

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“An Unlikely Choice”
II Corinthians 5:11-15
I Samuel 16:1, 4-13**

**Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 8, 2018**

II Corinthians 5:11-15

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

I Samuel 16:1, 4-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."

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?" And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

"An Unlikely Choice"

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

After demanding a king from God, the Israelites received just what they wanted in a man named Saul. I Samuel 9 describes him as a descendent of Benjamin, who was very handsome and very tall. A man who truly looked the part. Saul would later be anointed king of Israel and would lead God's people in military campaigns against the Philistines. The era of the Judges faded away and Samuel transitioned to the role of Prophet. Saul would judge and rule over Israel,

and Samuel would advise him and speak for God. For about twenty-five years God used Saul to bring victory to Israel and glory to his name. But there came a time in Israel's history when Saul would be rejected by God.

In chapter fifteen, God tells Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites, one of the most savage enemies of Israel. Saul was victorious in his campaign against the Amalekites, but when he saw the wealth and power of those peoples, he thought to himself, "How grand would it be to bring this mighty king into my city in chains and rags? How wonderful would it be to add all their economic strength to mine?" And so he chose to disobey God's commands. Instead of destroying the Amalekites, he paraded their wealth. Only the unwanted things were destroyed: the things that didn't look good or didn't add to Saul's glory. Unfortunately, you can't just ignore God's commands. Especially not for your own glory and pride. So God says to Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments."

Some see this conversation between Samuel and God and jump to the conclusion that God can and does turn from those who disobey him. We have to be careful about jumping to such conclusions. Remember, God is talking to Samuel, a mortal man with all the limitations that come with being human. Samuel is not omniscience. His prophecies are limited to what God reveals to him. God, on the other hand, is all-knowing and God's plan from the very beginning was to have a king over Israel of his own choosing and from the tribe of Judah. When God tells Samuel he regrets making Saul king, God is speaking in terms that Samuel understands. From Samuel's perspective it looks like God is changing his mind or regretting a previous action. But from the grander cosmological perspective—or God's perspective—this is all just part of a long and detailed plan of salvation not only for Israel but for the whole world. For the Messiah is to come from the tribe of Judah.

Having said that, we cannot ignore or downplay the severity of disobeying God. Saul chose to disrespect God's directions. He is at fault for that disobedience. Because of Christ, today God doesn't demand the annihilation of our enemies, but he does demand a lifestyle and worldview that is pleasing to and guided by him. When you dedicate your life to God it means you are accountable to him for your actions. Even the elect are capable of tripping and they, too, must answer to God. In the case of King Saul, God used him for a long time, but remember, he was not God's ideal leader. Saul was the king the people demanded from God who he put in place to teach Israel a lesson. Saul was striking and tall, just like their neighboring kings. And just like their neighbors, both Saul and Israel were blinded by their lusts and greed. God demands total allegiance, the Second Commandment makes that clear. To break that commandment at a personal or national level is to be guilty of denying God's sovereign authority. And both Saul and Israel would reap the harvest of such disobedience.

So while Saul still sat upon the throne of Israel, God told Samuel "Fill your horn with oil and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." I love the reasoning God gives to Samuel. *I have provided for myself a king*. God is providing a new king not for the people's vanity, but for his glory. Saul was provided for Israel's arrogance and eventual dismay. In David, God's name will be glorified first. Certainly that is true when

you look down the pages of history to David's descendent Jesus, who sits upon the throne of glory to this day. But even in his earthly ministry, David brought more glory to God's name than did Saul. Was he perfect? By no means. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint the new king of Israel. Already Saul has made an infamous name for himself. When Samuel arrives, the elders of the city come to him *trembling*, asking him, "Do you come in peace?" The elders were afraid of Saul. They feared that Samuel was coming to bring news of destruction upon them. But Samuel quells their fears and tells them he came to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. One of Samuel's roles as prophet was to ride a circuit of cities and offer sacrifices to the Lord in those places on their behalf. So this was not an unusual request. What is interesting to note is that God directs Samuel to keep his true mission a secret. Samuel never lies to Jesse. But God does want him to keep hidden the fact that one of Jesse's sons will be anointed king that night. The reason for this is known only to God, but may well include the simple fact that people are vainglorious and may try to sway others with fancy feasts and well-polished looks. But not here. God wanted Samuel to see Jesse's sons in a sacred moment.

