

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

Lesson 9: God Chooses and Anoints David -- 1 Samuel 16:1-23

Samuel is grieving. The king he anointed has failed, the throne is in turmoil, and the old prophet cannot stop mourning over Saul. Then God interrupts the grief with a question that gently moves him forward: "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go" (1 Samuel 16:1). There is work to do. God is not finished with His people; He is already preparing the next king, a king after His own heart. And He is preparing him in a sheepfold, far from any throne, where no one is looking.

Watch the scene at Bethlehem. Samuel comes to the house of Jesse, and the sons are paraded before him, oldest to youngest. Eliab steps up, tall and impressive, and Samuel is sure: surely this is the Lord's anointed. But God stops him with one of the most important sentences in all of Scripture: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature... for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Seven sons pass by. None is chosen. There is one more, the youngest, out keeping the sheep, so overlooked that his own father nearly forgot him.

And that is the one God wants. David is sent for, and when he comes in, ruddy and bright-eyed, the Lord says, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he" (1 Samuel 16:12). Samuel pours the oil, "and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). Meanwhile, in the palace, the Spirit of the Lord departs from Saul. Two men, two destinies, and the whole difference is a matter of the heart that God alone can see.

This is a tender and hope-filled chapter, but it is also weighty, because it points beyond David. The God who looks on the heart, who chooses the overlooked, who anoints a shepherd-king and fills him with His Spirit, is preparing the way for a greater Son of David. Centuries later another child would be born in this same Bethlehem, the Lord's true Anointed, the Messiah, the King whose throne has no end. As we study how God chose and anointed David, let it lift our eyes to Jesus, and let it search our own hearts, for the Lord still looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart.

Group Discussion: What does it change for us, day by day, to truly believe that "the Lord looketh on the heart" rather than on the outward appearance we work so hard to manage?

Personal Reflection: Where are you most tempted to invest in your "outward appearance," the impression you make, while neglecting the heart that God actually sees?

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-23

Study Questions

1. What does God's correction of Samuel, "the Lord seeth not as man seeth... the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7), reveal about how God evaluates people, and how it differs from the way we judge?
2. Where have you recently judged yourself or someone else by outward appearance, and what would change if you measured by the heart instead?
3. What does God's gracious choice of David, the overlooked youngest son out keeping the sheep, teach us about the kind of people God delights to call to His purposes?
4. When have you felt overlooked or "out with the sheep," and how does God's choice of David speak to that feeling?
5. What is the significance of the Spirit of the Lord coming upon David at his anointing (1 Samuel 16:13), and what does it tell us about how God equips those He calls?
6. In what area do you sense God calling you to depend on His Spirit and strength rather than your own natural ability?

7. What does the departing of the Spirit from Saul and the troubling spirit that followed (1 Samuel 16:14) warn us about the path of persistent disobedience?
8. Is there a place where your own slow drift from obedience is quietly draining the peace and joy God means you to have, and what would turning back look like?
9. How does God's choosing and anointing of David, the shepherd who becomes king, point us forward to Jesus, the greater Son of David and the Lord's true Anointed who reigns now, and why does that matter for our salvation?
10. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming your heart through this passage, so that what He sees within you is increasingly pleasing to Him.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Samuel 13:14, on God seeking a man after His own heart; Psalm 78:70–72, on God taking David from the sheepfolds to shepherd His people; Acts 13:22–23, on David as God's chosen and on Jesus raised from his seed as Savior; Luke 1:32–33, on Jesus receiving the throne of David and reigning forever; 1 Peter 2:9, on believers as a chosen and royal people in Christ.

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