

NOT AS MORTALS SEE

**Sermon Preached by the Rev. Dr. Lindley G. DeGarmo
Towson Presbyterian Church
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2 Corinthians 5:14-17

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

This morning I am beginning a series of [sermons] on the figure of David. For much of the summer, we are going to look at this titanic personage of the Old Testament. Some of you may be thinking, “All summer! Why spend the whole summer on David?” Let me explain. “First of all, David is one of those people who as we get to know him, we get to know God. At times it seemed God was shining through the very pores of David’s body. God lived in David even though David was far from perfect. He was capable of adultery and even murder. In the [weeks ahead], we will be delving into a very complex person. David was an ancient, Middle Eastern, warrior king, who just happened to be a poet [on a par with] with Shakespeare and whose writings today appear on the same shelf with the world’s greatest literature.

“David had one theme: God. Everything he saw reminded him of God. Let me give you an example. Today we say, ‘O Lord, you are my rock.’ David taught us that. But if you had never heard that before, and someone told you God is like a rock, you’d probably say, ‘What?’ The one thing in the universe God is least like is a rock. God is spirit. [God] is intelligence, life, and love. [God] is anything but an inert chunk. But David has convinced the whole world to say, ‘God, you are my rock.’ The land of Israel is made of limestone, and everywhere there are stone formations and rocks. David picked up rocks to throw at Goliath, and said, ‘Lord, you are my rock.’ If David had grown up [here] he might have said, ‘Lord, you are my [oak].’ If he’d grown up in California, he may have thought, ‘Lord, you are my wave.’ If David had been a [lacrosse dad], he may have said, ‘God, you are my SUV.’ Everywhere David looked, he saw God. God shone brightly through all of David, even with his many sins and shortcomings.

“That leads to the second reason why we’ll spend [the summer] on David. David is arguably the most human character in the Bible. We know more about David and the details of his life than any other Bible character. Detail after detail of his outer life and career are recorded in I and II Samuel. Psalms is filled with details of David’s inner thoughts and feelings told to us by David himself. Here’s something I want you to think about. As you read about David, you will not find one miracle in his life. David is playing with the same deck of cards you and I are as we go through our week. I believe God can and will do through us the very same things he did in the life of David if we have the same dominating vision of God.

“David teaches us that when we take time to pray or to worship we aren’t taking a breather from life, but we are charging into the very heart of what life is all about. Life is a gift designed by God to be enjoyed with God. David understood this and becomes so alive that he almost seems to leap off the pages of Scripture. My prayer is that we also will come alive in a whole new way as we study David.

“Eugene Peterson[, author of the popular contemporary Bible translation, *The Message*.] says you can’t understand Jesus fully until you first understand David.¹ Why? Because in Jesus we see GOD in human flesh, but in David we see God in HUMAN FLESH. [In David, we] see how the presence of God can make this ordinary human flesh come alive with joy and power. We’re also going to see that holiness and earthiness go hand in hand. Some people think the more holy they become the less human they’ll become. Oh no, not with David. To be holy means simply you live your life set apart for God...

“Let’s jump into our study of David. [Our lesson this morning is] I Samuel 16:1-13. At this time, Israel has entered its period of monarchs, and King Saul has proven to be an unmitigated disaster. The prophet Samuel, who anointed Saul, feels depressed. One day God comes and tells Samuel, ‘Get over it; I have a new plan.’ Let’s read the first verse:

¹ *The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.’² Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.’*

“That’s a good point. How is King Saul going to handle Samuel anointing someone else to be the king? God instructs Samuel, ‘When you go to Bethlehem, hold a big outdoor worship service. Make sure Jesse and his sons are invited.’ So Samuel saddles up his donkey for a ride to Bethlehem in his new role as an executive search consultant for God.

⁴ *Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, ‘Do you come peaceably?’*

“There must have been majesty and awesomeness in the persona of Samuel that would strike fear in the town leaders. Apparently one of these city fathers was none other than Jesse, the man with the sons. Jesse goes home and says, ‘Okay boys, shower up and polish your shoes because we’re going into town. You’ve got a meeting with the man himself, Samuel the prophet.’

“What I wonder is, did Jesse leak to his sons the reason for the visit? Did he say, ‘Oh, and by the way, [keep your shirts tucked in] because one of you boys is going to be anointed king’? If so, imagine those young men getting dressed and looking at themselves in the mirror wondering if they were the lucky one to be king. Finally, here they come:

⁶ *When they came, [Samuel] looked on Eliab [the eldest] and thought, ‘Surely the LORD’s anointed is now before the LORD.’*

“All I can say is that this young man Eliab must have been one impressive, kingly-looking young man for a prophet of the stature of Samuel to make such a snap judgment that was so wrong. But then again Israel had a thing about impressive physiques in their leaders. This obsession with the physical is what got them into the trouble they were in with Saul. They swooned over Saul and wanted to make him king

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

because he was and I quote ‘head and shoulders’ taller than any other man in the realm. Now all they wanted to do was to get rid of him.

