

As I begin this morning I want to ask you a question, and then I want to pause to give all of you some time to think. Here's the question: *If I could snap my finger and you could be instantly transformed—a personality change or character qualities changed—who do you know that you wish you were like?*

I suspect that many of you had more than one name (or face) come to mind; we all know people that we admire. Perhaps you have a friend, a teammate, a family member, or colleague that is intelligent, or loving, or courageous, or funny; we see something in them that we wish were more true of ourselves. As we consider this person, it may not be envy or jealousy that feel, as much as it is admiration or longing. All of us feel a sense of incompleteness—we're not perfect, we've all got gaps.

I wonder, what's the story of your life? *Who are you? Where are you going? What's happening around you? Or, in you?*

Stories are powerful; they can entertain, inspire, or challenge us. Almost everyone likes stories, and we can all relate to stories, because we all have a story—a beginning, a middle, and one day, an end. Listening to another person's story awakens us to our own—we see similarities and dissimilarities. We see things that we admire, and we see other things that confuse, frighten, or anger us.

But there is something important we must keep in mind as we read stories from the Bible. The Bible is more than a story about ancient people; it's the story about God. That's not to say that the human characters are unimportant—far from it!—but as we read the story of their lives we're meant to watching and listening for God. *What is God saying, doing, blessing, and correcting?* And we're looking for

God in these stories—in the lives of these ancient people—because it trains us to find God in our own stories...what *He's saying, doing, blessing, and correcting in us.*

Throughout the month of January we focussed on the subject of mission—God's mission in the world, our city, neighbourhood, and family. This morning we are beginning a new preaching series entitled, *A Heat After God*; over the next few months we will be walking through two historical books from the Bible known as 1&2 Samuel. The first half of 1 Samuel contains stories that focus on the prophet Samuel and Saul—the first king of Israel. The second half of 1 Samuel contains stories that focus on Saul and David, and by the time we get to 2nd Samuel, it's all David.

Perhaps you've grown up reading Bible stories; perhaps you were taught to look for the “moral of the story”—“*Be like David,*” or, “*Don't be like Saul;*” the truth is, there's something much deeper going on. Again, as we listen to these stories, we're looking for God's activity—finding Him in Saul or David's story will train us to find Him in our own.

Now before we get to the text this morning, I want to offer a perspective—or a set of lenses—that will help to connect David's story, and our stories, to the greatest story of all—the story of Jesus.

The Bible's teaching is clear—in Jesus we come face to face with God *and* Humanity. In Jesus we meet God with us, God for us, and God *as* a human being. The salvation God offers in Jesus is an “earthy” one; no one is “saved” and then promptly whisked away to a heavenly cloud, and given a harp to play. Instead, God *became* human.

Eugene Peterson noted that the Gospel writers kept Jesus' humanity firmly in front of their audience by regularly introducing Jesus as the "*Son of David*". Peterson writes,

The David story anticipates the Jesus story... Why David? [Because] he's so emphatically human: David fighting, praying loving, sinning... David with his eight wives. David angry; David devious; David generous; David dancing. There's nothing, absolutely nothing, that God can't and doesn't use to work his salvation and holiness into our lives... The entire meaning of the incarnation is that God *enters* our human condition, embraces it, comes to where we are to save us.<sup>1</sup>

Just like our own lives, there are things in David's story that are worth celebrating, while other things should be avoided at all costs. As we examine David's story we will come to see that the God who is seeking, forgiving, and shaping him is the same God who is seeking, forgiving, and shaping us.

My sermon this morning has two primary aims: (1) to set the stage for the David story, and (2) to explore the primary characteristic that marked David's story from beginning to end. At this time let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to 1 Samuel 1; if you are using one of the blue Bibles from seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page 213.

**(1) Setting the Stage For David's Story:** The Book of 1 Samuel begins with the story of a childless couple; the wife—Hannah—cried out to God and He responded by gifting her with a son. And this son, Samuel, became a gift to all of Israel for God raised him up to be a prophet—Samuel heard the voice of God and provided leadership to the nation.

Samuel's story is not without heartache. In his later years, Samuel appointed his two sons to succeed him but they wandered from his example, accepting bribes and perverting justice; everyone saw it but him (1 Sam. 8:1-3). The elders of Israel finally brought their concerns to Samuel saying, "*You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.* (1 Sam 8:5)"

To this point in her history, Israel functioned as a **theocracy**, which is to say, they had leaders but no *human* king—God Himself was their King. Now it's clear from earlier Old Testament texts—like Genesis 17:6 and 49:10—that God foresaw the day when Israel would have a human king.<sup>2</sup>

God was not opposed to human kingship, but He stood opposed to the *kind* of kingship they were seeking. They wanted a sense of security and control; it's hard to trust a King you cannot see. *We want a king we can see and touch, one who will lead us into battle, into victory, into glory.*

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall: Earthy Spirituality For Everyday Christians*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (instructions and limitations for the Israelite king).

