

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 "Heart Vision" 5/2/21

Today we are beginning a hit or miss sermon series - Not because God's Word might hit or miss you with its message - But because some Sundays we will focus on the sermon series - And others will focus on the special days we will encounter

The sermon series is about King David - It will take us nearly the entire summer, because I am planning 9 or 10 messages - We will also need breaks for all the special days that occur at this time of year: Mothers' and Fathers' Days, plus Pentecost - And our Hymn Sing day on June 6th

Do you know what a derecho is? - It is a violent storm of straight-line winds - It is about the same intensity as a tornado, but with one direction winds, instead of the tornado's circular motion - On June 30th, 2012 one traveled from the mid-west, through West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and finally New Jersey

Here in New Jersey, it traveled through Salem, Cumberland, and Atlantic counties before going out to sea on the southern tip of Long Beach Island - It had winds that reached 130 mph - It passed just north of Mays Landing - And just south of where I was, in Sweetwater, at about 1:00 a.m. - Electricity was the first thing to fail

That storm was so violent that we worried that at any moment the Sweetwater parsonage would collapse - Or at least the windows would fail - Or perhaps one of the many oak trees that surrounded that parsonage would come crashing through the roof - Fortunately the several trees that were snapped off all missed the house, the parsonage structure held up well, and we survived

When we awoke the next morning, there still was no power - I figured it was daytime and the electric company would have the problem cleared up in an hour or so - My family was hungry, and since it is difficult to make breakfast without power, we went out for something to eat

That was when we discovered the true magnitude of the storm's damage - At the local diner, in Hammonton, we discovered a huge crowd - It was so large a crowd that we decided to go next door to McDonald's, figuring they could not be as busy - We were wrong

The derecho had done major damage in Atlantic County, where we lived at that time, leaving 170,000 homes without power - And I think all of those people went to breakfast in Hammonton that day

The day continued to present problems - And when power had not been restored by afternoon, we needed to evacuate our son Matthew, who does not deal well with heat, and the contents of our refrigerator and freezer

We loaded Matthew's van and Joanne's car and headed off to our daughter's house which at the time was in Cape May Court House

We were not the only people fleeing the area - And we discovered many roads closed by downed trees and snapped off utility poles - We spent time inching along in bumper-to-bumper traffic - It was an incredible ordeal - But at least it did provide this sermon illustration

While we were at McDonald's - Waiting through that incredible crowd - There were many other customers - One was a man who was covered in angry looking tattoos - He was also dressed like a tough guy

He looked like the kind of character that you might be uneasy about being alone with - But then his food was ready - He brought it into the dining area where two adorable little girls in sun dresses waited

I then proceeded to see the most gentle and loving father interact with his daughters - Had I not seen him with his daughters, you might have convinced me he was capable of being dangerous

However, after seeing him have breakfast with his girls, you might have convinced me that he recently won the dad of the year award

I recognize how much my jumping to the wrong conclusion is like Samuel in today's passage - We both jumped to the wrong conclusion based on someone's outer appearance

Years before, the people of Israel thought they needed a king - But God was happy being their king - And God tried to warn them about what a human king would be like in 1 Samuel 8

The Lord told them, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots . . . He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants . . . And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves"¹

Nonetheless, they were persistent in their desire for a king - So God let them have what they wanted - Even though God knew it was wrong - At that point Saul became their king

By the time we reach today's passage, God is not pleased with Saul - And the Lord has called Samuel to go and anoint a new king - Although Samuel realizes that Saul may very well kill him for doing so - He is obedient to God and goes to Jesse's house to anoint one of his sons

As you heard in the passage, Samuel and Jesse think one son after another must be the one chosen by God - Until all are rejected, except the one that God actually chose

1 Samuel 16:11 says, "Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here."

¹ Excerpted from 1 Samuel 8:11-18 - Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, © 2001 by Crossway (Good News Publishing, Wheaton, IL)

Next, verse 12 tells us, “And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.”

