elders who are terrified of him because, you know, for all they know, the prophet could be coming to say, God has judged you. Your wrath is coming on you.

And he tells them not to worry. And he finally goes to see the sons of Jesse. And the climax of the story, in one sense, is when he gets to this young man named Eliab.

[8 : 29] And we know from a later verse that Eliab is the eldest brother of Jesse's eight sons. And Samuel looks at him and he, the text that we read says he thought to himself.

I don't know why that is. In the Hebrew, it says he just, he said, he said to himself, surely the Lord's anointed is before him. And again, when you hear what God says, you say, well, Samuel's problem is because he was looking on outward appearance.

But that doesn't answer the question that I think the text is trying to show us that there's a reason that Samuel is looking to outward appearance. And it's because when he sees Eliab, he sees Saul.

That's where Samuel goes wrong. He looks at, he looks at Eliab and he sees a man who is tall and who is strong and who looks brave.

And it reminds him of Saul, who for all of his failings, that was what he had going for him was he had the look of a king. And it seems like that's what God is hinting at in verse seven, where God says, do not look on his appearance or on his height or his stature because I have rejected him.

[9 : 42] And the inference, right, is that what Eliab must have is height and appearance and stature. And Samuel looks at this and he says, surely here is the next king because he looks like the last king that God had chosen.

And he looks like a brave man and he looks like the kind of man that when you're in battle, you look behind you and you see him and it gives you courage. And God says, no, you have, you've chosen wrong.

You've got the wrong man. And the way that one commentator describes what God does when he explains, Samuel sent to him as he says that God is engaging in a deconstruction of social conditioning because Samuel had been trained in his society to see certain things as being valuable and certain appearances as telling you what really is and what is truth.

And so the Israelites had been socially conditioned to think that they needed a king and they needed someone strong to protect them. And they, when they were so socially conditioned to imagine that that king must be tall and brave and have the look of a hero, that when they saw Saul, it was obvious that he should have been king.

And when Samuel saw Eliab, it was obvious to him that he should have been king. And what is God telling us here?

[11 : 14] What he's not telling us is that you never want to choose someone for a job who is attractive and who actually looks like they could fit the part. Because one of the ironies of the passages that when they finally do get to David, what does David look like?

He's ruddy. He has beautiful eyes and he's handsome. But the point that God is making is it doesn't matter whether David is handsome or not.

And in his defense, he wasn't tall. But the point is all of those things, they're not bad. They're just irrelevant and they're not the way that we should judge character.

And to go back to what I said at the beginning, where God looks at Samuel and he says, you are like all men in the sense that you can only judge by appearances.

One of the things that this text asks us to do is not to make sure that we're not choosing tall brave men for leadership. It's to say, what do we have to have deconstructed in our society?

[12 : 15] What has our society trained us to see as valuable? That we don't need to say these things are bad, but that they can blind us to what is actually valuable around us.

There was just yesterday in the Times, Scotland, there was an article, and I told Carly I was going to say this in Jesus' sugar head when I said I was going to mention the word Botox.

But there was a passage, not a passage, an article in the Times. And it said this, and I just thought it had so much to say to what our passage was tonight.

It was about the dangers of cosmetic surgery, but this is the one positive that it said about cosmetic surgery. It said Botox has brought happiness, has brought happiness and greater confidence to countless people looking to hold, longing to hold back the ravages of time and to feel more comfortable in their skin.

And then it gets even more particular. It says, this is not mere vanity. Cosmetic surgery makes people richer. Individuals who are perceived as beautiful, however fickle in shifting that concept may be.

[13 : 25] They enjoy higher earnings than those considered plain. Cosmetic surgery can flatten the playing field of opportunity, reducing the advantages enjoyed by those with natural good looks.

And it can also help combat ageism. And I'm not here to attack Botox, but what the article implied was, what it said outright was that we still live in a society where you will be judged by your outward appearance.

And the obvious way that we're judged by our outward appearance is the way that we look. But of course, there's all kinds of ways that we can judge outwardness, not just our facial features that can be how successful we are in our jobs.

I don't know if you would agree with this, but I heard a minister once say that the most Scottish of all questions is, what do you do? And that question can be so loaded sometimes, and depending on our situation in life, we can either be proud of the answer that we have to give, or we can be ashamed of the answer that we have to give.

God looks at our looks and at our success in life, and at our jobs, and at our finances, and at our family lives, that we want to be so perfect.

[14 : 42] We want all those things to be great. And he says, those in one sense are all appearances, and what I care about is your heart. And one of the things that the gospel asks us to do, and the scriptures in this scripture asks us to do, is to make sure that we are not judging the world around us, and we're not judging ourselves by outward appearances, but that we're training ourselves to look at the heart.

