

## Hearts Trained by the Ordinary

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Today we begin a sermon series on the life of David. There are a lot of reasons for studying the life of David. One of the most obvious reasons is because the Scriptures give more space to describing the life of David more than anybody except Jesus Himself. The accounts of David are found in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. But once David is introduced, his life really dominates the Old Testament. David's name is mentioned more than 600 times in the OT and more than 60 times in the NT (Peterson, p. 24). David's life really can't be ignored if you're going to understand the message of the Bible.

But one of the most intriguing observations that has been made about David's life is that his story contains no miracles. There are no healings, no appearances of God from heaven, no food or drink supernaturally supplied. God certainly spoke to people, and God was at work everywhere. But the accounts of David's life are marked by the ordinary. David exhibits what Eugene Peterson calls "earthy spirituality" (p. 10).

In many ways, that exactly what we need to recover in our day. We need to understand what spirituality looks like in the context of ordinary circumstances: growing up in a less-than-perfect family, doing jobs that we don't particularly find fulfilling, dealing with friends who disappoint us, negotiating the difficulties of marriage and parenting, etc. In other words, we need a type of spirituality in which we can experience God in the midst of everyday, ordinary circumstances.

So many times we think that the ordinary is the problem. If only we didn't have to deal with so many mundane, ordinary circumstances that we'd have time and energy to seek and experience God. Consequently, we refuse to live the life that we've been given. But David's life makes clear that a relationship with God gives significance to the ordinary, mundane roles and responsibilities of life. Nowhere is this point more obvious than the very first passage in which David is introduced: 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Even though David was living in obscurity (probably in his late teens), God chose him as someone whose heart was fit to be king of Israel. And his heart was trained by the ordinary. As we turn to 1 Samuel 16, I'd like to make a couple points of context.

***First, Israel's Rejection of God as King.*** God's "plan A" was never for Israel to have an earthly king. Israel was to be unique among the nations. Instead of an earthly king who lived in a big palace, levied taxes, raised armies, and demanded absolute loyalty, ***God*** would be Israel's king. They had human leadership, but God was their King who directed the whole nation.

But that organizational setup demanded much more faith than the people had. They looked around at the other nations and concluded that they needed an earthly king like everybody else. God was great at being the invisible power behind everything, but they wanted a physical, human king. So they basically fired God as king and demanded an earthly king. This is what God told the people through Samuel the prophet (1 Samuel 8:7):

7 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

Amazingly, God gave them what they demanded. God warned them that there would be all sorts of unintended consequences that would prove over and over again that God was a better King than any man. But God said, "Okay. I'll give you a king." That first king was a man named Saul of the tribe of Benjamin.

***Second, God's Rejection of Saul as Israel's first king.*** Saul began his kingship well. But after two years (13:1), Saul violated his calling as king by offering sacrifices that only Samuel was authorized to offer. Here is Samuel's pronouncement in 1 Samuel 13:13-14:

13 Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

And so God rejected Saul as Israel's first king. God reveals the criterion for Israel's second king: God would seek out "a man after His own heart." The heart is the command and control center of the person. "Heart" is an overarching term that includes the mind, the will, and the spirit. We think with our hearts; we speak from that which fills the heart; we *live* from our hearts. A king "after God's own heart" would rule Israel the way God had ruled Israel. That king would think God's thoughts, speak God's truth, and do God's will. They had rejected God from being their King, so the next best thing would be a king after God's own heart.

***David, a man after God's own heart, is chosen as king of Israel. (1 Samuel 16:1-13)*** With this context, let's consider 1 Samuel 16 which records how God identified David as the next king.

1 Now 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 selected a king for Myself among his sons."

When Samuel heard this instruction from God to go anoint a replacement for Saul as king, he immediately thought about how Saul would react.

2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of 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 "And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you."

