

It's What's Inside That Counts

1 Samuel 16:1-12

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In 2012, Barack Obama was elected to his second term as President of the United States. That was not terribly unusual. Incumbent Presidents often are re-elected. What was unusual is that he defeated a candidate who was taller than he was. The 6'1" Obama got more votes than the 6'2" Mitt Romney. That doesn't happen very often in American Presidential elections. The taller candidate usually wins.

Studies have found that people all over the world prefer tall leaders. One study had children from a variety of countries draw a picture of their top political leader and an ordinary citizen. Over 70% of the time, they drew the leader as taller.

Some psychiatrists say we inherited this attitude from our ancestors who chose tall and physically strong leaders because they would be able to provide protection from threats like wild animals and other tribes that had tall leaders. Whatever the reason, people have, for a long time, seemed to associate height with leadership.

That was certainly true in ancient Israel, as we will see in our text today. However, we will also see it is a big mistake to think physical stature is what makes someone a good leader.

Friends, this morning we resume our journey through the book of 1 Samuel. It's been six months since we were here, but for the summer we will take a break from Luke's gospel and focus on this wonderful Old Testament book.

Here is my very quick summary of the first fifteen chapters of 1 Samuel that we explored last year: God calls Samuel as a very special judge, prophet and priest. The people of Israel want a king, and the Lord, through Samuel, gives them the king they want – Saul.

Soon, however, Samuel and the Lord become disappointed with Saul, and as we see today, seek a new king. I think this is a fascinating story and also one that has important lessons for us. So let's pause and pray that the Lord will help us hear and heed His Word today.

In chapters 13-15, the actions of King Saul disappoint both the Lord and Samuel. Then...

1 Samuel 16:1 – The LORD said to Samuel, “How long are you going to mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have selected a king from his sons.”

Friends, even when there are disappointments in life or ministry, we have to move on. We cannot get stuck with regrets, focused on what could have been. The Lord tells Samuel we need to move on and anoint a *new king* for Israel.

1 Samuel 16:2 – Samuel asked, “How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me!”

He realizes that declaring someone to be king when the current king still reigns won't be received well.

1 Samuel 16:3 – The LORD answered, “Take a young cow with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will let you know what you are to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate to you.”

Some folks are a bit uncomfortable with how the Lord seems to instruct Samuel to be a bit deceptive, using a sacrifice as a cover for his real reason for meeting this Jesse of Bethlehem. I don't think it is a big issue, but if that troubles you, give me a call. Or you can call Pastor Mark, who does not think Samuel is being deceptive.

1 Samuel 16:4 – Samuel did what the LORD directed and went to Bethlehem.

He meets Jesse and his sons. Then...

1 Samuel 16:6 – Samuel saw Eliab and said, “Certainly the LORD's anointed one is here before him.”

In other words, this must be the one that the Lord has chosen to be king. Why does Samuel reach that conclusion? Apparently, Eliab is not just the oldest, but the tallest of Jesse's sons. And

remember in the ancient world, tall is good! That is what impressed the people about Saul, according to:

1 Samuel 9:2 – Saul was the most handsome man in Israel – head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land.

Incidentally, I did read a study where women said they found not the tall men, but those who were 5'9" to 5'11" as the most attractive. That made sense to me, being 5'10" tall. Anyway, height was considered a good measure for leaders in the ancient world.

Yet, Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2), contains an implicit warning. Those who think of themselves highly (maybe see themselves as tall) are going to stumble because the Lord is going to bless the humble, not those who rely on their own strength.

So, it should not be a surprise when...

1 Samuel 16:7 – The LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature (his height) because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart.”

Wow! Other versions say, “The Lord does not see as man sees.” Humans see only what they can see with their eyes. The Lord is able to see *much more* than that.

At this point, Jesse and his sons are likely a bit confused. Surely, Eliab would be the one Samuel anointed. He was the oldest, the tallest, the one with the greatest physical strength. Yet, Eliab is being passed over. Well then, obviously, it must be the second oldest and tallest son.

1 Samuel 16:8 – Jesse called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel. “The LORD hasn't chosen this one either.”

Finally...

1 Samuel 16:10 – After Jesse presented seven of his sons to him, Samuel told Jesse, “The LORD hasn't chosen any of these.”

At this point, not only Jesse, but also Samuel is confused.

1 Samuel 16:11a – Samuel asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” (the Hebrew word can actually mean the smallest or the shortest) he answered, “but right now he's tending the sheep.”

Apparently, Jesse didn't think there was even a reason for his youngest son to be there. Most Bible scholars think the boy was probably between 12-15 years old, a young teen-ager. Obviously, he *would not* be the one Samuel anointed as the new leader of Israel. But Samuel tells Jesse to send for him. He does. And when this youngest son arrives, Samuel sees...