Not surprisingly, Samuel took their request personally. The combination of his old age and his son's bad behaviour set the people against him—his days as Israel's leader were over. It's one thing to leave a role on your own terms, it's another thing to be pushed out; Samuel was pushed out. Some of you know how this feels. It's painful, demeaning; it feels unjust, it makes us angry. Samuel took all of this hurt to the Lord in prayer and it was revealed to him that a deeper rejection was taking place—it was the Lord who was being rejected as King.

Samuel sent the people home but shortly thereafter God sent Samuel to anoint a man to become king—this is where Saul enters the story. In the beginning Saul was a reluctant leader; at the time of his coronation, he was found hiding among the baggage. But when Saul was brought forth and stood among the people, everyone noticed that he was physically impressive. 1 Samuel 10:23-24 we read, *“as [Saul] stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.’ Then the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’”*

But the rise of Saul was soon followed by his fall. In 1 Samuel 13, Saul was given instructions to wait for Samuel before leading the army into battle against Israel's enemies. But in Saul's impatience and fear, he refused to wait and went ahead on his own. When confronted by Samuel, Saul blamed the situation and the soldiers, refusing to take responsibility.

In response, God spoke to Saul—through Samuel—saying: *“You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people”*.<sup>3</sup>

And here we discover a phrase that distinguishes the kind of leadership—the king of king—that God seeks. We read, *“the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart;”* the question is, what does this phrase mean? When the Bible refers to the “heart” it isn't speaking about a physical organ that pumps blood. In the Biblical way of thinking, the heart represents the centre of a person—one's character and will. A person “after God's own heart” is one who centres their life around God—listening, following, obeying. Saul presents us with the opposite image: ears closed, hard-hearted, going his own way.

Just two chapters later, in 1 Samuel 15, Saul repeats the same behaviour—ignoring God's instruction, thinking he knew better. In vs. 10-11 we read, *“Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: ‘I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.’”*

Then God sent Samuel to bring the following message to Saul: *“Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”* In vs. 35 we read, *“Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.”*

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 13:13-14.

**(2) David’s Primary Characteristic—a heart after God:** Let’s leave Saul behind for the moment and move on to talk about David and the primary characteristic that marks his story. If your Bibles are still open, please turn with me to 1 Samuel 16:1.

*“The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have **chosen** one of his sons to be king.’”* Interestingly, the word translated “chosen” is literally the word “seen”—I have seen one of Jesse’s sons and he will be king. This begs the question, *what did God see?*

Samuel filled a horn with oil and set out for Bethlehem to anoint a new king of Israel, one of Jesse’s sons. Understandably, Samuel was nervous about carrying out this assignment. The last time he had spoken to Saul, he delivered a message that God had rejected him as king. But while God had rejected Saul as king, he had not yet vacated the throne; it’s dangerous to crown a new king when the old king is still wearing the crown. When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem, he met Jesse and asked him to bring out his sons, one by one, beginning with the oldest.

Reading now from 1 Samuel 16:6, *“When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.’”* **7** *But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’*

**8** *Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, ‘The Lord has not chosen this one either.’* **9** *Jesse*

*then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, ‘Nor has the Lord chosen this one.’* **10** *Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, ‘The Lord has not chosen these.’* **11** *So he asked Jesse, ‘Are these all the sons you have?’ ‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered. ‘He is tending the sheep.’ Samuel said, ‘Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.’*

**12** *So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; this is the one.’* **13** *So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.”*

One by one they came—oldest to youngest. When Samuel laid eyes on Eliab, he knew that he was looking at the one who would be king. How did he know? We’re not told exactly, but I can imagine that Eliab was kingly in appearance—tall, strong, and handsome. But the God who sees and hears all—even our thoughts—interrupted Samuel saying, *“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

Once again, just as in 1 Samuel 13, the “**heart**” is of central importance to God; He sees beyond physical appearance to our character, our will, our driving motivations. He sees those who resist His leadership, and those who joyfully embrace Him. A woman after God’s heart, a man after God’s heart, is a person who chooses to centre their life around God and respond to His leading.

Now, it's perhaps a little surprising that after being so adamant that the **heart** is what matters—not outward appearance—the narrator goes on to describe David's outward appearance in some detail. He is described as "*glowing with health*" with "*a fine appearance and handsome features.*" Older English translations describe David as being "ruddy and handsome," with the word *ruddy* conveying the notion of red hair, leading Gingers everywhere to claim David as their own.

But in spite of this physical description of David, we know that he wasn't an impressive physical specimen—certainly not like Eliab. After seeing the first 7 brothers, Samuel asked if there were any more; Jesse responded saying, "*There is still the youngest*". The word that is translated "youngest" can also mean "smallest;" at any rate, David wasn't considered significant enough to be present for the inspection.

