



Seeing Through God's Eyes

1 Samuel 16:1-23

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We are back. There is something about the narrative of God's Word, the story of scripture. In his perfection God has ordained it to be vivid and yet translatable, intimately deep and moving yet intentionally detailed and driving. It's in his story in history we find our story. Except, the problem today is that it has been 8 weeks since we entered into the story of 1 Samuel. So let's do some recap.

The narrative of 1 Samuel bawn in barrenness. The people of Israel were in barrenness, forsaking GOD completely and doing whatever they thought right in their own eyes. Worship was barren as they were led by an aged priest and his corrupt sons. Things were dark, and in that barrenness our first character is the barren woman Hannah. She is the opening catalyst of our story whose faithful trust of God sparks the light of the Word of God through her son Samuel. Samuel leads the people to repentance and God leads them to victory, only after they try to use the ark of the covenant for their own purposes. But God doesn't abandon them, even when the people stubbornly ask for a king. God uses Samuel to anoint a king for them. Chapter 9:17 tells us that "When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people." Samuel saw Saul, and the people of Israel saw that Saul was tall and handsome and strong, and they wanted him as king instead of God.

So God gave them what they wanted, even if he knew it wasn't what they needed. Saul is anointed king and filled with the Holy Spirit of God, rising to the occasion when his country needs him to deliver them from their enemies and fighting well. But Saul is no true leader. His tragic flaw is that he does not know God, he has no intimate knowledge of Yawheh. And so he sacrifices when he shouldn't, he treats God's commands to him as arbitrary, and God makes it clear what the consequences are. Saul and the rest of his family will be cut off from kingship in Israel. Promising and valiant young Jonathan will never be king, and now Saul himself sits on the throne as more or less an imposter. It seems, as it were, that Israel is back to square one. Perhaps there is relative peace in the land, but the king on the throne is not the king they need. They picked who they saw with their eyes, the man who stuck out, and they were wrong.

And so we come to **verse 1** of our text and Samuel is sitting in the depression of hopelessness. Saul has been rejected as king, and just what Samuel wanted the people about is coming true. They got a king like the other nations, and it was not what they needed. But God calls out to him: "how long will you grieve over what is past? Do you really think I would not provide for my people?" **The operative word in this whole chapter is the variation on the Hebrew word *raah*, which is used to**



great versatility in this text. It's root occurs nine times in this chapter. It appears first in verse 1 as a verb, meaning "provide", where it is used again in verse 17, linking two narratives of our text together. Why fret, God asks Samuel? I have provided for myself a king from the sons of Jesse. It also occurs in verse 7 and 12 meaning "appearance". When used as a verb, however, this word root *raah* typically means "to see, or look at", and it is used in this way in verse 6, in verse 14, and three times in verse 7, which I believe is a center hinge of really the book of 1 Samuel. The most natural reading of verse 7 is this: "For the lord sees not as man sees: man sees the outward, but the Lord sees the heart."

God says to Samuel: go and anoint another king, but this time it will not be the king that you and people saw, standing above the rest, but the king that I see.

What does it mean to have God-sight? When God looks and sees, what does he notice? Those questions lie at the truth of 1 Samuel 16. I love this, because the theme of God's sight helps us frame the whole chapter. It sets up an interplay, between the way we see and the way God sees, between our shortsightedness and God's all-encompassing vision. So here in our text let's examine three ways we are spiritually shortsighted, and three ways God brings solution to our shortsightedness and teaches us in the gospel of Jesus Christ how to see through his eyes.

Our First Short-Sightedness: we are afraid of what we cannot see (1-5)

Our text begins with an examination of Samuel's shortsightedness. His grief over Saul is real, and makes sense. He feels as if his appointment of a kid has just made things worse. All he was trying to do was obey God, and how did that turn out? But God rouses his Spirit, and sends him to Jesse in Bethlehem. We know Jesse as the grandson of Ruth and Boaz, those protagonists of the strange but powerful story of redemptive love for the outcast. But Samuel didn't find anything special about Jesse. Instead, his focus is still on Saul, even after God has moved on from him. **Verse 2** we find Samuel afraid, rightfully so, that any act of anointing a new king will be seen as treason and he will be making himself a ripe target for the wrath of Saul.

Indeed, the task of anointing a new king while the other sits on the throne is treasonous. But the reason Samuel should obey anyone is because it is God's plot, not his own. He is the one who sets up kings and brings them down, and no coup he has led has ever failed. So God's plan is to shelter Samuel under the guise of sacrifice. This is not false: he will sacrifice in Bethlehem—but he intentionally hides the fuller purpose for his visit. Notice in **verse 3** how much unknown there is for Samuel. He is asked to participate in a ponteventonally dangerous act with no foreknowledge: all he knows is one of Jesse's sons will be there, and God will tell him what to do and show him which son to anoint. In this sense, Samuel is blind: he must rely on the sight of God.

