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*I Spy God on the Move:
From Shepherd to King*
1 Samuel

Some of the greatest stories in the human experience are about those who by outward appearances were unqualified to do the great things they did. Want someone to lead your army to throw the English out of France? (Sorry Ellis.) How about a teenaged girl named Joan? Who shall lead this nation through the darkness of Civil War? How about a man once described as "lean and ugly in every way." Who shall guide America during the greatest conflict in human history? How about a president in a wheelchair? And as his British counterpart? A tubby, grouchy-looking cigar-smoker. Or to get down to really important matters: what quarterback will lead the Seahawks to successive Super Bowls? How about someone the experts say is too small to play pro ball.

Last week in our journey through God's story, Ellis taught us that Israel wanted to be like the cool nations around them. Instead of God as their king, they wanted a human king. They got what they asked for: Saul... tall, dark and handsome but deeply flawed. How many read the sad chapter of King Saul?

Well, this week, God gets fed up with Saul's arrogance and chooses a most unlikely replacement... a kid, really. He wasn't cool, but he was great. If you've ever felt like an outsider, a loser, an also-ran, you are going to love this story. The prophet has just given Saul the news that God is rejecting him as king. But there is no time for Samuel to mope. We pick up the story in I Sam 16.

¹The 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."

⁴Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

⁵Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." ⁷But 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 man looks at. Man looks 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.”

So Samuel goes to Bethlehem as instructed and finds Jesse. Remember Jesse... the grandson of Ruth, our heroine from a couple weeks ago? Samuel lines up Jesse’s boys to figure out whom the Lord has chosen as the next king. He sees the eldest, Eliab, and thinks, “Surely this is the one.” In those days, the eldest son was always the next head of the family. And, like Saul, Eliab was tall and good-looking. But God says, “Nope. He’s not the guy.” Next in line: Aminadab. Nope, not him either. And so on, right down the line. Samuel comes to the last of the sons... seven boys with great potential. But God says NO. And verse 7 gives us a glimpse of why:

“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

God wasn’t interested in the eldest, the tallest, the best looking, the most charismatic... he wasn’t interested in any of the things we usually look for in a leader. What was he interested in?

¹¹So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered, “but he is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”¹² So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; he is the one.”¹³ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers....

All those boys standing there, but none is the right guy. “Is this all?” Samuel asks. “Well, there’s one more, but he can’t be the one you want. He’s the youngest. He has the low-son-on-the-totem-pole job of tending sheep.” “Bring him,” Samuel says. And onto the stage pops this young shepherd... clueless, the runt of the litter. He’s the one who gets the dirt jobs, the hand-me-down clothes, the abuse of seven older brothers. But, wow, does the scene change when he shows up. His cheeks are bright red from the sun and wind. There is just something about this youngster that oozes life. And the Lord, to everyone’s surprise says, “That’s the one.” So Samuel pours oil on his head, and for the first time in the story, we hear his name. “...from that day on the Spirit of YAHWEH came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.”

Notice, they have no idea what this anointing is for. Samuel knows, but no one else. No mention of “king” anywhere. In fact, the last line says that when he was done, Samuel just left and went home. It’s kind of funny. David kneeling there, hair

all oily, jealous brothers looking on, and Samuel just walks away! They have no idea what just happened, no idea that they just witnessed the anointing of the next king of God's people... this unlikely, red-faced kid named David.

The path ahead will be hard. The immediate obstacle is a huge Philistine warrior named Goliath. Then there's Saul's paranoia. He tries to stick David to the wall with a spear... twice! Ultimately, David does become the king, but that's a long way off. For now, he is just a shepherd boy with oily hair on his knees before the Lord. So how did this kid become the greatest king Israel ever had?

First, there was the anointing. Samuel was told to fill his horn with oil and go to Bethlehem. In the Old Testament, "oil" is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Any time you read about "anointing," you are getting a Scarlet Thread glimpse of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. No one believed oil was magical. Like baptism, a pouring of oil represented the pouring out of God's Spirit on someone to be empowered for a calling.

Notice, after David is anointed, we read, "...from that day the Spirit of the Lord came over David in power." Again, it will be years before he assumes the throne, but from the moment of his anointing, David walks in the power of the Spirit. This explains how a shepherd boy was able to defeat the giant Philistine. It explains how a shepherd boy could rise up to become Saul's greatest warrior. It explains how, even when Saul became paranoid, David refused every temptation to steal his throne or take his life. David walked in the Spirit's power from that day on.

This point is made even more powerfully when we read in 16:14, "Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul..." Remember, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was only given to some and only temporarily. The Spirit was given and the Spirit was withdrawn. Right here we find one of the greatest differences between the Old and New Testament. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given not just to a few and not just for a time but to all disciples of Jesus forever.