David was the baby of the family, the runt—he's off in the fields with the sheep—too insignificant to even be present, but Samuel called a halt to the inspection and everyone was now waiting for David. Jesse, the brothers, the prophet Samuel, indeed all of Israel was waiting for the boy who would be king. When David finally appeared, the Lord spoke to Samuel saying, "*Rise and anoint him; this is the one.*"

### **Application**

It's reported that Aristotle once said, "Personal beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of reference."<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli once

wrote, "Men in general judge more from appearances than from reality." It's true isn't it? Our first impression of others typically comes from what we see, and we tend to trust what we see and perceive.

Think about your daily routine...most of us begin our morning and end our evening by staring in the mirror; the question is, *what do we see?* Are we making decisions about our own sense of well-being and value based upon how we look? Is this what we do when we look at others?

Samuel introduced Saul to Israel saying, "*Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.*" Samuel's vision, our vision—all too often—is only skin deep, but God's vision extends deeper. "*The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*"

It's a sobering thought. We can be impressed by secondary things. Our perspective can be flawed. We can have a front row seat and miss the point completely. Samuel jumps to a conclusion about Eliab but the Lord corrects him gently; we see only in part; God sees in fullness.

**illus:** I know a thing or two about not measuring up to people's expectations. People look at me, size me up, and make a judgement about who I am or what I'm worth. It doesn't just happen to me, it happens to all of us, and it doesn't just happen *to* us, we do it to other people—it's second nature. Not meeting people's expectations can

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, as quoted by Paul S. Evans, *The Story of God Commentary: 1-2 Samuel*, 178.

trigger feelings of rejection, anger, or shame, but sometimes it's downright amusing.

A few years ago I was struggling to read the small print in books and I realized that it was time to get a pair of glasses. I set up an appointment with an optometrist, arrived on time, and they put me through a number of tests. I was being assisted by young guy in his mid to late 20's and we got to talking about life: *Have you always lived in North Van? What school did go to? How long have you been working here?*

After he answered my questions, he asked one of his own: *What kind of work do you do?* When I told him that I was a pastor, he stopped what he was doing and gave me a strange look. After a brief pause, he said, *"You don't look like a pastor."* Quite innocently I asked him, *"What does a pastor look like?"* He responded saying, *"You know... old, white hair, a bad suit, and a bit odd. You look so...normal."* I laughed out loud. *"Thanks, I think."*

We've all felt like David before—we've been weighed and found wanting, underestimated, unimportant, invisible. But God *saw* this son of Jesse and chose Him to be king. When I read about God choosing David, I can't help but picture the expression on his brothers' faces. *You're choosing him? Baby brother? Sheep-boy?* And this unlikely choice of David foreshadows the coming of the One who would be described as the "Son of David."

When Jesus came most people overlooked Him because He came in the wrong package. He was born in poverty and raised in a town with a bad reputation. Instead of an Ivy League education Jesus learned a builder's trade—hammers and chisels, wood and stone.

Isaiah 53:2-3 describes Him in the following way: *"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem."* People couldn't get past His outward appearance; they didn't see that God had come to live among them.

If ever there was a person after God's own heart it was Jesus—His life was centred around God—listening, following, obeying, right to the very end, even death on the cross.<sup>5</sup>

In the David story God is front and centre, choosing, anointing, calling; in your story God is doing the very same thing. The Apostle Paul writes to Christians in Ephesus saying, *"4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure."*<sup>6</sup>

Bill Arnold writes, "God has the superior vantage point of seeing the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hebrews 10:5-7 for a description of Jesus' submission to the Father; interesting, the author of Hebrews puts the words of Psalm 40—David's Psalm—in Jesus' mouth.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1:4-5, New Living Translation.

heart. Since we are not God, we cannot know who will answer his call and who will be effective in his service. This means both that we should be cautious about judging other people and their potential effectiveness in the kingdom of God, and also that we should not question our own abilities and gifts for service. We may feel we do not have much to offer God—but that would be a superficial evaluation, based on our own limited perspective. If God calls, he also empowers.”<sup>7</sup>

The anointing of David marks the turning point both in David’s and Israel’s story. And when the Spirit of God gets ahold of you or me, it will mark the turning point in our story too. And who knows, maybe it will mark the turning point on the North Shore?

As I conclude, I want to return to the questions I opened with: *What’s the story of your life? Who are you? Where are you going? What’s happening around you?* As you think about your story, *what is God saying, doing, blessing, or correcting?* And like David, do we have a heart that is open and responsive to Him?

**Pray**

**Worship**

**Benediction**

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<sup>7</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *NIV Application Commentary: 1&2 Samuel*, 232.