The elders of Bethlehem have a similar fear as Samuel. For the ophept of Israel to show up in their town with no warning could be a sign of trouble. Notice how **verse 4** says that they come to him *trembling*. Their hands are shaking, they assume the worst. Perhaps Samuel has come to pronounce judgement on them, and so they ask with what no doubt are cracking voices: "do you come peaceably?" Thankfully for them, Samuel responds in the affirmative. He has come for sacrifice, of



which he invites them to. Still, no doubt you can sense the tension in the air. If I was an elder of Bethlehem, I would still be wary. Why sacrifice, why here, why now, by the senior spokesman of God? They are in the dark as to his exact reasonings, I suppose not a single elder dared miss the sacrifice that night due to their curiosity. I would image many of them came to the sacrifice still trembling.

And so the first problem we come to when God shows up on the scene into our miniscule lives is we begin to notice: we cannot see the future. I love how in every Sci-Fi movie where a character is given a glimpse into the future or taken into the future they somehow still manage to screw things up and change the future or endanger the future or whatnot. You remember that part in Back to the Future when Doc freaks out as he slowly sees Marty's siblings disappear from their family photo? It's when he exclaims the title of the movie by telling Marty: "we have to go back to the future!" That is us when we rack our brains to try to determine the plan and foresight of God. We just end up screwing everything up even more.

But the reality is, our lack of foresight can hit us in two ways. What it normally does is it affects us like Smauel and the elders of Bethlehem: we are afraid. We fail to trust, fail to see the big picture. Our limited physical scope leads us to limited spiritual scope. And you may think this is just a small part of the text, but is setting up the big piece—Samuel's interaction with God and the elders is showing us just how oblivious and anxious we are in the face of the unknown, but it also shows us that God has it under control.

God, we might say, is a conspiring God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is what the late theologian Dallas Willard called "the Divine Conspiracy". Ephesians 1 reminds us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world—a plan before there was time and space to make us his own. The Father, the Son, and The Spirit, our Trinitarian God, met in the boardroom of eternity, as it were, and conspired to save you. So it's right up God's alley to hide his plan in a mystery, as he does with Samuel. He tells Samuel "tell them you are here for a sacrifice", and they will never see it coming. God is in the business of surprising us with the richness of his foreordered plans.

You may struggle with faith these days. The fact that your future is unknown is deathly terrifying to you. But God has always worked in our unknown. In Christ's cross, he also veils his mystery of salvation though the means of sacrifice. We look to the cross and think: what is God doing, sacrificing his own son? Surely there is something else at work, some sort of divine plan? And there is: Jesus as Jesse and his Sons and Samuel and the Bethlehem elders came to a sacrifice that was really a coronation, so the cross was a coronation. In our text Samuel is about to anoint a new king's head with oil, our true king was anointed with his own blood as it ran from his throne of crowns.

The people of God are not always blessed with foresight. But they are blessed with faith. And in the unknown, we remember that the conspiracy of God to bring us Christ our king gives us peace and rest and frees us from our anxious fears. Remember that is seeing through God's eyes.



Our Second Short-Sightedness: we are oblivious to spiritual realities (6-13)

So Samuel comes into the sacrifice, which would have consisted of a feast beforehand. If you remember all the way back in chapter 9 and 10, this is the scene where Saul is anointed king too: right after the feast of sacrifice. And what does the author tell us about Saul, something everyone at the feast with Samuel notices? 1 Samuel 9:2, “there was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than [Saul]. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.” And so Samuel uses those same eyes who noticed Saul, those physical, sin-fogged eyes, and notices Jesse’s first son Eliab.

Verse 6, notice his confidence. Surely, he thinks, this is the one! You could not have made it more obvious, God, thank you. But immediately the Lord tells his prophet where his error lies: this new king will not be like Saul. Eliab may be strong and tall, but **verse 7** makes it clear: he is not the one. The way God looks is not the way that man looks. Even God’s own prophet is deceived by his own eyes.