“[We’re subject to the same folly today, of course. Judging people by physical appearance. We’ve all experienced it. We’ve all done it. Take Susan Boyle, the Scottish woman whose appearance on the *Britain’s Got Talent* TV show went ‘viral’ on the internet and was viewed by several hundred million people worldwide in a matter of days. That whole phenomenon really was about appearances, wasn’t it? How we think beauty and talent, accomplishment are supposed to go together? Susan Boyle didn’t fit the mold for a popular singer, because she was middle aged and frumpy. It turned out she sings like an angel. How oppressive our stereotypes can be!] We need to break the authority of the those idolatrous images.

⁷ *But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; [and now these words to put above your mirror] for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.’*

“Do you know how to break those idolatrous images? Through the community of faith here at the [Towson] Presbyterian Church. Here at [TPC] we know one another not just by appearance but for who we are on the inside. Let’s let [TPC] be a place where we worry less about our pimples, wrinkles, or crow’s feet...Let’s worry less about self improvement, and more serving one another and [our neighbors] and discovering who we are in the glory of the face of Jesus Christ.

Well, son number one, Eliab the Hunk, flunks the interview. So Samuel moves on:

⁸ *Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, ‘Neither has the LORD chosen this one.’* ⁹ *Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, ‘Neither has the LORD chosen this one.’* ¹⁰ *Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The LORD has not chosen any of these.’* ¹¹ *Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’*

“About now Samuel is wondering , ‘Have I lost my prophetic touch? This is Bethlehem, right? You are Jesse? These are your sons?’

“Then Jesse says, ‘Oh, oh, oh, wait a minute. I do have one more son, the youngest. We didn’t even bother to bring him in from the pasture. He lives in his own little world. He’s always singing these songs. We thought we’d keep him out of everybody’s hair.’

¹¹ *Samuel said..., ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’*

“So they go out and search for the youngest brother. Notice, had it been up to Samuel or Jesse, this search would have been over a long time ago. Then they bring in a young man, probably in his late teens, and the Lord says to Samuel in verse 12 *‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’*

“One of the great themes of scripture is the people that we pass over are the very ones God chooses. God loves to pluck people out of obscurity and put them in the

spotlight. There is a takeaway here for parents. We feel such pressure to make our children turn out like those seven brothers: all impressive, star athletes, perfect grades, and in the popular crowd. But God often chooses the [fair-to-middling] student, who doesn't have a lot of friends but whose heart is right with [God. And God has a way of calling us to do things that we believe are beyond us: provide for a family as a single parent; make our way in a new school or job or community; care for an aging parent; cope with an unfavorable diagnosis; serve on a church board. God loves to throw us in over our heads where we desperately need what only God can offer]. Now verse 13:

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.

“That is the first mention of the name David in the Bible. The first twelve verses have all been about David, but the author has withheld his name until now. David's name will go on to appear 600 times in Scripture. This first time he is anointed by the Spirit of God in power. As I said before, there are no supernatural miracles in David's life. There is no voice calling in the middle of the night. Rather, a powerful adult sent by God comes into David's life and says, ‘Young man you are destined to change the world.’

“We know that so many young people today suffer from low self esteem. [N]ever before [have we so needed] to be Samuels who tell young people who they are before God...God says in Jeremiah 1:5, ‘*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you.*’ God is saying, ‘[Eons] before you were born I had a work I wanted done in the world and you were the finely crafted tool I created.’”² That is true for each and every one of us. Not that all of us are destined to be kings. But all of us, like David, have special status before God. Like David, we have received God's Spirit; for us, it is in the waters of baptism. In baptism God claims us as God's own daughters and sons—“children of God,” the liturgy says, “and so we are...By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the one body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice.” God has work for us to do, if we will but listen and follow. How we live our lives is a matter of cosmic concern to God.

“God...knows better than anyone, better than we ourselves, what is inside us; [God] knows the unrealized potential, the untapped possibilities in our hearts. I have come to the conclusion that among the most important people in our lives [are] those who [make] us uncomfortable [for a while] by expecting more of us than we [think we can produce]. I have come to the conclusion that our saints are those who [see] more in us than we ever saw in ourselves, the ones who [force] the issue of who we are and who we can be: the teacher, the coach, the parent, the mentor who [calls] us out, who [calls] out of us something we didn't even know was in there. Old Samuel missed it, but God didn't and God doesn't. God saw the heart of a king in a little boy. God sees your heart and mine. God wants us to become and to be all that we can.”³

² Victor D. Pentz, “Stranger Than Fiction: God's Surprising Way of Electing Leaders,” Sermon preached at Preachtree Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia, August 22, 2004.

³ John M. Buchanan, “Not As Mortals See,” Sermon preached at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, June 25, 2006.

So, leave here this morning remembering who you and whose you are. God has anointed you in power. God has plans for you. God has made you a person of destiny. And in God's love and power, there is nothing that cannot be done.

Thanks be to God!