

What Matters to God

I Samuel 16:1-13

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As the presidential primary season gets closer to a termination point, what would happen if all of the sudden a new candidate emerged into the campaign? He never attended college, he's a bit homely, he's already lost an election to the U.S. Senate. His party has never won a presidential election. How absurd to think such an individual could be elected President in 2008! Of course the candidate is Abraham Lincoln, but the odds of Lincoln being elected in our day and age are very slim. He's just not right for television and he didn't attend the right schools.

One of the lessons that we learn from the scriptures is that our ways or priorities are not necessarily God's ways or priorities. God chooses leaders on the basis of what is best for His kingdom purposes not simply the moment.

Today we will take a scriptural look at how God chooses leaders. Perhaps if you are a recent graduate this will be an encouraging and inspirational word from the Lord for you. For God undoubtedly has plans for you. The key is knowing that and then living in such a way as to be open to His leading. This is not only true for recent graduates; this is true for all of us.

As you recall our scripture lesson for this morning, you'll note that when the prophet Samuel went to the house of Jesse to anoint a new King for Israel, he had certain characteristics in mind for what that new King would be like. When Samuel meets Jesse's sons, he is especially impressed with Eliab, the oldest son. He assumes that this firstborn, who is also striking in appearance, will make the ideal King for Israel. Yahweh immediately tells Samuel that this young man is not to become King and that Samuel should not be unduly influenced by external features, such as Eliab's handsome appearance.

So what we learn is that God does not judge on the basis of outward appearances. Do you think that God's advice to Samuel may speak to some would-be-Samuels in contemporary society?

Consider the following: "This year, *Fitness Magazine* did a poll about what drastic steps women would be willing to do to hit their 'ideal' weight. Nearly one quarter (23%) would spend a week in jail; 23% would shave their head; 22% would wear a bikini on TV; and 21% would trade 10 years of life. Most of these women polled, 85% would rather have an extra toe than 50 extra pounds. Why is this? Because we want to have a good appearance, and we are a society that preaches you have to be thin to look good."

Clothing manufacturers do a large percentage of their business on the basis of changing fashions, because something was popular once doesn't mean it is "in" today. You perhaps remember when men wore leisure suits, or neckties were narrow or very wide based on the trend of the day. All of this plays into the fact that we're influenced by outward appearance in many aspects of life.

The God of the Bible, however, was not concerned about outward appearances or what others think or the fashion trends of a particular era. Jesus, you recall, spent time with a wee little man named Zacchaeus. The same Jesus found himself comfortable with those who had leprosy, with those who according to the society of his day were untouchable. Note how the prophet describes the very same Jesus whose mission was not to be on the cover of *GQ* but to save sinners, to save us. Isaiah 53:2-3, "He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not."

Enter David. He's not one of the sons passed by the gaze of Samuel awaiting a bid for coronation, instead he is out in the fields tending sheep, and they smell. Sheep may look cute as can be, but David must have smelled from the sheep and being out in the fields. Yet David is

called in from the fields. Samuel gets the nod from God and in verse 13 he is anointed with oil, a symbol that the spirit of the Lord is upon him, and that he will be King. Gosh, he's only a shepherd, the youngest of the brothers; surely he did not graduate from Jerusalem University with a degree in administration. So why did God choose him?

There are many clues throughout scriptures, but let me point you to Psalm 57:7. David said, "My heart is fixed, oh God, my heart is fixed." Which means what? It means that God saw in David a commitment of his life and will to his plan. It was a heartfelt commitment. God looks at the heart of an individual, not simply the outward appearance. Note the powerful words of verse 7 again, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

So where is the wisdom in that statement for us? If God examines us by the condition of our heart, what does that really mean? Basically, I believe it happens when we become honest with God, warts and bruises, sins and failures and treat God as family, as our parent vs. as a guest. Here's what I mean by that.

When we go to someone's home for the first time, we ring the door bell, go into the living room and are afforded tea and cookies, sit on the good furniture and the best foot is put forward by the host. After we leave you can bet that everyone isn't hanging out in the formal living room, they have quickly migrated to the family room. It is there that the social barriers come down and life happens. I suspect a measure of growth in relationship with that individual you first met, is when you take them to the family room where there is a lack of pretense. That is what God desires of us, a lack of pretense.

So what were the characteristics God was looking for in David that he is also seeking in us? David loved the Lord and he loved God's word. Psalm 119 is the longest of all the Psalms and throughout the entire Psalm David speaks of his love and dedication to the scriptures. Listen to his words from verse 137-138, "Righteous are you, O Lord and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous, they are fully trustworthy."

What also matters very much to God is spiritual character which includes the ability to trust God fully. Shortly, David a mere shepherd boy would take on Goliath, the Philistine giant. His slingshot was not a cannon, it was a slingshot, but his faith in the Lord was so great that a slingshot was all that was required to win the day. David also knew how to care for others; his friendship with Jonathan is an exceptional example of fidelity and trust. David as you know was not without sin, his adultery with Bathsheba cost him dearly, yet he was an individual of repentance and confession. Was God disappointed in his action? Surely, but David did not exhibit a hardness of heart, rather a spirit of contrition and as a result God would use David for his kingdom purposes, thus becoming known as, "The man after God's own heart."

Salvation in Christ is all about a perfect Christ entering an imperfect world, an imperfect us, so that we might be perfect before God. Spiritual character happens when we internalize that truth and build on it.

Finally know this, that if you endeavor in your life to do first and foremost what matters to God, you'll face opposition; you will stand out from the crowd. David faced it in the next chapter, I Samuel 17:28, "His brother Eliab was jealous of him and as David was answering God's call to defeat the Philistine, Eliab told him to go back to his sheep. Saul spent his final years trying to have David killed because of his envy of David as a person and his relationship to the Lord.

So in summary let me ask you, does what matters in life to you coincide with the things that matter to God? That is a huge question. If your answer is, "I don't know, I am not sure," look again at the example of David. He loved the Lord and he loved the Lord's word, the Bible. He invested more of his trust in the Lord than himself. And when the world would have him compromise himself, he chose the path of faithfulness over convenience.

Each day we are writing our own autobiography. How many pages of our lives will reflect what really matters, what really matters to God? Are we leading or being led by the Lord?