

## THE SHEPHERD KING: HEART OF A KING

SHERARD EDINGTON

1 Samuel 15:34 – 16:13

To begin this sermon series, it would be most helpful if first we undertake a quick review of the history of Israel. Here we go. In the beginning, God issued a call to Abraham and Sarah to become God's people. They complied. They had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons. Then, through a series of bizarre events (which included Jacob's sons selling their brother Joseph into slavery), the Jacob family relocates to Egypt where they prosper and multiply. Over time, their presence in that land becomes a threat to the Egyptians who began to fear these people known as the Hebrews. So, the Egyptians enslave the Hebrews and force them to work on the great public construction projects in that country.

As the years go by, the Hebrews cry out in distress. They weren't crying to God specifically because they largely had forgotten the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But, nonetheless, God hears their cries and because of the covenant established with Abraham, God responds and selects a reluctant Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, across the wilderness, and into a land they can call their own—a land that would become known as Israel.

Once settled in Israel, they regard God as their sovereign. The Israelites were organized into a structure that political scientists today describe as 'a loose confederation of tribes.' They had no formal monarch. They did however have a network of regional administrators known as judges. They also had prophets who arose as needed to speak the word of God to the people.

This theo-political arrangement continued for many generations until the time came that the people desired a change. They wanted to be more like their neighbors and have an actual human king to lead them. The people bring their wish before the prophet Samuel who reluctantly agrees to go to God. God is distressed because the people are rejecting him as their king. God warns that the people won't like the demands that a king will make on them—taking their sons to war, their daughters to work, and their crops to pay for it all. But God relents and grants the people a king. The people demand that their first king be a man named Saul. Saul is strong and tall and good looking and hails from a wealthy family. He is also an accomplished warrior. He is the sort of man that should be king. So, God tells Samuel to anoint Saul as king of Israel.

Saul becomes king. He is successful in curtailing the military threat posed by the Philistines. But, because Saul disobeys a specific command given by God, God loses favor with Saul. As we find in our reading for today, *the Lord is sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.*

The Lord then instruct Samuel to travel to Bethlehem. There Samuel will find a man named Jesse, and Samuel is to anoint one of the sons of Jesse. As God explains, *for I have provided for myself a king among [Jesse's] sons.*

Samuel is understandably concerned because what God is telling him to do could be interpreted as treason. Samuel is worried that if Saul catches wind of this plan to anoint a new king that Saul will have him killed. So, God proposes a pretense. God tells Samuel to take a heifer with him and just explain to anyone that asks that he is planning a sacrifice. After all, isn't that what prophets do?

Samuel travels to Bethlehem (with the heifer) and he invites Jesse and his sons to a sacrifice and a feast. At the event, Samuel observes Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, who himself was tall and handsome. Samuel presumes that this must be the one that God intends to make king. He's perfect. He is the first born. He is physically impressive. But God speaks to Samuel and says, *No, Eliab is not the one. Don't look at his appearance or his height. The Lord does not see as mortals see. Mortals look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.* So, evidently, whatever was in Eliab's heart was not what God was searching for in his king.

Samuel instructs Jesse to bring him his second son, Abinadab, as well as his third, Shammah, and then the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth, and the seventh. But God gives them all the thumbs down. Samuel is confused. God had told him that he would anoint a son of Jesse, so he inquires of Jesse if by chance there are any more sons. I mean, he's got seven here. Odds are that there is another one out there that maybe he's misplaced. Jesse replies, *Yes, there is one more, the youngest, and he is out keeping the sheep.*

"For God's sake," says Samuel, "get him here." So, Jesse sends for the youngest of his sons—the one named David. When David arrives, Samuel sees that he has a red complexion, has beautiful eyes, and was himself handsome. God speaks to Samuel saying, *This is the one. Go and anoint him.* And so, Samuel anoints the young David with oil, and we read that *the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.*

That is the account of David's anointing—how he went from shepherd boy to the future king of Israel. The story raises the question of what exactly is a king, and what is the function of a king. (And by king, I mean any leader—king, queen, governor, senator, councilman, PTO president.) The first thing we learn from this story is that David is not a king for the people. David is a king for God. Remember the words God said to Samuel: *I have provided for myself a king.* Why would God want a king? Well, we know that God loves his people and cares for them. Therefore, God should also prefer a leader who feels the same way. The king becomes an extension of God.

And the person God chooses is not necessarily the one that we humans might select. God does not look on the outward appearances. God looks at the heart. We, on the other hand, have a tendency to favor the superficial and ignore the depths of the soul.

Logically, the one who should have been chosen was Eliab, the first born. The first born always comes first. But time and again God shows that it is the ones that we least expect that are the ones chosen. When Samuel asks Jesse if he has any more sons, Jesse replies that there remains the youngest. In Hebrew, the word youngest implies being short or small. It's like we might call a youngest child Peewee or Shrimp. In this beauty pageant of height, David didn't stand a chance against his older brothers. Remember, Saul was chosen king because he was tall of stature. God's choice is less obvious.

This is only the beginning of the David story. Through this sermon series we will explore those qualities that God recognized in David's heart—qualities such as kindness and compassion and care. But most importantly, David listened to God and kept God foremost in his heart (well, most of the time, anyway). David was truly like a shepherd watching over his sheep—the type of king that was pleasing to the Lord.

When Samuel instructed Jesse to assemble his sons, they didn't even think to include David. Why should they? What possible reason would the prophet have with the youngest, smallest, least significant of the brothers. David, in their eyes, was inconsequential. He wasn't even on their radar. But God saw differently. God had a task for David to be a king. And God poured God's spirit upon David.

Pouring out the spirit is not something we see often in scripture. It is fairly rare until we come to that particular celebration of Pentecost, a thousand years after David—a day when God's spirit floods the house where the followers of Jesus are gathered. As a result, they surge into the world ordained with the task of proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Christ—that salvation is at hand. As followers of Christ, we ourselves share in that Holy Spirit. We ourselves have been tasked by God to share the good news in many and unique ways.

This story applies to all of us. We may not be kings or queens or presidents or czars or anything like that, but we can be called by God to be leaders. Whatever we discover our calling to be, we should perform it as if we have been anointed by Samuel himself, because we have.

I believe that each of us has been tasked by God in some way for some purpose. Look into your heart and find your task and do it. You have the Spirit. You are anointed.

Amen.