1 Samuel 16:12a – He had beautiful eyes and a healthy, handsome appearance.

Various Bible versions each translate this description a little differently, but they all make the same point. This youngest son is a good looking boy. This seems a little confusing because in verse 7, we were told that outward appearance is not what is important. Why are we now told about how handsome he is?

Well, I suspect up until this point no one had really noticed this #8 son because he was just a kid, only a shepherd boy. Samuel sees him differently, and as a result, he sees things that others have missed.

Yet, what Samuel thinks of this shepherd boy, the youngest and shortest of all Jesse's sons is not really important. The only thing that matters is what the Lord thinks. Friends, that is always true. Divine opinion always trumps human opinion on any topic. So, what does God think of the shepherd boy?

1 Samuel 16:12b – Then the LORD said, “Anoint him, for he is the one.”

The one who God has chosen to lead his people Israel, the one *who will be* the new king.

1 Samuel 16:13 – So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully on David from that day forward.

David. That is the shepherd boy's name. In verse 11, his father had simply referred to him as, "the youngest." This is really quite a scene. Little David, a 12-15 year old boy, is standing there with his father and seven brothers. The oldest brothers were probably in their 20's. They are likely a physically intimidating bunch of guys. Yet, their little brother is being anointed by the great prophet Samuel as the next king of Israel. They could never imagine the full significance of what was occurring.

David would not merely be the next king, but he would become the greatest king Israel, as a nation, would ever have. His 40-year reign would be a time of peace and prosperity which would never be replicated. And most important, one day a descendant of David, an heir to David's throne, a king anointed not by a prophet, but by God himself, a Messiah would reign as the eternal King, forever and ever, as King of kings and Lord of lords.

OK, that is the Bible's account of what happened about 3,000 years ago. So, what is the Lord saying to us through this passage today?

#1 Our text warns us: Do not judge people by outward appearance.

1 Samuel 16:7 – The LORD said...“Do not look at his appearance or his stature...Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart.”

Now, in one sense, this is simply a statement of fact. Yes, doctors can use ultrasounds, etc. to “see” that very important organ in our body, but only God knows our real motives and true desires.

However, we should strive to avoid letting our first impressions, often fueled by irrational prejudices, determine how we view and treat other people.

Whether someone is short or tall, or that perfect 5'10" (for males) in height, really doesn't say anything about *who that person really is*. Knowing his/her height tells us nothing about whether that individual would be a good employee, a good friend, a good pastor or a good spouse.

The reason Sonny & Cher got divorced was not because she was 5" taller than him. Folks, we look at people and see how tall they are, or roughly how much they weigh, or their skin color, their hairstyle, their tattoos or lack of tattoos, what kind of clothes they wear, and we *start forming opinions* about that person, before he/she ever says a word.

Can we keep ourselves from doing that? Maybe not. But what we can do is very intentionally remind ourselves that we actually know nothing about who that person really is. And when we have the opportunity, we need to seek to get beyond appearances and really get to know that person. No, we won't always like what we learn, but we need to give people a chance.

Some of you in this room, or watching on TV, have never seen me without a coat and tie. That is what I wear on Sunday morning. However, on Monday morning I usually walk around the Chisholm lake and then go have breakfast at McDonald's. At that point, I am wearing jogging pants and a t-shirt. And I may have not showered or shaved in over 24 hours!

Do I love Jesus any less on Monday morning than I did on Sunday morning? Do I have any less wisdom or spiritual insight when I am wearing jogging pants and a t-shirt? No, of course not! I am the same person on Monday morning as I am on Sunday morning. God knows that.

Yet, it is only natural for people to have first impressions based on how someone is dressed. My plea is *don't trust those first impressions* because they really tell you nothing about who that person really is.

Friends, I would also encourage you not to focus on appearance when you are looking in the mirror. Studies show that most people would like to change their height. Here I am, a perfect 5'10" tall, but I am at least 3" shorter than each of my four brothers. I have always wished I was a little taller...and a little thinner.

Most people who look in the mirror think their nose looks funny. How many of you here really like the way your nose looks? And then there is that hair on top of your head. How much time do you spend wondering if your hair is too short, too long, too thin, too curly, or too gray? A few of

you don't worry about that at all because you have one of those perfect heads God has not covered with hair!

Oh friends, I am not suggesting we ignore our personal grooming. There is nothing wrong with being like David and having a healthy, handsome appearance. You gals probably don't want to be handsome, but a healthy, beautiful appearance is not a bad thing. But remember – beauty is only skin deep. Don't be obsessed with how you look on the outside. Focus instead on who, by God's grace, you are on the inside. That is what God is concerned about; and in the long run, that is what most people will eventually notice.

#2 Our text reminds us that God uses little people in big ways.

Bethlehem was a small village that day when Samuel arrived. Yet, when he anointed that little shepherd boy as king, it became a royal city. And the people around him sure didn't think David was anyone special. Meeting with the great prophet Samuel was a great honor for his family. Yet, because someone had to watch the sheep, it looked like David would miss the whole thing. Yet, God had a very big plan for little David.

