

“GOD LOOKS ON THE HEART”

I. Introduction

- A. This chapter introduces us to one of the most important human characters in all of Scripture: Jesse’s youngest son, David, the king of Israel.
1. It is worth noting that the Bible only speaks of David in relation to his office as king.
 2. As one book puts it, “everything we know about David, we know about him *as king*. One could say Scripture has no interest in David outside of his being king. All the personal and intimate knowledge we have of David is given so that we might know him as king, so that we might better grasp the office of king in God’s plan of redemption in Christ.” [Brown and Keele, *Sacred Bond*, 123]
 3. And another writer explains the centrality of kingship to God’s plan by saying this: “The Davidic king would be the expression of God’s theocratic rule in Israel... God’s creational purpose to establish his kingdom with his image-bearer exercising dominion now reaches a new stage in its progressive accomplishment.” [Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 95]
 4. David was not Israel’s first king, but unlike Saul he was not like the kings of the nations.
 5. Though he was far from perfect, he stands as the paradigmatic king in God’s plan of redemption.
- B. First Samuel 16 tells us about David’s initial anointing to the office of king, an anointing that was performed by Samuel.
1. While there are two distinct parts to this chapter, they are intimately related to each other.

2. One indication of this is that both of the stories told in these sections are framed by key words and phrases.
3. The story of David's anointing is framed by the reference to the horn filled with oil, which is mentioned in verses 1 and 13.
4. The story of Saul's decline is framed by mention of a spirit departing from him, which is mentioned in verses 14 and 23.
5. These stories are then connected to each other by the fact that the verse that speaks of the Spirit rushing upon David is immediately followed by a verse that speaks of the Spirit departing from Saul.
6. And then there is the fact that the affliction that comes upon Saul as a result of God's rejection of him directly results in David gaining entrance into the royal household.
7. All of this makes it clear that this chapter is about the rise of God's chosen king and the simultaneous decline of God's rejected king.

II. The Chosen One

- A. We see in verse 1 that this chapter begins right where the previous chapter left off: with Samuel grieving over Saul.
 1. The Lord tells Samuel that it is time to move on and go to Bethlehem to anoint a new king.
 2. It is easy to understand Samuel's fearful response to these instructions.
 3. Saul has already shown signs of a homicidal megalomania that will only get worse.
 4. If he was willing to put his own son to death in order to save face after his rash vow, it is highly likely that he would be willing to put the Lord's prophet to death for anointing a new king.

5. Nevertheless, the Lord assures Samuel that he is not sending him on a suicide mission.
 6. He tells him to take a heifer to offer as a sacrifice, which was not altogether out of the ordinary in the days before Israel had a central sanctuary.
 7. The anointing will take place within the context of a sacrificial feast, a feast to which one particular family will be invited.
 8. This ensures that this anointing will be a private affair, just like when Saul was anointed.
- B. When the elders of Bethlehem hear that Samuel has arrived in their midst, they come trembling before him.
1. This is understandable in light of what Samuel he did to Agag in the previous chapter.
 2. Samuel was not a man to be trifled with.
 3. He was an imposing figure.
 4. Think of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*.
- C. Samuel sets the elders at ease by telling them that he has come peaceably, then he consecrates Jesse and his sons for the sacrifice.
1. It was a big deal for Samuel to invite Jesse and his family to this sacrificial feast.
 2. Samuel was the prophet of the Lord, the most important religious figure in Israel.
 3. The sacrifice that Samuel was planning would have required a significant amount of preparation.
 4. If we think of all that goes into the preparation of a Thanksgiving dinner for a large family, we get a sense of what this would have

been like for Jesse's family.

- D. When the feast begins, Samuel's attention is caught by Jesse's son Eliab, who seems to have all the outward qualities that would be desirable in a king.
1. This reminds us of the account of Saul's anointing back in chapter 9.
 2. Saul was described as the tallest and most handsome man in Israel.
 3. When Samuel presented Saul to the people he said, "There is none like him among all the people."
 4. It is interesting that Samuel is still drawn to that which is outwardly impressive, even though he has seen how Saul's inward failings led to his rejection as king.
 5. The fact that it is Eliab who attracts Samuel's attention shows us that we all tend to be impressed by what our eyes tell us.
 6. We are inclined to evaluate people and things on outward appearances.
 7. This is why we always need to remind ourselves that looks can be deceiving.
 8. As the saying goes, not all that glitters is gold.
- E. God responds to Samuel's observations about Eliab by saying, "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."
1. God does not make his assessments on the same grounds that we typically make our assessments.