The Lord told Samuel that he didn't need to tell Saul the "whole truth" – just that he was going to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice. That would make sense to Saul since offering sacrifices was one of the main things prophets did in that day. When Samuel went to Bethlehem, he was to

invite a man named Jesse to attend the sacrifice. With Jesse (and his sons) in attendance, God would designate the next king of Israel. [There's a contrast here between the appointment of Saul in which God told Samuel to "appoint them a king" (8:22) and David in which God says "anoint for Me" a king.]

4 So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" 5 And he said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.

[That the elders of Bethlehem were fearful is understanding; a chapter earlier we have recorded that Samuel executed Agag, king of the Amalekites, because Saul hadn't. The elders wanted to know if he came in peace. Samuel calmed their fears by explaining that he was going to offer a sacrifice. When the elders, Jesse, and his sons were consecrated they all gathered for the sacrifice.]

The stage is set for God to reveal to Samuel the next king of Israel. What happens next is really fascinating. What we learn in this process can radically alter the way we think about ourselves and about our relationship with God. Each of Jesse's son's passes in front of Samuel so that he can discern which one God had chosen as Israel's next king.

6 Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him."

It was the most natural thing in the world to assume that the tallest, strongest, most attractive person would be the next king. We learned in chapter 9 that Saul was "a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people" (9:2). When Samuel saw Jesse's oldest boy, Eliab, he thought for sure that he was "the Lord's anointed."

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Samuel then remembered that God "sought out for Himself a man after His own heart" (13:14). What really mattered was not outward appearance, but the heart. What really mattered was the "command and control center" of his life – the unseen part of his life that included his thoughts, his will, his motives. Years later another prophet, Hanani, would remind King Asa (2 Chr. 16:9):

9 "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. . .

God wanted a king whose heart was completely His (see also 1 Chronicles 28:9). He wanted king who thought like He thought, felt like He felt, and who therefore ruled Israel like He had ruled Israel. God wasn't impressed by outward appearance. He looks at the heart.

As an aside, I suspect that almost everybody here today would agree that God cares most about the heart. But one of the great challenges of this life is to live in light of that truth. If you really believe that God looks at the heart, two things will be true. First, the deepest concern of your life will be your own heart. The primary ambition of your life will be to have a heart that is fully God's; everything else will be secondary. Second, like God you will care less about others' appearance and more about their hearts. That will revolutionize the way you treat people. This is best learned young; it's harder when you get old.

Back to 1 Samuel 16 . . . . After God made clear that Eliab wasn't His choice of king, we read:

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 9 Next 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. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these."

This had to be confusing to Samuel because he had clearly been told that one of Jesse's sons would be king. [1 Chronicles 2:15 lists David as Jesse's 7<sup>th</sup> son. Several ways to harmonize these two accounts are suggested. Most probable (in my mind) is that the Chronicler omitted one of David's older brothers in the genealogy, possibly because he didn't have children.]

11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

Jesse hadn't even invited his youngest son to be present when Samuel was picking Israel's next king. It honestly never occurred to him that his youngest son would be chosen. Jesse doesn't call him by name; he simply says, "There remains yet the youngest, and he's tending sheep." What could a shepherd boy possibly offer the nation of Israel (besides a shepherd's heart, Psalm 23, and skill at killing enemies). . .

12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

Interestingly, the author describes this youngest son's outward appearance: he was ruddy (which means red; maybe he was a redhead); he had beautiful eyes; and he had a "handsome appearance." We're actually told twice in this chapter that David was handsome (see also v. 18). Being handsome wasn't what qualified David to be king; but it didn't disqualify him either (which is good news). God said to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." This youngest son was God's choice for Israel's second king. God had sought out and found a young man with a heart after His own heart.

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

Whereas “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward,” we read in the next verse that “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul.” Even though David wouldn’t actually reign as king for more than a decade, the choice had been made. God had sought out and found a man after his own heart. As we look at the life of David over the next three months, we’ll see David’s heart on display in the things he said and did and in the psalms that flowed from his experiences. He sinned in spectacular ways, but we’ll also see that his heart was God’s.