Then, a thousand years later, God has a really big plan for Bethlehem again. By that time, people had forgotten this was once a royal city, and it was just an ordinary village. And Nazareth, that was just a remote little town up north. As I have said, it was probably not as obscure as Gheen or Greany, but maybe was like Cook.

Yet, born in the little village of Bethlehem and growing up in obscure Nazareth was a little boy, working in his step-dad's carpenter shop. This was Jesus, the person who would change human history in more ways than we can imagine and who continues to impact every one of our lives today.

On a Sunday morning a few weeks ago, we focused on the list of the Twelve Apostles in the gospel of Luke. We noted they were rather ordinary people, ordinary people that God used to change the world in an extraordinary way.

Jesus did not choose any scholars, politicians, wealthy business people, celebrities or even clergymen. Most of those apostles were just

ordinary fishermen. They were little people whom God used in very big ways.

And friends, this truth, the truth that God uses little people for big things is something which should be an encouragement to us. This is a room full of what seems to be "little" people – oh, not necessarily small or short in stature, but there are not really any celebrities here. Yes, many of you are wonderful folks. Some of you have enjoyed a degree of success in your career or other aspects of life. Yet, my guess is that each of us sometimes wonders, "Does my life have any real significance or impact? With over seven billion people on this planet, would it really make any difference if I had never been born?"

Now, it is worth noting that from a secular, atheistic perspective, the answer to that question is really, "no." In their view, human beings are simply cosmic accidents with no real purpose or significance. All we are is dust in the wind.

The Christian perspective is very different, however. Francis Schaeffer used to say that as far as the Lord is concerned, there are *no little people and no little places*. Our text today is one of many places in the Bible which reminds us of that.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, if you are being who the Lord has called you to be and doing what he has called you to do, you are playing a very important role in this world.

Doing God's will always matters! Even if you are confined to bed in a nursing home and all the Lord wants you to do is smile at the aide who is feeding you, you better make sure you do your assignment well. And folks, the ripple effects of you doing so may be very significant.

Your positive attitude may make an impression on the nurse's aide as she wonders what makes you different from those who do more grumbling than smiling. And in the end, the Lord may use your very simple testimony to help that person come to a knowledge of the truth and trust in Jesus Christ. And from there, she may go on to be a missionary, and pretty soon people who have never before heard of Jesus are hearing about him, and the world is being changed. And it all started with a person smiling at the aide who was feeding him/her!

Friends, if someone laying in a nursing home bed...an insignificant, little person in the eyes of most, can be used by the Lord in significant ways, just think what he can do with a student in Jr. High or with a mom staying home raising a couple of preschoolers or with a guy working a minimum wage job because he can't find a job in his field. As far as God is concerned, none of you are little people, and the Iron Range of Minnesota is not a little place.

The Lord can and will use us in this room in marvelous ways when we commit ourselves to being the people he calls us to be and doing the things he wants us to do. And that has been happening for a long time. For 112 years, the Lord has been using the ordinary people of Chisholm Baptist Church in extraordinary ways.

And it is happening today as the Lord uses little people like us in big ways. One person that comes to my mind is LeAnn Anderson. We had her funeral a few weeks ago. I know the Lord used her in a variety of ways over the years; but those last months, the extraordinary thing she did was simply come to church. Even though her body was very weakened by the cancer, even though she was in pain, even though she might have been a little self-conscious about how she looked, even though it would have been a lot easier to stay home, LeAnn came to church. She wanted to worship the Lord with other believers. That mattered a lot to her because she loved the Lord Jesus, and she valued her brothers and sisters in Christ. And when other people saw LeAnn sitting over there, they were encouraged. Or maybe a little embarrassed about how easy it was for them to stay home from church sometimes. All LeAnn did was come to church on Sunday, a very ordinary thing. But I believe the Lord used that in an extraordinary way.

So friends, how can you, an ordinary, little person, be used by God in big ways? What is the key?

Well, for David (verse 13), the key is the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on him. That was the key for the apostles as well. On Pentecost, they were filled with the Lord's Holy Spirit. Even Jesus...

Luke 4:1 – (Jesus) returned from the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.

Folks, I believe the reason LeAnn Anderson was able to continue to express love and joy despite her illness was that she was filled and led by the Holy Spirit.

And that, friends, is what needs to happen in our lives. We need to be filled and led by the Holy Spirit, or as Paul says in Galatians 5:16 (Old NIV) – Keep in step with the Spirit, or walk in the Spirit.

Doing that doesn't mean you have to be weird or that you need to have a Ph.D. in Theology. It just means you need to look to the Lord for guidance as you read the Bible and pray. And then you need to ask the Lord to give you grace and strength to be the person and do the things he is calling you to do.

That's what being led and filled by the Holy Spirit looks like. No matter what we are like on the outside, may the Lord help us to be that type of person on the inside, each and every day, by his grace and for his glory!