2. God looks inwardly on the heart, not merely on what can be seen on the outside.
 3. God is not concerned with the image that a person projects but with their inner character.
 4. God often chooses to work through that which is outwardly unimpressive.
 5. Jesus was not outwardly impressive, but he is the one and only Savior.
 6. The ordinary means of grace are not outwardly impressive, but they are the means that God has appointed for the building of his kingdom.
- F. Seven of Jesse's sons passed by Samuel, but the Lord made it clear that none of them was the one he had chosen.
1. When Samuel asked Jesse if he had any other sons, Jesse said that the only one left was the youngest, who was out keeping the sheep.
 2. David was so insignificant that he was not even invited to the sacrificial feast.
 3. This is underscored by the way his appearance is described.
 4. He is said to be ruddy and handsome.
 5. The word "ruddy" refers to dark or reddish skin, the skin of someone who spends a lot of time outside.
 6. While tanned skin is desirable in our culture, this was not necessarily the case in the ancient world.
 7. Having darker skin was an indication that you spent a lot of time doing manual labor.

8. It was not a sign of nobility.
 9. David may have been ruggedly handsome, but this was not a quality that was highly esteemed in the ancient world.
- G. While tending sheep was not a glamorous occupation, it is interesting that it was frequently used in the ancient world as a metaphor to describe the office of king.
1. Even after he becomes king, David is often described as the shepherd of God's flock.
 2. And of course God himself is depicted as the faithful shepherd of his people.
 3. This is a fitting metaphor, because it reminds us that a good king cares for those who are under his rule, just as a shepherd watches over his flock.
- H. When Samuel anointed David, the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him.
1. This is the reality that is signified by the act of anointing.
 2. The Lord's anointed is the one who is empowered by the Holy Spirit for the task to which he has been called.
 3. The Hebrew title 'Messiah', which is translated in the Greek as 'Christ', means 'Anointed One.'
 4. Jesus is the supreme anointed of the Lord, the One upon whom the Spirit came to empower him to fulfill his mediatorial office as Prophet, Priest, and King.
 5. We should also note that the name 'Christian' is derived from the title 'Christ.'
 6. In Christ we too are anointed with the Spirit so that we can fulfill the task to which the Lord calls us.

7. Listen to how this is expressed the Heidelberg Catechism: "I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in His anointing, so that I may as prophet confess His Name, as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, and as king fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and hereafter reign with Him eternally over all creatures." [HC 32]

III. The Rejected One

- A. After relating how the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David at his anointing, the text goes on to tell us that the same Spirit departed from Saul.
 1. Not only that, but an evil spirit from the Lord came and tormented Saul.
 2. While it may seem strange that an evil spirit would come from the Lord, this is only expressing the fact that God is the primary cause of all things.
 3. This does not mean that God is the author of evil.
 4. Secondary causes are real and secondary agents are responsible for their actions, even though they always operate under divine sovereignty.
 5. The evil spirit was the source of Saul's afflictions, but God was sovereign over this spirit in the same way that he was sovereign over Satan when he wanted to afflict Job.
- B. We do not know the exact nature of the torments that Saul experienced at the hands of this evil spirit, but the behavior that he exhibits bears some similarities to that of people suffering from forms of mental illness.
 1. In Saul's case, this was not just a matter of brain chemistry but of a malevolent spiritual influence.
 2. Consider the tragic nature of Saul's downward spiral.

3. His refusal to listen to the words of the Lord constituted a rejection of the Lord himself.
 4. His rejection of the Lord led to the Lord's rejection of him.
 5. And the Lord's rejection of him resulted in his being exposed to the torments of this evil spirit.
 6. Saul's sad fate serves as a warning of what will eventually happen to all of those who persist in rejecting the Lord.
- C. We should also note how Saul's decline paved the way for David's arrival in the royal court.
1. Though Saul does not know it yet, David is being groomed to replace him.
 2. Surprisingly, David already has a good reputation among Saul's servants.
 3. Listen to how David is described by the young man who recommends that he play the lyre for Saul: "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him."
 4. Even though David is only a shepherd, some people are already seeing his kingly qualities.
 5. Moreover, in the Lord's providence, David's time of service in Saul's court provided the opportunity for him to learn things that would prepare him to serve as Israel's king.
 6. David would also be in a position where people could begin to take notice of him, especially when his noble character stood in such sharp contrast to Saul's increasingly unstable character
 7. As one commentator puts it, "The chapter ends with a gifted young man, Israel's future king, coming to serve a rejected and dejected

ruler who is totally unaware of the implications of his welcoming David into his court." [Youngblood, 174]

- D. That being said, we should note that David did not grasp at the throne.
 - 1. He did not try to supplant Saul.
 - 2. He brought relief to Saul and was even loved by Saul, and in this way he served both the king and the covenant people.
 - 3. David's path to the throne was the way of humility and service.
 - 4. This was a typological foreshadowing of Christ.
 - 5. As Jesus said, he did not come to be served but to serve and to offer his life as a ransom for many.

IV. Conclusion

- A. When the people of Israel demanded a king like the nations, they got Saul.
- B. When Saul was rejected by the Lord, God gave his people a better king, a king who was not noteworthy because of his outward appearance but because of his heart.
- C. To be sure, David was a sinful man like you and me.
- D. He had many flaws and he failed in many ways.
- E. But he had a renewed heart, a heart that wanted to please God.
- F. For this reason, this ruddy young shepherd stands as a picture, albeit imperfect and shadowy, of the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep.