

27/4/14

GSM

1 Samuel 16:1-13

We're starting a new sermon series this morning – David: a man after God's heart - which will take us up to the summer holidays on the life of one of the key figures in the Christian faith, David, whose story is set out in the Old Testament part of the Bible. He is one of the central characters of the Old Testament, and he is the key figure in two books of the Old Testament, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, which is where most of our sermons will be taken from. But he has importance beyond those two chapters. David wrote many of the psalms in the Bible, and we'll be hearing sermons on two of those. But maybe his key significance in the Bible is the fact that he looks forward to Jesus. He does so because of a promise made by God to David in 2 Samuel 7: 12 and 13 which say:

“When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

This promise came true in Jesus. In the Christmas story an angel visits Mary to tell her that she will have a son and this is what the angel says – Luke 1:30-33:

"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called

the Son of the Most High. *The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*"

So, when you hear of David, remember that his story looks forward to the story of Jesus because of the promise that has been made. But more than that – look out in the sermons you're going to hear of echoes of the story of Jesus in the passages we will read about David. When you hear of a faithful king who desired to serve God, we might usefully think of Jesus. When we think of someone who faced a giant as a representative of his people and won a victory for them on their behalf, we might usefully think of Jesus on the cross. When we read this morning of someone who was not an obvious choice to lead his people, who did not come from a mighty background but became a mighty king, we might usefully think of Jesus.

Before [*name*] comes to read the passage, a bit of background. At this stage in the Old Testament, the people of Israel are a nation. They are God's people who have inherited the covenant given by God to Abraham that he would be their God. They are served by prophets, men to whom God speaks directly and who pass on his words to the Israelites. But they are a rebellious people. Rather than trusting in God to save them they want a king to lead them just like the nations around them. The prophet Samuel tries to persuade them that they do not need a king, but this is what it says in 1 Samuel 8:19,20:-

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

The people of Israel don't trust that God is enough. They want a king to lead them and protect them. God decides to give them a king, and a man called Saul is appointed, but he turns out to be a bad king, disobeying God. Samuel then comes to see Saul and tells him that another will take his place. This is what it says in 1 Samuel 13:13, 14:-

"You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

So as this morning's passage opens, it is a tense time in Israel. Saul knows that God's prophet has promised that someone will come to take his place, and does not want to give up his place as king. Now let's read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

*[read]*



When I was at school many years ago we used to spend most of our break times playing football or cricket in the school playground. The routine was always the same – whoever wanted to play would line up in a row. Two captains were picked usually on the grounds of skill, popularity, or who actually owned the ball that we were going to play with. Each one would take turns in picking teams. “I’ll have Fred”. “I’ll have Jim”. “I’ll have Tom”. And

so on. No-one ever really picked their mates to play on their side. No, what you wanted were the boys who were going to win the game for you. You wanted the best players, the best bowlers, the best batsmen, the best strikers, the best defenders. To the best of my knowledge I was never picked first. To the best of my knowledge I was never the last one left, the one who the team picking last had to have. The liability. The guy taking up space who would probably do more harm than good, who would get in the way, who would obstruct the view of the keeper or drop the catch. No-one wanted to be left last. It told you that no-one wanted you on their side.



I sometimes wonder if we were picking a team from the Good Shepherd Mission on spiritual rather than sporting grounds, who would get picked in what order. This morning's passage shows us that God's reasons for choosing people are very different from our own.

Now, consider, if you're involved in appointing a king who will lead your country into battle, what sort of person will you pick? Well, Samuel has a pretty good idea. He is told that the person that God has chosen will stand before him, and in steps the eldest son of Jesse, Eliab. Verse 6: "When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord". Why was this? Well, we're given clues in verse 7 – Samuel is looking at the appearance and height of Eliab. Here is a man who appears to command the area he is in. He looks the part. He is the sort of imposing figure that opposing armies will respect. He's the man you want leading you into battle. And more than that – he is the firstborn, a far more important position in those days than it is today. The firstborn inherited the family wealth, it fell to him to carry on the name and the honour of the family. Eliab from an early age would have been told that he was the special one, the one on whom the fortunes of the family would rest. He would therefore have been taught the importance of responsibility.

He would have been trained to lead and would naturally have assumed that when it came to taking on power and authority, it would be him that would be chosen.

But what happens? Jesse fields his top pick first. No, not chosen. Then the second – surely if there’s something wrong with the first then the second will be accepted? No. Seven brothers are shown to Samuel, and God does not choose any of them. Who is left? Only the youngest, the one looking after the sheep. He wasn’t even considered important enough to meet with Samuel in the first place. After all, what’s the point? He’s just the youngest – no one’s going to pick him. But, yes, David is the one that God has chosen. The shepherd boy. Not the natural leader, the person that might have been expected to be picked, but the person in charge of the smelly animals.

Why was David chosen and his brothers rejected? Verse 12 tells us that he was glowing with health and had a fine appearance – maybe he was more physically imposing than any of his brothers? No, that’s not why. After all, Samuel thought that the firstborn, Eliab, would be the chosen one because of his appearance but he is contradicted by God. Look with me at verse 7 again – “The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” Earlier in the book of 1 Samuel, the prophet Samuel explains to Saul that God had chosen another man to be king who was a man after God’s heart, and that is the title that we have chosen for this sermon series – “David – a man after God’s heart”. This passage shows just how important the heart is to God. God chooses David because of his heart and, having chosen him, he is anointed and then – look at verse 13 – “from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came on David in power”. God chooses, then God gives David the Holy Spirit. God does not ask David to trust in his own strength, but instead equips him with the Holy Spirit to be his guide and his helper.

What we see here is an upside-down, round-about kingdom. A God that does not choose the groomed leader to lead his people, but the person looking after the sheep at the back. A God that chooses the youngest, not the firstborn. A God that chooses on the basis of the heart, not

of the appearance or natural ability. Why? Well, we're given the answer in the New Testament. This is what it says in the book of Acts 13:22: "After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; *he will do everything I want him to do.*' God calls David a man after his own heart because of his *obedience*. Saul had been disobedient to God; he had not followed his instruction. What God prized was someone who was going to be obedient to his instruction. He did not need to have the power of a natural leader or king – God had the power to give David and he gave him that power in the shape of the Holy Spirit. God chooses, then equips.



What does this tell us about what qualities God looks for? What qualities we as Christian should look for in those that lead us? Here we find that Samuel, the prophet of God, got it wrong in assuming that the firstborn would be the one that God would choose to lead his people. Do we sometimes make the mistake of looking at people with the eyes of the world rather than the eyes of God?

Maybe sometimes we end up looking in the wrong direction. This is a picture of whale watchers off the coast of Ireland.



I can only assume that they'd hear the splash behind them and know that they had been looking in the wrong direction.

I thought I might contrast what people look for in different types of leaders. had a look online for what people demand in their leaders. This is taken from a well-known political blog called Iain Dale's diary in a piece called "The Ten Qualities of a Good Prime Minister";-



1. *Decisiveness*
2. *Conviction*
3. *Understanding the motivations of Middle England*
4. *Being a good negotiator*
5. *Being a good conciliator*
6. *Having a good TV presence*
7. *Being a good parliamentary performer*
8. *Having a thick skin*
9. *Being able to cut through civil service nonsense*
10. *Having a depth of knowledge outside politics.*

I would reckon that's a fairly accurate picture of what people want in a political leader. Someone of power and influence. What I find interesting in this passage this morning is that the leader of the people is not found hobnobbing with the important visitor, but out the back, tending the sheep. I wonder if we look out the back when selecting leaders, or we look at the people up front. God accepts all types of people into his family, but he does not command anyone to be successful or impressive-looking or with lots of personal skills. Yet often we can have a tendency to assume that if someone is those things then they are somehow more equipped to do God's work than the rest of us. I think if God was choosing people to lead then he would look out the back, to see who was tending his sheep. Because God does command us to carry each other's burdens, to weep with those who weep, to give spiritual direction and rebuke and to use our gifts to minister to God's family. God's leaders are those who are obedient to these commands.

If you have a look on the church website you will see a document setting out the qualities that this church expects of its leaders. This isn't a complete list, but the document states that the leaders must:-

- *serve as an overseer/shepherd of the GSM members*
- *hold fast to Biblical truth*
- *be self-controlled, hospitable, gentle not violent, avoid greed*



- *pursue Godly virtues and spiritual growth*
- *be motivated by bringing glory to God*

In short, our leaders must be obedient to God. Do you see how different those selection criteria are to those that people look for in political leaders?

