

We're in the 1st week of a series of 9 OT lessons this summer that center on the life of King David. And during those 9 weeks, I'm planning to preach 6 sermons about David. Why?

First off, David is a wonderfully human character—when he does things right—he's awesome. When he messes up, he messes up big time. But... and this is so important... But, when confronted about his sins and errors, he also knows how to truly repent and get back on track.

David loves God tremendously. And yet he lives a very human life. Sometimes he does everything right. And sometimes he does everything wrong. And sometimes he is simply the victim of terrible circumstances. Yet, through it all, he acts with great faith. He sticks with God throughout his life, through all the ups and downs.

The second reason David is worth our while to consider over a period of 6 sermons is that David in many ways is THE quintessential Old Testament character. Moses was slightly more important. Abraham was the first to follow God. But David was the leader who really captured the imaginations of the Jewish people.

David lived 1,000 years before Jesus. Yet even in Jesus' time, the people were longing for a new David, a son of David, a warrior king like David to arise again.

We don't have anything comparable in our culture. Americans don't look back 1,000 or so years into the past longing for the return of an ancient leader. We don't hope for a new William the Conqueror from 1066 AD. We don't pray for God to send a new leader like Charlemagne from the year 800 AD.

But in Jesus' time, the Jewish people were hoping, were longing, were praying for a new King like David to arise among them. They were longing for a Messiah to fill David's shoes and carry out a similar mission.

And even in our time, it's fascinating that on the national flag of Israel, the symbol smack-dab in the middle of the flag is called the Star of David. The Jewish people have only been using that symbol for a couple centuries as a symbol of their identity. It does not stretch back to the time of David himself—it's far newer than that. But it still carries the name of David. 3,000 years later, David is still of huge importance to his people.

So, what does our Old Testament lesson today tell us about David? We are introduced to David for the first time. And he's only mentioned at the end of our lesson.

So, if we're looking at what our OT lesson says explicitly, there's not very much about David. But if we dig a bit under the surface, there is a tremendously important message for us. But before we look at what the book of 1st Samuel has to say as it introduces David, I need to step back for a moment, and make a brief mention of two other important figures: Samuel and Saul.

Samuel is a hugely important figure in the Old Testament. He's a transitional figure. In some ways he is like the last of the Judges, that charismatic group of leaders that would arise from time to time to lead Israel, and then fade away again. On the other hand, Samuel could also be described as the first of the prophets, that group that would become so important in Israel. So Samuel is bridging the transition between the judges and the prophets, between one era in Israel's history and the next.

And the key marker for this new era is the rise of monarchy. We heard all about this in our OT lesson last week. The Jewish people are clamoring for a monarch.¹ Why? They want to keep up with the Joneses. They want to be like everyone else. "All the other nations have kings. Why can't we?"

Samuel views this as a negative. He says that God is king, and the people should be satisfied with that. But they keep begging for a king. Samuel then warns the people that kings will do negative things—a king will tax you, and draft people into his army, and seize the best of your lands for himself.²

But the people are undeterred. They want a king. So eventually God says to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and set a king over them."³

And so Samuel anoints Saul as the first King of Israel. Saul comes from a wealthy family. Saul is described in glowing terms:

"There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else."⁴

Saul is tall, handsome and rich. He seems like perfect king material. And things start off well with Saul as the new king.

But then things take a bad turn. Saul proves to be problematic in several ways. And so God tells Samuel to anoint a new king who will succeed Saul. That's where our lesson begins today.

We start with the statement, "the Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel."⁵ And God himself says point blank, "I have rejected Saul from being king over Israel."⁶

So God instructs Samuel to grab his oil for anointing. And he sends Samuel off on a pretty specific mission. God says, "I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."⁷

¹ see 1Sam 8

² see 1Sam 8:11-18

³ 1Sam 8:22

⁴ 1Sam 9:2

⁵ 1Sam 15:35

⁶ 1Sam 16:1

⁷ *ibid.*

So Samuel knows where to go: Bethlehem.

Samuel knows who to go to: Jesse.

BUT, Samuel is not told specifically which of Jesse's sons is supposed to be king.

A couple of things here. Unlike Saul's father, Jesse is not wealthy. Jesse comes from Bethlehem, a little village. He's a little fish in a little pond. Yet one of his sons is supposed to become the new king.

So Jesse parades his sons in front of Samuel. Samuel is impressed by what he sees.

But each time, Samuel receives a message that each of these sons is not supposed to be the future king. At one point God says explicitly, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."⁸

Seven of Jesse's sons pass in front of Samuel. And Samuel is told, "No," seven times by God.

So Samuel asks if there is another. Jesse says that the youngest son is out in the fields caring for the sheep. Samuel says to summon him. And when David makes his first appearance in scripture, God says to Samuel, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."⁹

And so Samuel anoints young David to be the next king of Israel.

This is not the first time in scripture that a younger son has been chosen over his older brothers.

Abraham's younger son Isaac is chosen instead of his older half-brother, Ishmael.

Isaac's younger son Jacob is chosen instead of his older twin-brother, Esau.

Jacob's second-youngest son, Joseph, is chosen instead of his ten older brothers.

In a society where being the oldest carries extra privileges, God turns things upside down over and over again by choosing the younger over the older. As God says to Samuel, "The Lord does not see as mortals see... Lord looks on the heart."

And David is described in scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament as a "man after God's own heart."¹⁰

⁸ 1Sam 16:6

⁹ 1Sam 16:12

¹⁰ 1Sam 13:14 , Acts 13:22

WE don't know anything about David yet, other than the fact that he's Jesse's youngest son. But God knows his heart. And later we will learn that David indeed has a strong desire in his heart to follow God, come what may.

King Saul was rich, tall, and handsome. Yet things turned out badly with him.

King David will have a heart for God, and in spite of many mistakes and missteps, he will become the greatest king, the quintessential king in the history of the Jewish people.

Now, it just so happens that David is also described as being handsome. But that's not what's crucial about him. God judges according to the heart. And David has a heart for God. That's what's most important about David.

Now, we live in a culture that is very influenced by outward factors. We judge people based on their status or their appearance, on their power or their wealth. Style is often more important than substance.

But God judges according to what on the inside. The heart counts for far more with God than any of these external factors.

We can easily get seduced by external factors, by labels, by brand names, by appearance, by media image.

But God looks to the heart, God sees who we are in our souls. And if we're God's followers, if we seek to be God's people, then that presents us with a challenge. We too must look to what's in the heart. We must seek to learn to see as God sees. We must learn to value the things God values.

This will undoubtedly put us out of sync with much that is valued in our culture. Our culture might say, "You'd *Better Call Saul*." He's the one who's got it together. By all outward appearances, he's the best.

But from God's point of view, it's what's on the inside that counts the most.

Our culture sends us lots of messages about how to take care of our outward appearance. Clothes. Grooming products. Cosmetics. Exercise. Nothing wrong with that.

But what counts the most is what's on the inside. How close are we to God? How do we seek to follow him? How do we live our lives according to his standards?

How much time do we spend in prayer? In Bible reading? In service to others? How can we grow more in faith? In love? In joy?

When it comes to the spiritual life, it's not about externals. What God truly wants is your heart.