Think about that! If you belong to Christ, then His Spirit—the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit that fell upon David as the oil fell upon his head—that Spirit empowers you! You have the same anointing! If you walk in that anointing... if you walk in faith that the Spirit of Christ lives in and empowers you, then whoever you are, whatever you look like, however gifted or ungifted you might be, God can do something great in you! You may not know what it is, it may not come for a while, but the anointing of God is irrevocable. Walk in the power of that Spirit... the Spirit that makes runt boys into mighty kings.

But there's one more thing about why God chose this unlikely candidate. What did David possess that God loved? A great heart. When the Lord rejected Saul, Samuel gave him the bad news: "But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people..." And remember what God told Samuel as he stood in front of Jesse's eldest son?

“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

This word “heart” is used more than 500 times in the Bible. The “heart” is the spiritual and moral center of a person. When we use the word “heart” we are talking about feelings and emotions. That’s not what it means in the Bible, not mainly; it has more to do with motivation. “Heart” was what drove you to be the kind of person you were, to do the sorts of things you did. If your “heart” belonged to God that meant that your deepest longing was to live for God, please God, obey God. When we read that David “was a man after God’s own heart” it means that his primary motivation in life was to live for God.

This doesn’t mean he was perfect. Next week we see how horribly he failed the Lord. But even when he fell, David’s first instinct was to beg God to repair his broken heart. Psalm 51 is the song he wrote after sinning with Bathsheba and murdering her husband. Listen: ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.” David knew that after his terrible sin, his greatest need was to restore his God-centered heart.

The question this story asks every one of us is this: Do you have a heart for God? Is following and pleasing and being right before God the center—the “heart” beat—of your life? Is it your deepest longing to be the person God created you to be? Jesus said the greatest command was to “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I’m not saying that you are a perfect saint. I’m asking, “Do you have a heart for God? Is your primary motivation in life to please God?” Or is God just one of many interests in your life?

If you look at your own life and have to say, honestly, “I don’t really have a heart for God; my heart is for my family, or my heart is for making money, my heart is for pursuing pleasure,” then this could be a discouraging message. You say to yourself, “David was just better than I am. No matter how hard I try, I could never have a heart like that.” Well there is good news. Do you know where this heart for God comes from in the first place? God! God gives us this heart! In Ezekiel 36, God says to his people, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Having a heart for God does not mean beating your own heart into submission. It means surrendering your heart—surrendering the center of your life—to God and asking him to renew it. That’s God’s part!

But here’s our part. We must nurture that new, God-given heart. If we don’t—if we don’t listen and respond to the urgings of God—that new heart can wither. Or be transplanted for a different heart. Do you know who teaches us that lesson? Saul. Earlier in this story Samuel is trying to persuade a reluctant Saul to trust that God has called him to be king. But Saul was afraid and felt unqualified. Listen to I Samuel 10:9: “As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart...”

Did you hear that? "God changed Saul's heart!" God gave Saul the heart he needed to be his man. And in the early days of his reign, we see what happened when Saul's heart belonged to God. He was a powerful force. But somewhere along the line, Saul began to neglect his changed heart. He began to listen to the lies of the world, to believe his own press clippings, to live and lead as if he were really the god of his life... and that God-changed heart of his began to wither.

Every prompting of the heart starts with God... his Holy Spirit calling us, wooing us, and beckoning us. But it is what we do with that prompting that determines our usefulness to God. The other day, I saw a friend at a funeral. She'd been away from the church for a while because of embarrassment over things in her life, but the memorial touched her and she said she would come back to church that weekend. She didn't. So I called her the next week and said, "I hope you will come back soon, because here is what I've learned: When we continue to ignore the promptings of God, we eventually become deaf to them."

Do you understand what I was saying to her? The first time we sense God saying, "I want you to go to church faithfully" or "I want you to invite that person to church" or "I want you to start a LifeGroup" or "I want you to lead your family spiritually" or "I want you to start tithing" or "I want you to stop sleeping with your boyfriend"...that prompting in our heart comes through loud and clear. But if we ignore it—if we disobey the clear voice of God—pretty soon, that voice is more muted... and more muted... and more muted until we become deaf to it. It's not that the Holy Spirit is no longer speaking to our hearts, it's just that we've trained ourselves to ignore His voice. Tuned our hearts to follow something other than God's leading

Saul heard God's prompting in his heart but stopped listening. David heard God's prompting and never stopped listening, even when he was deeply broken. So the question again is: do you have a heart for God? Do you listen for the promptings of his Spirit? Do you walk in his anointing? Do you care about the things God cares for? Do you serve and give to the things God loves? Does your calendar and your checkbook and your friends and activities suggest that you are passionate for the Lord?

The Church is full of indifferent Christians—people who were once excited about their new heart, the new passion God had put inside them, but have now gotten distracted and divided—and their hearts are withering. It's not too late. God is still looking for men, women and young people whose hearts are His. So once more the question: Does your heart belong to God?