

God Looks at the Heart

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening everybody. My name is Alistair. As has already been mentioned, I have the privilege of being on staff here at the church and the privilege of opening this passage of God's Word to us this evening.

But before we get to that, let's pray together. Let's pray. God, we come before you and acknowledge that we need your help with this passage.

It is long, it is full of details, but it is beneficial for our souls. And we pray that you'd keep us attentive and that you would transform our hearts by your Word this evening.

In Jesus' name. Amen. You might not know it, but I can almost guarantee that the majority of you will remember what happened on Saturday the 11th of April in 2009.

I can see you all thinking. That's good. You're with me. Well, it was the night that Susan Boyle took to the stage for her very first audition of Britain's Got Talent. Now, as she walked onto the stage, Susan looked a little bit out of place.

[1 : 12] She's a small 47-year-old lady from a small town in West Lothian. And she's now standing on an absolutely massive stage, packed with flashing lights and glitter.

And as she walked onto the stage, you could see the skepticism in the judges' faces. Simon Cowell asked his normal question, What's the dream? And Susan said, Well, I'm trying to be a professional singer.

Who do you want to be like? Elaine Page. And everybody was surprised. You could hear whispers in the audience.

You could see that people didn't believe it. They were judging Susan Boyle by what they saw. Now, none of them would have thought that this little lady from Bathgate would go from being completely unknown to the world in 2009 to having an estimated net worth of £23 million in 2018 and six albums.

The minute she opened her mouth and sang just the very first line of the song, I Dreamed a Dream, the whole crowd erupted with amazement and stood to their feet applauding.

[2 : 29] Susan Boyle is now a household name in Scotland and arguably all over the world. And that very first audition on YouTube has over 28 million views.

Appearances can be deceiving, can't they? And the big thing that we're going to see in 1 Samuel this evening is that God doesn't look at things the way people do.

People look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. But before we dive into chapter 16, we need to do a quick recap of what's already happened in 1 Samuel up until now.

So a lot has happened in this book so far. In chapter 3, God stepped into the broken life of the nation of Israel and called a prophet, a man named Samuel.

At that point, he was a boy. He's a spokesperson for God. Someone who would proclaim the word of God to the nation and then call them to a right worship of their God.

[3 : 36] But sadly, that didn't happen. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show us how Israel treated God as a good luck charm. They weren't giving God the honor or the praise that he deserves.

And then in chapters 8 to 15, we see the rise, but sadly also the fall of a king. In chapter 8, Israel cry out for a king to fight against their enemies.

They reject God as their ruler. And they say they want an earthly king to sit on their earthly throne. But despite all of Samuel's warnings, despite this so-called brave king hiding in the luggage when they want to crown him, they still make Saul their king.

Saul was tall. He was handsome. He looked the part. He looked like the real deal, and so they made him king. But it doesn't take long before we see that he isn't the right king at all.

Saul disobeys God's commands time and time again, and we see the end result of that in chapter 15, verse 26, where Samuel says to Saul, that the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel. [4 : 54] This is terrible news. Israel looked at Saul's physical attributes, and they thought, yes, this is the guy we want in the head of us.

But appearances can be deceiving. Saul looked the part on the outside, but on the inside, he was not obedient to the Lord. He didn't care for God's ways. He didn't care for God's word. And so God rejected him as king. And it's with that backdrop that we arrive at chapter 16, and I'd encourage you to keep that open as we walk through this passage together.

And we are told about God, and how God, this is the God who sees things differently. And the first thing that we see in this passage is God's chosen leader, in verses 1 to 13.

God's chosen leader. So in verse 1, we see the state that this ordeal has left Samuel in. He is mourning. The one he anointed, the one he blessed, the one he spent so much time with, has now been rejected.

[6 : 07] He is mourning, and chapter 15, verse 35, tells us that Samuel never went to see Saul again. That's how painful this ordeal was for him. And this presumably went on for quite some time, because God says in verse 1, how long will you mourn?

Now as I read, as I was reading this verse this week, I was convicted, and I asked myself, when was the last time I mourned for someone else's sin?

When was the last time that I mourned, because someone was wandering away from God, and away from the gospel? Does it cut us to the core, to know that someone is skimming off their work? Does it hurt us to see people walking away and rejecting God? Does it hurt us, and does it make us weep, to know that thousands of people around the world this evening will die without being made right with God?

It should make us mourn. And I long that our hearts would mourn like Samuel's. I long that we would be broken, because people are not made right with God.

[7 : 16] Samuel is mourning. And he knows that God has rejected Saul, but God goes on to give Samuel some great news at the end of verse 1.

