

Do you ever hear the message that you are not as good as someone else? Maybe you are the youngest child and you are compared to older siblings. Maybe you are female and you are compared unfavorably to males. Maybe you are older and you are compared unfavorably to people who are younger. Or maybe you are younger and you are compared unfavorably to people who are older.

Maybe you grew up in the country and you are compared unfavorably to people who grew up in larger cities. Maybe you have a high school diploma and you are compared unfavorably to people with more education.

If you come into worship today feeling as though you have been overlooked for whatever reason then today's passage may have something to say to you. Because today we will learn about someone who was overlooked by the people around him but God saw something much different.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be reading stories about the early Israelite kings. If you find yourself intrigued by shows such as Downton Abbey or fascinated by stories of the royal family then you know that royal families and powerful families have some great plots in them.

We Christians do not spend near enough time learning about the family dynamics of the characters found in the Old Testament. Because we tend to ignore them we miss so much that is fascinating and that teaches us about how God chooses to act within real life situations.

The story which we are about to read includes all sorts of attempts at deception. So let us set the scene. Last week we read about the character of Samuel. Samuel was a leader of ancient Israel who was considered the last of the judges. The judges were charismatic leaders that sprang up in various ways to become military leaders as well as community leaders. We are looking at the period between about 1200 BC and 1000 BC.

Last week we read about how Samuel was getting old and his sons were not dependable. And so the Israelites were becoming nervous that they were not going to have a good leader. The Israelites wanted to have the security which they believed could only be found by having a king. And so they demanded Samuel appoint them a king.

Samuel was distressed by this because he saw their demands for a king as a sign that they were rejecting him. But God spoke to Samuel and said that the people are not rejecting Samuel. They are rejecting God.

And so God tells Samuel to do what they ask and to appoint them a king. God speaks through Samuel to warn them about what they are asking for but they do not listen. They want a king.

So let's think about this for a moment. If we are looking for a king or a president, what criteria would we use? Typically the criteria would be this. Kings need to come from wealthy families. Kings need to be good looking. Kings need to be male. Kings need to be young.

So Samuel was directed by God to find that perfect person. His name was Saul and he fit all of those important categories.

Read I Samuel 9:1-2

So Samuel anoints Saul to be the first king of Israel and so the early Israelites get what they want. They get the young, attractive, tall, man from a wealthy family. But Saul is going to prove to be a leader who is more worried about what people think about him than what God wants of him. He listens more to the fear of the people than he listens to the wisdom of God. And that is never a good thing.

So God expresses disappointment at having ever allowed Saul to become king. And so it is now time to replace him. So let's read about how Samuel chooses the next king of Israel.

Read I Samuel 15:34-16:13

So the first thing Samuel is told is to quit beating yourself up over the selection of Saul as the king. "Time to move on," God says to Samuel. And so God sends Samuel to find a man named Jesse from Bethlehem. God informs Samuel that the next king is found among the sons of Jesse.

But Saul is still king so God helps Samuel come up with a plan of deception. Don't you love it that God is involved in a plot of deception? How cool is that? Samuel is risking his life at this point because if Saul finds out that Samuel is seeking a new king then Saul will surely have him killed.

God tells Samuel to bring an animal to sacrifice and that will get him into Bethlehem. Samuel does that and he is successful. He is able to get by the guards of Bethlehem by carrying in his animal sacrifice.

Samuel meets up with Jesse and is able to check out all of his sons to see which is the one who is to be the next king of Israel. Samuel sees the first of Jesse's sons and figures he must be the one. But God tells Samuel that Eliab, this first son, is not the one that he is choosing to be the king.

God tells Samuel that with this king there is a different set of criteria. God tells Samuel to not look for the one with the best looks or the tallest. "Those things don't matter," God says. Instead, God says, "look into the heart. In the heart is where you find greatness."

So Jesse invites his next son Abinadab to come out. But Samuel says that he is not the one. Remember to look into the heart to find greatness. So the next son Shammah is presented. But Samuel says that he is not the one either. Remember to look into the heart to find greatness.

Jesse makes the rest of his seven sons to come out but Samuel rejects every one of them. Remember to look into the heart to find greatness. “Is that all of your sons?” Samuel asks Jesse. And Jesse responds, “Well I have one more. But he is the youngest and he is tending to the sheep.” But Samuel says to bring him in and so he is brought in.

Even though God has told Samuel to not look on one’s appearance but to look to the heart, this youngest son is described as having attractive physical features. He is ruddy. He is described as having beautiful eyes. He is described as handsome. And upon seeing this youngest son, Samuel announces that this is the one. This is the one who is to be the next king of Israel. We find out then that this next king to be anointed is named David.

But it is not for the physical features that David is chosen. We are told that he is chosen because of his heart. He is chosen for what is inside of him.

Show clip of Dove commercial

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DdM-4siaQw>

Maybe you too are the one who feels as though you are the forgotten child out back. The one who is asked to carry out tasks while others get the glory. Maybe you are the one who feels as though you are quite average and there is nothing all that spectacular about you.

But it is the average, everyday, overlooked kind of people that God chooses. Maybe it is the average, everyday, ordinary and overlooked kind of churches that God chooses. Even though you may feel that others in your life are overlooking you, stories like this prove to us that God sees you and values you.

In God's eyes, it is not appearance that counts. What counts is what is in your heart. So do what is necessary to be building up what is inside of you. That is where God is looking.

It's easy to see ourselves as average and mundane. But I hope and pray that we see the beauty inside of ourselves.

I hope and pray that we each find ways to cultivate that beauty inside of ourselves.

"Do not look on the outward appearance," says the Lord. "The Lord looks upon the heart." AMEN.

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