David’s choice as Israel’s king *illustrates two truths* for us as we think about our own hearts.

This account illustrates first that ***God calls us to be people “after His own heart.”*** As in David’s day, God isn’t looking for the tallest or the strongest the most beautiful people. He is looking for people whose hearts are like His. And that’s essentially what God promises in the new covenant in Jesus’ blood. It’s promised differently in different passages. In Jeremiah 31 God promises that He will write His law on our hearts; in Ezekiel 36 God promises that He will remove our heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh (meaning that it’s pliable and moldable). God’s prerequisite for king of Israel is now the norm for every person who enters into the new covenant in Christ’s blood.

It’s possible that you have settled for something much less ambitious than being a man/woman/boy/girl after God’s own heart. It’s possible that you have bought the lie that your heart will never beat in unison with God’s heart. Maybe you think that you can’t ever really love the Lord your God with all your heart. In the new covenant in Christ’s blood this is our birthright; it’s not something for the elite or the few. We need to understand that we are called and empowered to be people after God’s own heart.

Do you realize that God wants your whole heart? And do you realize that paying attention to the condition of your heart should be the primary ambition of your life? You and I can do a lot of things in this world with hearts that are lukewarm toward God. But we won’t live out our calling unless we have hearts that are fully God’s.

David’s choice as king also illustrates, secondly, that ***God trains our hearts through “the ordinary.”*** When God sought out and found David, a young man after His own heart, he really didn’t have much of a resume. He hadn’t attended king school. His father sure didn’t think he was king material. All we know about David was that he was the youngest of 8 brothers, that he was skillful at playing the harp, and that he tended sheep. As his story unfolds, it becomes clear that those were the very roles that equipped him – equipped his heart really – to be used by God.

For example, the rest of chapter 16 records how David was selected to play the harp in Saul’s palace. When an evil spirit terrorized Saul, David would play his harp and Saul would “be well,” and the evil spirit would leave him. All those years of music lessons for David paid off! We’ll see next week in chapter 17 that David’s experience tending sheep was the main thing that qualified him to go up against Goliath. We’ll also see next week that David’s brothers belittled him as the youngest.

As best we can tell, David’s heart was trained through growing up in a family with seven older brothers, through tending sheep, and through music lessons. In other words, his heart was

trained through the ordinary roles and responsibilities of life. David's life isn't the rare exception; it's the norm. God gives us each a life and then train us through the ordinary roles and responsibilities of that life.

The tendency is to look at other people and think, "If I had their life, I'd be able to experience God better." But that's not true. God has given you a life that is uniquely suited to training your heart. Think of the toughest thing you're facing right now – the most difficult relationship or circumstances that you're facing. No doubt God wants to train your heart in the ways of patience, prayer, faith, and perseverance. He doesn't merely want you to endure that circumstance; He wants to train your heart *through* that circumstance.

Think of the most satisfying, fulfilling thing in your life right now. No doubt God wants to train your heart in the ways of gratitude and joyfulness. If we're attentive we'll see that God can train our hearts through the ordinary circumstances of our lives.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, consider the condition of your heart. Is your heart fully God's? If it's not, confess that to Him and invite Him to give you the desire to be wholeheartedly His. As well, consider the circumstances and the roles and responsibilities in which you find yourself. Ask God to show you how He wants to train your heart as you live this life He's given you. Through the new covenant in Jesus' blood, we can be people after God's own heart.

As the servers come forward, I would remind you that we practice open communion here at Faith. Regardless of your church background of affiliation, if you have entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus, we invite you to celebrate the Lord's Table with us. We ask you to hold the bread and then the cup until everybody has been served; then we'll eat and drink together.

If you haven't trusted in Jesus, simply let the bread and cup pass by; we don't want the Lord's Table to be an empty ritual for you. Take the time to consider that Jesus' death on the cross paid for your sins; consider the possibility of life through Him.