God says, I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king. So God speaks into Samuel's grief and mourning, and he gives him hope.

God has chosen a new king. Samuel's commanded to go and fill his horn with oil and go to Bethlehem. The oil was used to anoint a king, and so in this first verse, yes, we see mourning, but we also see hope.

Something new is about to begin. But it makes sense, doesn't it, that Samuel's afraid in verse 2? To anoint a new king whilst the current king is alive and well, well, that's a bit of a hairy situation.

The equivalent would be Scotland deciding to set up its own king or queen in the place of Queen Elizabeth. calling together the government and placing a crown on someone else's head and obeying only their rule in the land.

[8 : 31] Now don't get me wrong, the consequences today would be far more polite and middle class than they would be back then. You'd probably get taken to court or sued or maybe go to prison.

But for Samuel, treason meant death. His life was on the line. But God has a plan. And Samuel will not be in danger because God tells him to take a cow and to make a sacrifice.

And this raises a question. In verses 2 and 3, is God lying? Well, the answer is no. Samuel is going to make a sacrifice and that happens in verse 5.

God is protecting Samuel and he was preparing the way for his chosen king to rule over his chosen people. And Samuel acts out God's command.

He arrives and says that Jesse and his son should be at the sacrifice. And so just picture this scene for a second. Jesse's sons are all brought before Samuel one by one.

[9 : 39] Starting first off with the firstborn Eliab. He's the oldest, probably the biggest. And he fits Samuel's ideology of what a king should look like, doesn't he?

Verse 6. Samuel saw Eliab and thought, surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord. Surely it's him.

But do you see the problem? Samuel's using his eyes. He's thinking that this new king will be just as tall, strong and handsome as Saul was.

He's looking for a Saul 2.0. He's looking for the upgrade. But Samuel's got it wrong. See, verse 7 is the key verse in this whole chapter and it gets to the heart of the problem with our world and it gets to the heart of the problem of how to choose a king.

God says in verse 7, Do not consider his appearance or his height for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at things like people do.

[10:47] People look at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart. God sees things differently. People look at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart.

Now when we read verses about the heart in the Bible we need to remember a few things. It isn't referring to the organ that pumps blood around our veins and around our whole body day and night. Nor does it only refer to the emotions like we would say to a loved one, I love you with all my heart. But in the Bible the heart refers to a person's emotions, a person's mind, a person's will, a person's character and motivation.

The heart in the Bible is all-encompassing. Now it's easy to do something nice for someone and to have an almost saintly appearance. People thank you for your help and you brush it off with a comment like I was only serving the Lord.

But inside we long for those compliments, don't we? We eat them up and they give us the boost that we want. Or what about the times where we don't get thanked?

[12:05] Or the times where people don't show appreciation as we think they should, we get upset. These are all indications that our motives, that our heart are in the wrong.

On the outside, yes, we look the part. We maybe even sound the part, but on the inside our hearts are just as fallen and broken as they have always been.

That's what God sees. God sees the heart. He sees things differently than we do. Now this is both a good and a scary thing.

It's good because on the day when we stand before God, as we all will, He will judge us based on our response to Him. And for Christians, we will be judged, our actions will be weighed.

God will determine the motivations of our heart. So in this life, if we are weak and if we're struggling, if we are mocked and if we are scorned, if we are shunned and cursed because we believe in the living God of this world, take courage because God looks at your heart.

[13:18] And you are not alone. He sees it all. But also be warned. Because if all we do is look the part, if we live out a religious life, if we live a secret life of sin and we lie to cover our tracks, if we serve our own fame and glory and not God, then we need a wake-up call.

Because God doesn't care about our religious trimmings. He looks at the heart. So it doesn't matter if you're a CEO or a chimney sweep.

It doesn't matter if you're young and enthusiastic or if you're older and you're frailer. God looks at your heart. And you can have your head bowed and sound your amends during prayer meetings. But if your mind is thinking about the apples that you forgot to put on the shopping list, well, where's your heart at that moment? Or maybe that time that you made it obvious for all to see just how much you were serving in church.

Or just how much you were giving during the collection that week. Or just how many hours you've spent helping others this month. Or what about the time you said to that person, oh, I'm praying for you just to make them feel better.

[14:44] Or that time you shared that juicy bit of gossip, but you wrapped it up nice and neat in a prayer request. what is our motivation?

What is in our heart? Or maybe the time you didn't share the gospel with somebody because you thought, no, they're too far gone for God. God can't touch them.