One of the most beautiful things about Jesus was when we think about Jesus, we think about how he stooped down to the lowly, and he was willing to engage with anyone.

But if you really see the way that he acts in society, in a sense he's blind to all distinctions and he's willing to talk to anyone, and even the rich young ruler who walks away from him, Jesus says that Jesus looked at him and loved him.

I assume with a love of grief that he walked away. And that's what God calls us to do, is to be so unlike our culture, and to say, I will not judge by appearances.

And it's not a small thing, because think of it like, it's easy to overlook the gravity of what Samuel does in this passage. If Samuel had been actually given the chance to choose the king, he would have chosen a terrible king.

[15 : 59] That's what he was about to do. And God doesn't say you've chosen a second tier candidate. He says, you have chosen one that I have rejected, that you would have chosen one that I have rejected.

And so why did Samuel not see the king? Part of the answer is he looked on outward appearances. The second question I want to consider is this.

How was Samuel meant to see the true king? And there's a question behind that question, which is why did God choose David?

And that's actually a tricky question to answer if you know David's life, because you want to say, well, God looked at David and he saw his heart and he saw that he had a good heart. And because he had a good heart, he made him king.

And that's a tempting answer, but part of the problem with that is that if you know David's life as many great things as David did, David also did terrible things too.

[16 : 58] There were moments which it's almost surprising that the scriptures are willing to record them because they're so embarrassing and they're so shameful and namely him committing adultery and then in order to cover up what he had done, killing this woman's husband.

When you look at David's life at certain moments and you say, is this really an improvement on who Saul was? Can we really say that God chose David because he saw his heart?

And even David in Psalm 51 looks up to God and cries out to God about how unclean his heart was. But I think in that moment when David looks up to God and he cries out to God, he says, God give me a clean heart.

That actually gives us part of the answer to why God was willing to choose David. And it's because he saw in David a man who when he was confronted with his sins, didn't excuse them, but he looked up to God and begged for mercy.

And you could see in David's life a man who as deeply flawed as he was, he did love God and he cried out to God. And so I can't give all the reasons why God chose David.

[18 : 16] And I think there's mystery and sovereignty here. But the question that I want to answer in the second point is again, how was Samuel meant to see the king, which is a slightly different question. I think it's a lot easier to answer.

If you look in verse three, God tells Samuel, invite Jesse to the sacrifice. This is how he will know the king when he sees him.

He says, invite Jesse to the sacrifice and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him who I declare to you.

So the way that God expects Samuel and all Samuel's great wisdom to know who the king should be is not with his own mind.

It's to actually lay aside his own sight and to trust entirely in what God tells him to do. And there's a play on words here throughout this whole passage that goes back several chapters because there's a parenthetical verse in 1 Samuel 9 verse 9 where it says, and it's talking to the reader and it says, just so you know, formerly in Israel, when a man was to inquire of God, he would say, come let us go to the seer.

[19 : 31] For today's prophet was formerly called a seer. And the point of it was saying Samuel in his day was known not as a prophet, but as a seer, even though the jobs were the same, but Samuel's job was to see things.

And so it's ironic, right, that he goes to Eliab and it says he looked on Eliab and he thought this should be the king. And the problem is the seer's job wasn't to act independently and say and choose the king for himself.

What it meant to be a seer wasn't to see with your own eyes, but to rely totally on what God showed you and to communicate only that. That's what it meant to be a seer.

And even after, you know, even after God corrects Samuel and even after he tells Samuel, don't look on the outward appearance, look on the heart. When they finally bring David in, Samuel doesn't say, well, now I have this ability, now I'm reminded to look past appearance and now I can see that David should be king.

That's not what he does. It says that God looked at David and he said, arise and anoint him for this is the one.

[20 : 47] So the only way that David was going to know that Samuel was going to know that Saul, excuse me, the only way that there's so many names here, the only way that Samuel was to know that David was the true king was not through his own wisdom whatsoever, but to rely totally on God.

Now if I could try to apply that one more time, again, it's not our job in life to anoint kings, but it is our job to see the world the way that God sees it as best we can.

And the way that we do that is not by creating our own wisdom. It's by constantly looking back to God and waiting for him to speak and looking to him in his word to teach us so that we're not relying on our own wisdom and we're not going around thinking, relying on our gut to tell us how we should live our lives, but we're constantly going back to God saying, God, show me how to make wise choices in this life.

One of the greatest gifts that any of us can have in this life is to have someone, either a parent or a friend or a mentor who we can trust and who we can go and ask advice from.

