

LOOK BELOW THE SURFACE

1 Samuel 16:1-13

This week at Vacation Bible School the kids learned to look below the surface because things are not always the way they seem. All of us tend to judge people by how they look, what they say, or even what they do. However, when we get to know someone, they are sometimes not at all like what you thought.

Last week the kids walked with Jesus through five passages in the gospels. In these episodes we saw several people who had encounters with Jesus. Some of these people, like Zacchaeus the tax collector, like the Samaritan woman at the well, like the man born blind, these were people that were not on the A-list. They were people that others rejected and shunned. While Jesus was on earth, the religious leaders often ridiculed Him because of whom He chose to spend time with. That's because Jesus viewed those people very differently than the religious leaders did.

The way God sees people is often not the same as the way we see people. Today I want us to briefly look at an illustration of that truth. In the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, the Lord makes this powerful statement, **"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart,"** (1 Sam. 16:7). When God sees people, He always looks below the surface.

Please open your Bibles to *1 Samuel 16* as I read verses 1–13.

1 Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons." 2 And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you." 4 So Samuel did what the Lord said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" 5 And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 8 So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And 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 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." 11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Then he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here." 12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

To understand what is going on here let me give you a bit of biblical background. The nation of Israel wanted a king so they could be like the other nations. They pestered their judge and prophet Samuel until he finally said, “Lord, these people really want a king,” and the Lord said, “Fine, I’ll give them a king.” Saul had been the people’s choice. If Israel had been a car lot, Saul was the Rolls Royce.

No man ever had a better start. He was an impressive young man—tall, handsome, a born leader. For a while, it was all wine and roses until something happened inside Saul. There was an impulsive streak that made him act without thinking. Not minor things, big things—like deliberate disregard for the word of the Lord. The day came when God said to Saul in 1 Samuel 13:14, **“But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”**

No wonder we read in 1 Samuel 16:1 that Samuel weeps for Saul. Weeps for himself. Weeps for Israel. Verse 1, **“Now the Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?”** Who would take his place? Samuel saw no one on the horizon that could do the job. While Saul was flaming out and Samuel was mourning, God had already chosen His man. What was God doing while Saul was self-destructing? He was preparing David to be king. No one knew it but God. Samuel didn’t know, Saul certainly didn’t know, Jesse didn’t know, and David himself had no clue.

Are you uncertain and worried about the future? In a state of panic? Fearful over what might happen next? Rest in these two words: God sees. And while you worry, He is up ahead of you arranging the details of your future.

So in verse 1 God said to Samuel, **“Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.”** Literally that reads, “I have seen a king among his sons.”

God sees what man does not see. The first part of the VBS motto for the kids this week was Jesus sees. Jesus saw Zacchaeus, He saw the Samaritan woman, He saw Nicodemus, He saw the blind man, and He saw the children. In every case, the way Jesus saw people was so different from the way others saw them. God sees you today as well. He sees the truth about you. That is because,

God Sees the Heart

In due course Samuel makes his way to the house of Jesse and asks to see his sons. They line up and the first one is introduced. His name is Eliab. Evidently he is a bit like Saul—tall and handsome. He must have impressed Samuel because when he sees him, he thinks, “All right, Lord, good choice. He even looks like a king.” And the Lord says to Samuel, “What are you talking about? That’s not the one. In fact, I’ve rejected him.” So in comes the next son. His name is Abinadab. This time Samuel doesn’t do anything. And God says, “Nope.” Go to the next one. “Nope.” Next one. “Nope.” Next one. “Nope.” Next one. “Nope.” Next one. “Nope.” Pretty soon Samuel is 0 for 7 in picking the next king of Israel. He is utterly bewildered. He has come to anoint the new king but the new king is nowhere to be found.

Samuel assumed in advance that he knew God’s will but he was dead wrong. He was repeating the same mistake the nation had made earlier. He wanted someone who “looked” like a king. When he saw Eliab, he assumed he must be the man God had in mind.

Like Samuel we're too often impressed by outward success, looks, appearance, money, power, names, titles, connections, clothes, cars, and degrees. Even in church we like to pay attention to how people look on the outside. But God cares not a whit for any of this.

In our Bible stories this week it was not Nicodemus, the Pharisee, the ruler of the Jews, the upstanding religious teacher, to whom the kingdom of God belonged. In fact Jesus implied that all his religious credentials were worthless. He needed go back to square one, to start completely over, to lose all those things that impressed others. He needed to be born again. No, the kingdom was not for Nicodemus, it was for those who had nothing to commend them, no teaching degrees, no religious credentials. It was the little children of whom Jesus said, **"of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."**

God doesn't look at our religious qualifications, He looks at our heart. God isn't just interested in what we do. He's interested in why we do it.