God looks at the heart and as much as we try to hide our failings and our faults, He sees them all. If you're here this evening and you're serving yourself instead of serving God, or if you're saying the right things to please others as opposed to pleasing God, if you're here and you're just going through the motions of living in a middle-class city and you're happy with middle-class religiosity, please wake up.

because God doesn't care about any of that. He looks at the heart. And in verses 8 and 9, the parade continues.

Seven of Jesse's sons are brought before Samuel, each one failing the test and not being king. And Samuel asks if anyone's missing and he's told in verse 11 that there's one son, but he's out tending the sheep.

[16:05] Can you imagine the conversation that they had that morning in the Jesse household? Jesse walks in and tells the family that Samuel's asked specifically that him and all of his sons show up to this sacrifice.

But then they think, well, who's going to look after the sheep? And everyone turns to little young David, the youngest brother, the least of the lot.

Surely no one's going to even notice if he isn't there. This is an important day after all and the normal worries of sheep and cattle shouldn't bother us. Let's leave David behind to look after the flock.

This sacrifice is far too important for him. But suddenly this unimportant shepherd boy becomes the man of the hour. In verse 12, David walks in.

He's glowing with health. He's a handsome young man, but his features are not the determining factor in this decision as they were in the case of Saul. God has chosen this boy to be king and God says to Samuel in verse 12, rise and anoint him.

[17:16] This is the one. This is the indication that Samuel's been waiting for and he doesn't waste any time. God has chosen David to be king, but do you see how in verse 13 God equips him for the task at hand?

Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.

David was not in this by himself because from that day the Spirit of the Lord was with him. God has chosen him to rule and he's equipped him to do so.

Doesn't this make your mind wander to a greater anointed and chosen one? Doesn't David make you think about Jesus, how he too had the appearance of the least important of the world?

And yet he turned out to be the chosen one of God. So think back to the reading in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus too was someone who we would never have picked to be king.

[18:31] Born in a little town into an ordinary family, the son of a carpenter, nothing special in the eyes of the world. He had no riches, he had no palace, he had no throne, but he is God in the flesh.

Jesus is the real king of God who came into this world to reconcile us to God. To bridge the void between us and God that is caused by his righteous anger against our sin and our rebellion.

He paid the price. He bore the wrath and now we can stand forgiven because of him. Adopted into God's family.

This is a far greater work than David could ever do. Jesus is the true king to whom we owe all of our praise and our devotion.

He came into this world and he proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand and that people need to repent and believe the good news. And that is the same message that we proclaim.

[19:42] But we are not alone. Jesus has called us to himself and he's given us, given his people, the Holy Spirit who lives within us, who helps us and who transforms our hearts and makes us more into the likeness of Jesus every single day.

God sees things differently than we do. And I thank God for that every single day because if he didn't, you and I would still be cut off from God. Because we don't deserve his forgiveness.

And yet God saw fit to send his son so that we can be reconciled to him. Is this true for you?

Remember that God looks at the heart and he knows the truth.

Don't go another day without being sure that your heart is right with God. The second thing that we see in this passage is the rejected ruler in verses 14 to 23.

The rejected ruler. So if the first half of this chapter focused on God's chosen king and it ended up with the wonderful news that the spirit of the Lord was with him from that day forward, the second half of this chapter focuses on the rejected king and we see devastating news in verse 14.

[21:12] It says, Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. Now I find myself asking two questions of this verse.

How and why? So how can the spirit of the Lord depart from somebody? Now it's important to make a distinction here between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Old Testament the spirit of the Lord came upon people and they fulfilled certain tasks. So you see that with Saul himself in chapter 10. The spirit of the Lord comes upon him and he prophesies.

But the way that Saul has been living in these previous chapters indicate that he isn't really following the Lord. He doesn't seem to want to obey God and so the outward appearance is great.

I mean he is king after all. But on the inside he's not great. He's not fine. He's not walking with the Lord.

[22 : 17] Saul is no longer divinely empowered to act as God's anointed king over his people. He has rejected God's guidance and words time and time again.

And now God has left him for good. For us today the most important thing to know is that the Bible says if we put our faith in Jesus then we will have the Holy Spirit within us.

In the Bible people are given opportunities and time to repent before God's judgment comes. And that day will come when those who are not in Jesus will be judged.

But until that day there is time to repent. God does not cut people off. He doesn't enjoy sending people made in his own image into an eternity without him.

And the second question that I was asking is why would God send an evil spirit to torment Saul? And the truth is that we haven't been given much information by the author regarding this spirit so therefore we don't actually know much about it.