Samuel and Jesse were doing the same thing I was guilty of that day after the derecho in McDonald’s - Judging people by their outward appearance

But 1 Samuel 16:7b, today’s key verse, says, “For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

It is the answer to the sin of racism, as well as the sin of discrimination - Because if we only look at others by looking on the outward appearance, humankind is vulnerable to jumping to all kinds of wrong conclusions - But when we look at the heart, we make the effort to get to know someone

Looking on the outward appearance makes people vulnerable to judging people by the color of their skin, by their race, by what part of town they live in, by the type car they drive, and even by the way they are dressed - None of these things mean anything to the Lord - And if we are serious about following the Lord, they won’t mean anything to us either

Ephesians 5:1-2 exhorts us “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

When we imitate God and walk in Christ’s love, we will be people who cultivate a heart vision - Where we look beyond the outward appearance, to look upon the person’s heart - And like Jesus, we will then truly consider who the person is, instead of what they look like, or any first impression they might make

My Hot Illustration book shares the following example, “John Blanchard stood up from the bench, straightened his Army uniform, and studied the crowd of people making their way through Grand Central Station - He looked for the girl whose heart he knew, but whose face he did not - The only thing he knew was that she was the girl with the rose.

His interest in her had begun when he visited a second-hand bookstore and selected a book - When he began to read the book, it was not the words of the book that intrigued him, but the notes penciled in the margin

The soft handwriting reflected a thoughtful soul with an insightful mind - In the front of the book, he discovered the previous owner's name, Miss Hollis Maynell - It did not take long to locate her address—she lived right there in New York City

He wrote her a letter introducing himself and invited her to correspond - The next day he was shipped overseas for service in World War II

During the next year, the two of them grew to know each other through the mail - Each letter was a seed falling on a fertile heart - A romance was budding - Blanchard requested a photograph, but she refused - She wrote that if he really cared about her, it would not matter what she looked like

When the day finally came for him to return from Europe, they scheduled their first meeting—7:00 p.m. at the Grand Central Station in New York - “You’ll recognize me,” she wrote, “by the red rose I’ll be wearing on my lapel”

So at 7 o’clock he was in the station looking for a girl whose heart he loved, but whose face he had never seen

Lieutenant Blanchard remembered the event well, he said, A very beautiful young woman was coming toward me, her figure stunning and perfect. Her blonde hair lay back in curls and her eyes were blue as flowers - Her lips and chin had a gentle firmness, and in her pale green dress, she looked like springtime come alive

I started toward her, entirely forgetting to notice that she was not wearing a rose - As I moved, a small, provocative smile curved her lips. “Going my way, soldier?” she murmured

“Almost uncontrollably I made one step closer to her, and then I saw Hollis Maynell - She was standing almost directly behind the girl - A woman well past 40, she had graying hair tucked under a worn hat - She was a plain looking woman, wearing low-heeled shoes

The incredibly gorgeous young woman in the green dress was walking quickly away - I felt as though I was split in two, so keen was my desire to follow the beautiful young woman, and yet so deep was my longing for the woman whose spirit had made its way into my heart - There she stood - Her pale face was gentle and sensible; her gray eyes had a warm and kindly twinkle

I did not hesitate - My fingers gripped the small, worn, blue leather copy of the book that was to identify me to her - This would not be love, but it would be something precious, a friendship for which I had been and surely would ever be grateful

I squared my shoulders and saluted and held out the book to the woman, even though I felt the disappointment in not having followed the girl in the green dress - “I’m Lieutenant John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to dinner?”

The woman’s face broadened into a tolerant smile - “I don’t know what this is about, son,” she answered, “but that pretty young lady in the green dress who just went by, begged me to wear this rose on my coat

And she said that if you were to ask me out to dinner, I should tell you that she is waiting for you in the big restaurant across the street - She said this was some kind of test!”²

The message for us in God’s Word today is not to give in to the very human predisposition to jump to conclusions based on someone’s outward appearance - As followers of Jesus, we should instead strive to see everyone through God’s eyes with a heart vision - Looking at their heart, their soul, and their character; instead of their outward appearance

² The Test, Hot Illustrations, © 2001, (Youth Specialties, El Cajon, CA)