Isn't that a lesson we can all take home? How often do we try to impress God? What if all God wants to do is see how we act in sacred moments? Not adorned in pomp and ceremony, but standing before him in prayer and reverence. If Jesse knew Samuel was coming to choose a son to sit the throne, then he would pull all the stops to try and impress the Prophet. That's not what God wanted. So he tells them he's come to sacrifice, which he does, and during that ritual he takes the time to look over Jesse's sons, listening to God's guidance.

So, one by one, Samuel surveys Jesse's sons. The first born is Eliab and as the Prophet takes in the young man's good looks and broad shoulders, he thinks to himself, "This must be God's new king!" But he hears the voice of the Lord tell him, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Don't judge a book by its cover. The flashy, the ornate, the intricate might contain something bland or wicked. What appears attractive to human eyes might be filthy to God's. Eliab looked like a king! But God said, "Not him." Samuel looked at the other sons of Jesse. Abinadab, Shammah, Nethanel, Raddai, and Ozem. One by one Samuel saw their outward appearance and one by one God said, "Not him."

By this point Samuel is a little frustrated. So much so that he reveals to Jesse his true purpose for his visit and tells him that the Lord has not chosen any of the sons he has seen. "Are all your sons here?" asks the Prophet. "Well, there is one more, the youngest. But he's out in the fields tending the flocks." "Woah," says Samuel, "you've got to get him here or we can't sit to supper. God wants me to look at *all* your sons, and while the youngest may have the least honor in *our* sight, God sees beyond our range of vision." So Jesse complies and sends for his youngest son, David. Samuel, who is only able to see the outward appearances, describes David as ruddy, bright-eyed, and handsome. Upon first sight, God tells Samuel, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he."

Why is this flushed, handsome young man such a surprising choice? The lesson of this story hinges on the initial rebuke given to Samuel. "Man looks on the outward appearance, but

the Lord looks on the heart.” This was Israel’s problem the whole time. They were too distracted by the outward appearances of other kings that they forgot about the only true way to get the measure of a man, and that’s by looking at his heart. And the only person who is capable of looking into the heart, deeply reading it and knowing it, is the Sovereign God, whom the Israelites rejected in favor of human strength and human beauty. David was the seventh son. Seventh sons don’t normally amount to anything. Between his brothers and nephews, David wouldn’t have inherited very much from Jesse. And he wasn’t as strikingly tall as Saul, for when he tries on the king’s armor, it’s way too big and heavy for him. David was the last person on Israel’s mind as a future king.

God isn’t looking at your appearance. God isn’t looking at your height or your weight. God isn’t looking at how fast you walk or how slow you talk. God is looking at your heart. God knows your heart. So in this room there are only two people who truly know you. Yourself and God. That does two things for me. First, it gets my attention. If God knows what is in my heart, that means I need to make sure I am right with him. My attention is not on what society thinks. My attention is on what God thinks. And God reveals what is important to him in Scripture. My responsibility is to turn to the Word and conform my life to what God says in there. And second, it gives me comfort. While I try my hardest to live out what is in my heart, I know there is no way that any of you can truly and fully know me. And likewise in reverse, I can never truly and fully know you. But God can. And God does know us. He knows what brings us joy and what brings us despair. He knows the secret things that haunt our dreams. He knows the burdens and the pains that each of us suffers. And God still cares. He still calls us because we are his children. David was not a perfect king. He sinned before God. We sin before God. But because God has chosen you, he will not reject you. By knowing the hearts of believers, God imbeds himself through the Holy Spirit. With such an intimate knowledge of the heart, God is able to guide not only the heart, but the mind and body as well. Friends remember, God uses the most unlikely of people to impact this world in the greatest of ways.

Let us pray. Omnipotent and Omniscient God, we stand before you in humility and fear. You are our Sovereign, and too often we disobey you. Turn our hearts away from a love of sinning; keep us from vanity and jealousy. You know our hearts. And we know that a broken and contrite heart is pleasing to you. Make within us a renewed spirit that loves to obey you. Remind us that you do not call the equipped, but rather equip the called. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.