

[Slide] 1 Samuel 16:1–13 (The Living Bible, amended)

Finally the Lord said to Samuel, “You have mourned long enough for Saul, [Slide] for I have rejected him as king of Israel. Now take a vial of olive oil and go to Bethlehem and find a man named Jesse, for I have selected one of his sons to be the new king.”

But Samuel asked, “How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, [Slide] he will kill me.”

“Take a heifer with you,” the Lord replied, “and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Then call Jesse to the sacrifice, and [Slide] I will show you which of his sons to anoint.”

So Samuel did as the Lord had told him to. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the city came trembling to meet him.

“What is wrong?” they asked. “Why have you come?”

But he replied, “All is well. I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.”

And he performed the purification rite on Jesse and his sons, and invited them too. When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, [Slide] “Surely this is the man the Lord has chosen!”

But the Lord said to Samuel, [Slide] “Don’t judge by a man’s face or height, for this is not the one. I don’t make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance, but I look at a man’s thoughts and intentions.”

Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But the Lord said, “This is not the right man either.”

Next Jesse summoned Shammah, but the Lord said, “No, this is not the one.” In the same way all seven of his sons presented themselves to Samuel and were rejected.

“The Lord has not chosen any of them,” Samuel told Jesse. [Slide] “Are these all there are?”

“Well, there is the youngest,” Jesse replied. [Slide] “But he’s out in the fields watching the sheep.”

“Send for him at once,” Samuel said, “for we will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

So Jesse sent for him. He was a fine looking boy, ruddy-faced, and with pleasant eyes. And the Lord said, [Slide] “This is the one; anoint him.”

So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the olive oil he had brought and poured it upon David’s head; [Slide] and the Spirit of God came upon him and gave him great power from that day onward. Then Samuel returned to Ramah. [Window Slide]

Inconspicuous Choice

A sermon preached at North Prospect Union UCC, Medford, MA

Date: March 30, 2013

Rev. Dudley C. Rose

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

- Kingship in Israel [Slide]
 - + God didn't want one
 - + Afraid that the people wanted a king for human accomplishments, not obedience to God
 - + In the days of Samuel, Israel found itself surrounded by threatening enemies: Philistines, Amalekites, Moabites, Edomites, Zobahites
 - + The people wanted a king
- Saul
 - + Samuel was a prophet, not king
 - + God relented, Saul was chosen king
 - + But God demanded obedience, a kingdom with God at the top
 - + But Saul disobeyed God's commands
 - + Samuel told Saul that another would be anointed in his place
 - + Samuel and Saul became estranged
 - + From that time forward until his death Saul was increasingly bitter, fearful and depressed
- A replacement
 - + Meanwhile God tells Samuel he is to anoint another, one of Jesse's sons
 - + This is where our passage picks up the story
 - + Samuel is fearful, understandably afraid Saul will kill him
 - + God doesn't really assure Samuel; tells him that he will show him who to choose
- David
 - + Great story
 - + Anxiety in the kingdom over split between Samuel and Saul
 - + Gathers everyone for a celebration
 - + Makes sure Jesse and his sons are invited
 - + Samuel begins looking the sons over
 - + Eliab looks great; Samuel says this must be the one, tall, handsome
 - + God says no
 - + All of Jesse's sons are eliminated one by one
 - + Saul wonders what's going on
 - + Are there any more?
 - + One, out shepherding the sheep.
 - + Of course, it's David
- Backstory
 - + Things are moving pretty fast, too fast
 - + We're left with too many holes in the story
 - + Why David?