Jesse, too, has trouble seeing things God’s way. **Verse 8-10** details the procession of sons, all seven of them, from the oldest to the youngest. Perhaps many of them meet man’s eye test, but none of them meet God’s eye test. Samuel is rightly confused. He is waiting for God’s signal, like a runner on first staring down the third base coach. But the signals seem to be mixed. Something is off, so he has to think outside the box in **verse 11**. “Are these all your sons?” he asks, and the truth finally comes out. There is one more to try, but apparently Jesse didn’t even consider him. Jesse’s response in verse 11 tells us how highly he views his youngest son. It’s as if he expects Samuel to go back right around to son number one and try to go ahead from his God-radar one more time. “Oh no, he is with the sheep Samuel. Don’t bother him. He is more of a servant than a son anyway.” We don’t even get his name yet, that is how obscure this son is. Perhaps we can’t read too much into personal poetry, but we do find this remark in Psalm 27, a psalm of David: “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.” It’s very possible that the author of 1 Samuel is hinting to us with every increasing subtlety: Jesse is not David’s biggest fan. He is the youngest of 8 after all. It’s easy for him to get forgotten.

But what others forget, God tracks down. Samuel won’t have any of Jesse’s obfuscating. Notice **verse 11**, he is willing to let the diner get cold and the guests go hungry rather than move on without the honored son who is yet to be named. Finally, after what have must felt like days to the hungry guests, they find David in the field with the sheep and haul him back in. What is interesting in **verse 12** is that we find a physical description of David when we first are introduced. Ruddy and handsome, or a bit rough around the edges—wild, with nice eyes. What is going on here is that by being drawn to David’s appearance and David’s eyes, we see that it is not that God is blind to physical appearance. David looks the part of king, although very young. God certainly sees that, but the important part is that he sees more. We have trouble looking past the physical into the spiritual, but God sees right through to the heart.



I don't have to elaborate this morning much to impress upon you the significance of this truth. How often do we judge people, situations, and circumstances based only at what we see on the outside? Why do you think it is that we have a cultural fascination with those who are physically beautiful? Why do you think it is so easy to overlook and forget and trample over those who are not able-bodied and struggle with some outward disability? Just this week I was proud to see many of our college students on social media rallying around a cause to bring back a shuttle system on Baylor's campus that serves disabled students after it had been cut. Baylor brought it back very quickly after it became public, and my guess is that they didn't quite realize how significant their decision to cut a program like this would be. They forgot to value those who do not have outward strength, because it's so easy to look and value and consider only what we see with our eyes.

Perhaps you should thank God everyday for the gift of physical sight if you have it, but I pray we would all go blind before we forget to see through the eyes of God. Deep beneath the surface of this physical world there are spiritual realities always at play. God loves to overturn our logical conclusions of how things should be, of who really is the strongest and fittest, of what to value and who to trust. As Paul would say: "he chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the strong." He has been doing this from the beginning. He chose Abraham, that obscure eastern man. He chose Jacob, that second born and conniving son. And here he chooses David, the shepherd.

Samuel listens to what God sees, anoints David in **verse 13**, and immediately the Spirit of the Lord rushes on David. Life continues as normal after that: Samuel goes back to Ramah. It will be over a decade before David ever assumes any throne. But something has changed here. The unexpected, looked over David, the youngest son, has become the king apparent. From here on out is his ministry of the Spirit. Just as Jesus was baptized and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and immediately went into the wilderness, so David will have a wilderness test coming for him. But his future is sure: he will be king.

God's anointing of this king prefigures the king to come, Jesus Christ. Everyone counted out the nobody who was born in the city of David. They considered him to be simply one of their own, or they thought he was from the wrong place, mocking him as backwoods trash from Nazareth, the wrong city for Messiah anyway. When he hung on the cross, they mocked his suffering: "he can save others, why can't he save himself! He said he was the Son of God, let him prove it now!" they said. Nothing outwardly drew men to notice him. But it was through this suffering that Jesus Christ provided the means by which our eyesight can get reordered. Without Christ, all we see is what is in front of us. We are doomed for a lifetime of shortsightedness, only looking at the outward appearance. But the beauty of the gospel is that Jesus really is the Christ, which means anointed one, and by faith we can be unified to him. The anointed one becomes our anointed one, and the Spirit that indwelt him becomes the Spirit that indwells us.

And when we walk by the Holy Spirit, we begin to notice spiritual things. The physical world takes on a whole new light: we see people differently, we see situations differently. We find joy in the trees and the grass and the sky like never before, we begin to cast off lust for the deeper well of satisfaction in Christ, we begin to feel tangibly the grace of God, and we begin to judge the world



for what it really is: a spiritually charged word, a world, as the poet Hopkins says, that is “charged with the grandeur of God.” That is truly living—not to cease to see the things of the world, but to see through them and see God himself. That is seeing through God’s eyes, and only the gospel of Jesus Christ does that.