In Jeremiah 17:9-10, God says **"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings."**

He tests the heart that gives motivation to our actions. God was interested in what Samuel could not see, the heart.

God Knows Our Weaknesses

Jesse has presented 7 sons to Samuel. God chose none of them. Finally Samuel says, "You don't have any other sons, do you?" Just an afterthought, really. A shot in the dark. Jesse says a strange thing. "Yes I do, but he's the youngest and he's out tending the sheep." Meaning, he's just a kid and he really doesn't count for much. You wouldn't want him anyway.

While all his brothers are with Samuel, David is out with the sheep. He doesn't know anything is even going on. His father didn't even think enough of him to call him in from the field. But Samuel said, "Go get him." No doubt Jesse shrugged his shoulders and said, "Whatever you say but he's just a kid and I don't think he's what you're looking for." Jesse dismissed David because of his weaknesses. I imagine that when the boys chose sides to play stickball, David was always picked last.

In comes David straight from the pasture. He hasn't had time to wash up or change clothes. There stands the future king of Israel. He's maybe 16 years old. A shepherd. A poet. A dreamer. He doesn't look like a king. No matter. God has found his man. God says to Samuel, "Anoint him." And he does.

God loves to display His strength in our weaknesses. Verse 13 tells us, **"the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward."** In that moment the Spirit of God came on David with power. The anointing was God's way of saying, "You now have My Spirit, My power." A day will come in the not-too-distant future when David will walk down into the Valley of Elah to face the giant Goliath. It will not be his wisdom that saves him or his strength or his strategy. It will be God himself fighting on David's side. That's what the anointing and the coming of the Spirit really means. God has found His man and He will display His mighty strength through human weakness.

Perhaps David was thinking about this whole scene years later when he wrote in Psalm 27:10, **"When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the Lord will take care of**

me.” When God wanted to pick a leader for the nation, he didn’t choose Israel’s MVP. He chose a lowly shepherd boy.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul wrote that Christ is made perfect in our weaknesses.

God Saves Sinful Man by His Perfect Son

David, like all the champions God used before and after him, was far from sinless. When we study David’s life in its total perspective, considering the bad with the good, we may fairly ask, “But didn’t God know the trouble David was going to get into? How could God call a man like that to be king?”

Didn’t God know about all the political maneuvering? Yes.

Didn’t God know about the marriages of convenience? Yes.

Didn’t God know about the affair with Bathsheba? Yes.

Didn’t God know about the murder of Uriah? Yes.

Didn’t God know how Absalom would turn out? Yes.

Didn’t God know David was prone to depression and discouragement? Yes.

Didn’t God know how David’s own family would disintegrate? Yes.

God knew all those things and a lot more besides. That’s what grace is all about. He knew what David would do. And he called him anyway. All those things are trumped by one prior fact: God chose David because God sees what we do not see and He knows what we do not know.

In the beginning of his story, no one believes in David but God. Not Jesse, not Samuel. Only God. In the end, his family broken, his nation troubled, his closest friends mostly gone, he discovers that God is still there. **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”** God never gave up on David. That’s grace. David never gave up on God. That’s what it means to be a man after God’s heart.

In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan pointed out to David that he had sinned greatly. In verses 13–14, David humbles himself and repents of his sin. God forgives him. But David’s son will still die as a consequence.

But God had a plan. Looking down through the centuries God saw a future perfect Son and King who would die so David’s sin could be forgiven. The kids learned John 3:16 this week, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** God gave His perfect sinless Son to die in our place. 2 Corinthians 5:21, says, **“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

The bottom line on David is not his sin. The bottom line is God’s grace. David was God’s man. His heart belonged to God and that’s why God used him. King David is exhibit A in the museum of God’s grace.

Aren’t you glad that God sees differently than we do? He sees through the eyes of His own grace. That’s why Jesus received a cheating tax collector named Zacchaeus; why He welcomed an adulterous Samaritan woman; why He told Nicodemus he had to have a new birth; why God showed His glory through a blind man; why Jesus took the children in His arms and blessed them—because Jesus sees through eyes of grace, because although He knows all about our sinful ways, Jesus saves those who believe in Him.

Since the Lord sees, knows and saves, why not be open and honest with Him? A great way to respond to Jesus is found in Psalm 139:23-24. This was the children's memory verse for the week:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Does that express the longing of your heart? God search my heart, test my thoughts, remove any offenses, and lead me to Jesus who is eternal life. Let's pray.