- + The Bible gives us hints but begs for elaboration
- + The ancient Jews did just that
- + In the Mishna, the Talmud and in legends the Jews expanded and commented on the stories of the Bible
- + I mean expanded and commented
- + Front and back of a page of Talmud every day, 7.5 years [Slide]
- + So, we have elaboration about David
- + David's father, Jesse, good man but like many Biblical characters slept with slave, Nazbat
- + David born as result
- + Banished from the family
- + Sent out to desert to tend the flocks
- + Not even called when Samuel gathers Jesse's sons
- + Listen to how he David is described in the legends
- + You can hear the echoes of Psalm 23
- + With gentle consideration he led the flocks entrusted to him. The young lambs he guided to pastures of tender grass; the patches of less juicy herbs he reserved for the sheep; and the full-grown sturdy rams were given the tough weeds for food. Then God said: "David knows how to tend sheep, therefore he shall be the shepherd of my flock Israel.
- + But to all others David was not an obvious choice
- + Banished, shamed, small [Slide]
- + The amazement was great that the son of a slave should be made king
- + It took a special sign for anyone to believe it [Slide]
- + The legend says: When Samuel had tried to pour the oil on David's brothers, it had remained in the horn, but at David's approach it flowed of its own accord, and poured itself out over him. The drops on his garments changed into diamonds and pearls, and after the act of anointing him, the horn was as full as before.
- David's qualifications [Slide]
 - + David knows how to tend sheep, therefore he shall be the shepherd of my flock Israel
 - + God wanted a ruler with a shepherd's heart [Slide]
 - + Who would look to God for direction
 - + Who was not full of himself, humble
 - + Who had been banished and shamed
- Why humble, banished and shamed?
 - + From the beginning God resisted a king
 - + He knew the dangers of leaders who would follow their own ways, not God's
 - + He knew that the people wanted a king for their own ways
 - + The tall, handsome, self-assured and powerful were used to their own way
 - + They were used to wielding power in the world
- 1 Corinthians 1:26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.
 - + Paul says it's not an accident
 - + It's not an accident that Jesus' birth was scandalous
 - + It's not an accident that Jesus' wisdom was plain and simple [Slide]

- 1 Corinthians 1:20–25 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ... [Slide] [W]e proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block and foolishness. ... For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.
 - + It's not an accident that Jesus' strength was weakness in the world's terms
 - + It's not an accident that Jesus' wisdom was foolishness in the world's terms
 - + It's not an accident that the young runt of Jesse's litter would become David, king of Israel.
- Consider your own call, brothers and sisters, says Paul [Slide]
 - + Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth, he says
 - + God called, God is calling those who are not powerful and of noble birth
 - + God called, and is calling, the ones no one might expect
 - + God is calling you and me to lead the way to the restoration of the kingdom of God
- God doesn't call the lowly as a consolation prize—you don't have the power and money of the Koch brothers or Donald Trump, so you get a consolation prize, a special relationship with God. That's not it.
 - + God sees lowliness as a resource, a positive of sorts
 - + It is as hard for the rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven as a camel to go through the eye of a needle
 - + Not because God wants to punish the rich and the powerful
 - + But because it is very difficult to see beyond wealth and power
 - + It is very difficult for the rich and the powerful to understand that their wealth and power are not the kingdom of God
 - + Look how in this country many have tried to make capitalism and wealth out to be the equivalent of Christianity
 - + It's very difficult to avoid this seduction in every age
 - + In Israel the people wanted a king because they sought power and wealth
 - + God knew that kings would be perfectly happy with that job description
 - + In the Corinthian church the powerful people were grasping after privilege, too
 - + Homeowners were having their way with those of lower class, eating first, throwing their weight around
 - + Sure Paul wanted to point to the lowly and say don't treat people like that
 - + Much bigger point, though
 - + Paul wanted to point to the powerful and the wealthy and say, that kind of power and wealth is seductive
 - + But it's not the power and wealth of God
 - + the exact opposite of God's power and wealth
 - + Paul wanted to say that you have to put yourself in the mind of the lowly to understand that
 - + Remember the rich young man who came to Jesus and asked how he could inherit the kingdom of God?
 - + The man followed all the Biblical rules.

- + And he was wealthy
- + Really he wanted assurance from Jesus that his righteousness and good fortune made him right with God
- + Jesus told him to give everything he had away and follow him
- + The point wasn't that the man had to give up his wealth
- + The point was that he had to be able to
- + And if he couldn't envision letting it go, he could never reach out for the kingdom of God
- + Shipwrecked man
- Conclusion
 - + God can work with anybody, the least obvious, even you and me
 - + Wealth and power make it difficult to follow the call
 - + Even those who start out alright, like David can fall prey to it
 - + The only way is to keep turning to God
 - + There we are given guidance and strength for the task
 - + And grace and mercy in our failings
 - + This is your call, brothers and sisters.