So this passage should serve as an encouragement to those of you who serve faithfully in the background, looking after members of God's family in the same way that David would look after the sheep of his father Jesse. God does not look for upfront gifts or worldly success but looks for an obedient heart. We are most likely to find those who God would choose to lead out the back. Maybe they're leading the Sunday school groups, planting small seeds of truth in the lives of our children. Maybe they're in the entrance hall welcoming people in from the street. Maybe they're in your homes welcoming those who are friendless and homeless. And it is these people – it is you – that God equips to do his mighty work through his Holy Spirit.

But the essence of the Bible is that it isn't really at all a succession of different stories about different people, be they Abraham, Moses, David or any of the prophets. It's one story about one person, Jesus Christ. Paul writes in the New Testament book of Colossians 1:25-27:-

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which *is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Paul writes to the Colossian church that when God's word is presented in its fullness, then it contains a mystery unknown to those writing the Old Testament scriptures but now revealed as being "Christ in you, the hope of glory". So how can we see Christ in you, the hope of glory in this passage?

Well, remember that Jesus was a man in the line of David. And here we see that David looks forward to the person of Jesus. My belief is that when we see how David was selected – as a shepherd who was not someone who would naturally be selected – we are meant to look forward to Jesus. Because here's the thing – David was obedient to God at a time when it was a matter of life or death. Be obedient and live – be disobedient and die. This was the result of the Old Testament law – the penalty for disobeying the law was rejection by God, and only by his mercy did the people of Israel remain under his covenant despite their many rebellions. But still his people were called to obey as a matter of life or death.

But we are meant to look to the greater David who was also obedient, whose heart was so after God that he submitted to God in the Garden of Gethsemene at the cost not just of his life but his oneness with God. Jesus was also chosen by God to be a king. Jesus was also not someone who would stand out in a crowd. The Bible says that he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should want to be with him. In his life his own followers wondered if he could be the Christ because of where he came from, and he was rejected in his home town because they knew that this wasn't a king, this was Joseph the carpenter's son. The Jews at the time of Jesus also wanted a king to rescue them from their enemies but what they got was something that did not look much like a king. David was a shepherd out the back, Jesus was also a shepherd, but looked after a different sort of flock – he gathered to himself the poor, the dispossessed, the prostitutes, the despised, those who knew they weren't good enough for God. Like the whale watchers, the Jews ended up looking in the wrong direction and rejecting Jesus.

But here is where he differs from David – David was empowered with the Holy Spirit to win mighty victories for his people Israel, often at the risk of his life. Jesus had the Holy Spirit taken away from him at his moment of greatest suffering and won a mighty victory for God’s people not at the risk of his life, but at the cost of his life. And by his obedience we are saved from the consequences of our disobedience. I mentioned earlier that David wrote many of the psalms. One of them is psalm 22, which Jesus quoted from the cross and gives an indication as to what Jesus went through on the cross. Here is what it says:-

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. ... I am a worm, not a human being; I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people. ... Many bulls surround me; ... Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

That’s what Jesus went through for us. So this passage is not, in the end, about us having a good heart like David so that God will choose us. This passage is about the one who God chose, who had the best heart anyone has ever had and who obeyed all the way to death and abandonment by God, so that we can also be chosen by God, not to die and be abandoned, but to live eternal life and never be abandoned by God.

Jesus was also chosen by God and because his heart refused to turn away from God’s will, for us obedience to God is no longer a matter of life and death. Instead, it’s a matter of our life because of Jesus’s death. We are promised life as a result of Jesus taking the penalty for our rebellion against God. We’re called to obedience to God no longer to achieve our acceptance by God but as a matter of responding to what Jesus has achieved for us. David was under

the Old Testament law and for him his acceptance by God rested on his obedience to God. We are under New Testament grace and for us our acceptance by God rests on Jesus's obedience to God and our response to that obedience in following Jesus. As we'll see in this sermon series, David was not perfect in following God, but Jesus was and through his perfection and his obedience we can be here today certain that he has paid the price for our rebellion.