Our Third Short-Sightedness: we fail to see the grace of God when it is right in front of us (14-23)

Notice the juxtaposition of **verse 13** and **verse 14**. We cannot get around this: Saul and David are now in totally opposite camps. David has the Spirit, Saul does not. Not only that, but Saul now has a harmful spirit tormenting him. This goes beyond physiological anomalies and chemical imbalances, although it probably manifested itself in that way—notice the harmful spirit is from the Lord. God is setting up this situation that will color nearly all the rest of our time in 1 Samuel. Saul is not just a rejected king, he is a tormented king, a mad king, a tragic king. More and more we see him, in Shakespearean terms, less Henry V and more Lear and Macbeth. God is setting in motion, with his perfect foresight, the gears of grace that will lead to David’s rule.

Saul’s servants worry about him, naturally. So in **verse 15-16** they advise him to get himself a skilled musician, someone to calm him when he gets in one of his moods. Saul commands it in **verse 17**, and there we find our verb “see” again, translated here as “provide” as he says: “see to it I have a man who can play well”. and so **verse 18** drips heavily with irony. Behold, says the servant, I have “seen” the youngest son of Jesse, and what is it about him? The Lord is with him. The Spirit is upon him. God saw David in the field keeping the sheep, and through this servant he is seen again. So God’s divine conspiracy strikes again, landing David, the secretly anointed king, in the service of the rejected king. In the case of Saul, God sends both his torment and his remedy. And what irony that David is chosen both by God the one all-seeing and by Saul the shortsighted. Try as they might, no one can go unnoticed when God goes scheming.

Even more ironic is the fact we find in **verse 21-22**. Saul *loved* David, promoting him to armor bearer and giving him a permanent place in his house. The anointed one of God finds favor wherever he goes, and Saul is oblivious.

While Saul may not know the truth about David, he still benefits from David’s presence. **Verse 26** gives us a sweeping picture: everytime Saul is troubled, David is there to play, and play well, and Saul is refreshed. Very soon Saul’s temper will turn, but for now he receives blessing from the anointed one of the God he has rejected and who has rejected him. To put it in theological terms, we call this *common grace*. God is so gracious to us that he provides blessing and grace where we do not deserve it. He causes the sun to shine on the wicked and the righteous alike, Ecclesiastes reminds us.



The anointed ones of God, or rather, those who have been anointed in their union with Jesus the Christ, whether the world knows it or not, are the common grace of God wherever they go. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the ambassadors and representatives of the peace of heaven. Everyday you walk around with Christ in you by the Spirit, you are an instrument of the common grace of God to all men. But here is the thing: everyday most of us live like we wouldn't know common grace if it smacked us upside the head. We are shortsighted: blind to the truth that the very fact that the world is still spinning now means that God is full of grace for sinners. We are like Saul: benefiting from the grace of God without acknowledging it is God who is giving it!

As we breathe borrowed air and fail in our shortsightedness to see how that is God's grace, Paul says in Romans 2 it is like "presuming on the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" It's like assuming that tomorrow the sun will rise because you deserve it, not because God is good. Instead of humbling yourself in repentance, Paul says "because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." That is a serious claim, but one that was true for Saul. He failed to recognize the grace of God in front of him, and all he did was continue to store up wrath for himself.

The bad news of the gospel is that we are just as blind as Saul before Christ. God sent Jesus Christ the anointed one to calm our troubled spirits. We are troubled with the spirit of sin, and Jesus Christ is the gentle answer of God, the music of salvation that makes us well and whole again. This music of the gospel has been planned from eternity, been hinted at for ages, and finally came to its crescendo in the person and work of Jesus. The cross and resurrection were those notes that screamed the loudest, and yet, apart from the grace of God, we would never hear. But friends, those notes are playing today. You don't have to store up wrath for yourself any longer. God brought you today to a Christian church, to sing and read and pray and hear proclaimed the Christian gospel: the grace of God is right in front of you, whether you realize it or not. The kindness of God is here, and his name is Jesus. Let him lead you to repentance, for the first time or the thousandth.

Seeing through God's eyes ultimately means we stare right into the face of Christ. He is the anointed one of God, the shepherd from the line of Jesse who became king of kings. So today, if you are afraid of what you cannot see, if you have trouble seeing past what is physical, or you ignore the grace of God when it is right in front of you: look to Jesus. He is handsome and ruddy, with kind eyes. He is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, a man of good presence, and not only is the Lord with him: but he is Lord.

Let's go to our Lord now in prayer.