And when you have someone like that in your life and when you have a really hard decision to make, you don't need to be told to go see that person because you're desperate to hear what they have to say and you want their advice.

[22 : 12] And that's what God offers us. He commands us to obey him and he commands us to listen to him, but he does that because he is the one who has the answers that we need.

And he doesn't always, he doesn't speak to us in words and you may be wondering, who should I marry? What job should I take? And you may not hear the verbal words of God telling you what to do, but what God wants of all of us is to wait like Samuel did, to hear from the Lord, to study his word and to try to discern his will that way.

And there's all kinds of hints in this passage that God was actually even in the passage trying to train Samuel to do the very same thing. And one small way that we know this is that, you remember when God tells Samuel to go to Bethlehem, he doesn't say go to Bethlehem and find David.

He says go to Bethlehem and go to the sons of Jesse and I will show you what you will do. So all the way to the very end of this passage, God is making Samuel continually look back to God and wait for him to speak and wait for him to guide him.

I want to close with this last point. What does it mean for us to see our King? What does this passage teach us about seeing our King?

[23 : 43] And I'm sure many of you know this, that in the New Testament Jesus is called the Son of David. And part of the reason he's called that is because of his actual ancestry that he was a descendant of King David.

But the New Testament points to him as the one who is, you know, I said that in the Old Testament, all the kings that came after David were compared to David, but it was always a lesser than comparison.

This king was fine, but he wasn't David. And then Jesus comes and finally you have one who you can look back and you can compare to David, but he is the true and the greater David.

He's better than David in every way. And even in this one passage, there's all kinds of comparisons we can draw between David and Jesus that help remind us how great Jesus is.

I mean, just to list a few, and this isn't my main point here, but that one of the distinctives of King David was that no one recognized him.

[24 : 43] And the exact same thing is true of Jesus. When Jesus came to this world, he lacked all outward signs of majesty. And Isaiah says that he had no form or majesty that we could look at him.

And even when Jesus worked miracles in his own hometown, he was dismissed by the people in his own town and they looked at him and they said, isn't this David? Isn't this the carpenter's son?

Jesus was completely unremarkable in his appearance. And yet when he's born, what does God do? He sends the wise men to Bethlehem, just like Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to find the true king and to worship him.

And then when Jesus matures, he comes before John the Baptist to be baptized. And when John baptizes him, the spirit descends on him. In a way almost analogous to the way that at the end of this passage, the spirit descended on David.

And what's happening partly, I think, is that in both of those anointings, God is equipping these men with the spiritual gifts that they need to complete the task that's been given to them.

[25 : 54] And there's that beautiful moment in Jesus' baptism. You remember where the spirit descends like a dove and then God looks down and he says, this is my son with whom I am well pleased.

And it's as if he's saying, finally, one has come whose heart is pure. Excuse me. That's embarrassing. I'm getting a little...

God looks and says, finally, one has come whose heart is pure. And God could not say that of David, but for the first time, he can say, here is one who has the heart of a king in every sense.

And then Peter's confession in Matthew chapter 16, when Jesus looks at Peter and he says, who do you say that I am?

And Peter says, you are the Christ. And you remember what Jesus says to him? He says, blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven.

[27 : 05] And in the same way that Samuel could not see the true king unless God revealed it to him. Peter could not see his true Messiah, his true king until God revealed it to him.

And the same thing is true of us that when we become Christians, that is the moment when God comes to us and shows us who our true king is in a way that we could never see for ourselves.

And one way to describe the whorist of the Christian life, one aspect of it is that now that we know that Jesus is our king, we look at him. And we look at his heart as we see it in the scriptures.

And we remind ourselves over and over again that this is the heart of a true king. And we see our king go to the cross for us.

And our love for this king grows and grows. And God shows us this is what the heart of a king looks like. And one of the most beautiful things is how God, that king whose heart is so pure, looks at us, pushes us out of all of the appearances that we have that we use to try to hide who we are, looks right into our hearts and sees the ugliness and sees the sin.

[28 : 21] And he says, even though I can see right into your heart past the appearances and I can see the sin, I will die for you and I will cleanse you from your sins. And that's what our king offers us.

And so once, that's our call tonight, is to see our king for who he really is and to worship and bow down because we have gotten a picture of his heart in the gospels.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your word. We praise you that Jesus' story was a thousand years in the making.

And we continue to praise him 2,000 years later. And we ask that you would show us our king, that you would guide us, that you would walk with us, that you would teach us to adore his heart and that we would be changed by that.

In your sons name we pray. Amen.