[23 : 34] But what we do know is that this evil spirit whatever that may have looked like was sent by God. It was a form of God's judgment on Saul for his rebellion and rejection of God.

But this does not mean that God did something evil. Throughout the Bible we see God sometimes using evil people to accomplish his good and sovereign will.

For example the Babylonians capturing Israel or the sinful people who condemned Jesus to death and shouted crucify him. Each situation seems to be under the control of the evil party and yet we know that God was working out his purposes.

Now if you have questions about this I'd love to chat with you afterwards about it. We don't know exactly what took place and what all of this means but we know that this evil spirit was sent by God as a result of Saul's rejection of God.

And for some of you maybe this is a new topic and you've never come across it before or maybe this is something that you're struggling with. Please come and speak to me afterwards and I'd love to speak with you about it.

[24 : 54] I'd love to pray with you about it. But what we need to remember is that this passage is not about us. And it is not here to make us look behind every bad situation and see an evil spirit sent by God.

But this passage is encouraging us to see that God sees things differently than we do. So whatever this spirit was it was obvious to those around Saul when it tormented him.

So even his servants knew what it was and they knew that God sent it to him. And in verse 15 Saul's servants say to him, see an evil spirit from God is tormenting you.

Let our Lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the liar. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you and you will feel better.

Saul agrees to this and them to find someone and a servant suggests David. And notice the attribute that this servant uses to describe David in verse 18.

[26 : 03] He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine looking man and the Lord is with him. The Lord is with him.

Something is different about David and everyone can see it. His anointing as the king had been done privately so Saul doesn't know about it. But now David enters the palace and he's liked and he's trusted so much so that in verse 21 he has made Saul's armor bearer.

And whenever Saul was afflicted by this spirit David played his instrument and the spirit would leave him. The irony is that Saul was becoming dependent on his successor and he didn't even know it.

But this favor would not last long. In just a few chapters we see Saul wanting to kill David out of jealousy and rage. But look at David in this whole situation.

he's been anointed king. He knows what his job is. He knows that the throne is rightfully his as God's chosen king and yet what does he do? Well he willingly and humbly serves.

[27 : 19] He doesn't get frustrated and annoyed. He isn't itching to sit on the seat of power. But the Lord is with him and he goes about his normal life waiting for God's time to come to completion.

David can wait patiently and serve because God is with him. Now contrast that with Saul who's been rejected by God. He doesn't care about anything else other than himself in this passage.

Even when his servants observe that this evil spirit is sent by God, we don't see him arguing, we don't see him repenting, we see him looking for a quick fix to his problem.

Appearances can be deceiving. People can look the part, they can say and do the right things, but at the end of the day God sees things differently. God looks at the heart.

How is your heart looking this evening? Are you with God or are you against God because there is no middle ground?

[28 : 32] If you're trying to work your way into God's good books by filling your time with church meetings, by filling out your religious CV, but your motivation is not the glory of God, then I encourage you to think about that truth, that God looks at the heart.

Serve him for who he is and not what he gives, because God knows your motivation. This passage is a wake up call for us to think about the reasons behind our service of him.

And it encourages us to think about where we stand before God, because friends, that is the most important thing in the world. If our heart is not right with God, then we are under his righteous wrath God, and we deserve it.

But if our heart has been made right with God through Jesus, then we stand free and forgiven because of him, and that is what God sees. So just as we draw to a close, think back to Susan Boyle, how she stepped onto that stage in 2009 as your average Scottish lady.

The judges saw a 47-year-old woman and everyone was apprehensive when she said she was going to sing I Dreamed Dream. But looks can be deceiving.

[29 : 57] Don't judge a book by its cover. And thankfully we serve a God who sees things differently. He looks at the heart, he goes beyond the skin, and he looks at our motivations, our desires, our wills, and our characters.

So as God looks at your heart this evening, what does he see? Will he find a heart that is filled with unforgiveness? A heart filled with resentment, anger, and pride?

Will he find a hardened heart that has become numb to all of his promptings? Or will he find a repentant heart? Will he find a heart that longs for God, and a heart that wants to serve him?

God sees things differently. What does he see when he looks at your heart? Let's pray together.

And just in the quietness for a moment, take the time to reflect on your state before God, and how your heart is in relation to him.

our loving God and heavenly father, we come and we confess that without you we are broken.

Without you we are lost, and without you we are cut off.

[31 : 32] But we thank you so much that you looked beyond our sinful state, and you chose to send your son Jesus Christ to make us whole, to make us right with you, and to make us your sons and daughters.

We can never say thank you enough. And we thank you in the name of your son and our saviour, our rock and our redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Amen.