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1 Samuel 16:1-13

Twenty-sixth Message

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DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

SERIES: *THE CROSSING FATES*

Introduction to David

Over the past months we've been looking at some of the great heroes of the faith. Bernard Bell brought us Noah, who taught us how to float above life's floodwaters. Then John Hanneman gave us Elijah, who taught us where to find life and confront evil when our nation's capital is moved to Las Vegas. For the next five weeks, I have the privilege of introducing you to David, Israel's greatest king and sweet singer. But the task is not easy, for as Lore Segal affirms, "David plays more roles, in more situations, than any modern protagonist." The question, "Who is David" is voiced by more than one character and becomes the driving quest for the remainder of 1 and 2 Samuel.

"Whose son is this young man?" asks Israel's first king, Saul, as David goes out to fight Goliath. (1 Sam 17:55)

"Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asks again, of David directly, after David has defeated Goliath. (1 Sam 17:58)

"Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?" asks a wealthy and churlish landowner, Nabal, in a belittling manner. (1 Sam 25:10)

"Who am I, O LORD GOD, and what is my house?" asks David later in the story, when God has promised him an eternal dynasty. (2 Sam 7:18)¹

Paul Borgman, in his book *David, Saul, & God*, writes:

David occupies more narrative space and raises more questions about himself, and about the survival and well-being of Israel, than any other character of the Hebrew Scriptures—and all ancient literature... The mystery of who David is, insisted on by the narrative, is located narratively in an even larger mystery about God. What has God seen in David that makes him "better" than his predecessor Saul, so much better as to help change God's mind about the divine choice of Saul as king over Israel?²

What does it mean that he is a "man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14)? The narrator lingers over that question a long time, and it takes the entire narrative story from 1 Samuel 16 – 1 Kings 1 to fully ascertain the answer. To prevent us from making hasty conclusions, the narrator gives us three varied introductions to David. Each vignette places David on Israel's stage with a new credential to serve as the king, and sets the stage for Israel to identify her future King, Jesus of Nazareth.

In the first (16:1-13), David is portrayed as a shepherd, insignificant in the eyes of his family, but choice and chosen by God. In the second (16:14-23), he is depicted as a musician whose skill subdues demons in the royal court. In the third (17:1-53), he is seen as a warrior, the representative man who does battle with Israel's enemies.

In our first vignette God is on the move to lead the nation into a new era. Because of Saul's persistent disobedience and refusal to repent, God did—he changed his mind about the people's choice. Though he himself grieved over Saul's disobedience, it was time to move on. The Lord is not a God who dwells in the past. Despite mankind's sin, he always remains faithful to his covenantal promises and draws his people

into a new and better future. This time it will be God's choice for king, a man after God's own heart. Unfortunately however, God has several obstacles to overcome before his choice can be selected.

I. Setting and Introduction (1 Sam 16:1-3)

A. Samuel is stuck in sorrow (v. 1)

1 The LORD said to Samuel,

"How long will you grieve over Saul,
since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?

Fill your horn with oil, and go.

I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite,

for I have provided (lit. "seen") for myself a king among his sons."

(1 Sam 16:1 ESV)

Our story opens with God engaged in a conversation with Samuel, who is consumed by grief over Saul's failures. God's question of "How long?" indicates that considerable time has passed since Saul's rejection, and that God is slightly annoyed with the prophet's inability to get beyond his personal sorrow.

Embracing loss with all its wounds is essential to maintaining our spiritual health, especially when we live in a culture that glosses over pain. When we are able to articulate our pain before God, grief is channeled through the soul and moves us to a new destination. Israel's prophets and poets mentor us in the articulation of grief, using the poetic form of an acrostic to spend their emotions fully and prove the point that grief has a beginning and it has an ending. But if we hold on to grief and endlessly replay the tapes with all the "what ifs," we become paralyzed in despair, frozen in a past that we cannot change. This is what happened to Samuel, so God tells him that no amount of mourning can change God's mind. Saul's kingship is done.

Yet it is not difficult to empathize with Samuel's despair, for he had invested so much of himself in a monarchy that he knew was a bad idea from the beginning. As Fokkelman explains:

The introduction of the monarchy and the anointing of Saul are the greatest acts of Samuel's life and have meant all the more to him because they required considerable self-sacrifice on his part. God had to persuade, and even order him in fact, before he could be involved... However, the same Lord who first had to win him over to the monarchy now flatly announces that he is canceling it and declares Samuel's life work worthless.³

Having been devastated by his loss, Samuel is in no frame of mind to "see" that God is about to launch him on a mission that will become the capstone of his career. This text is designed for those who have suffered a loss that was so painful you have not been able to move on. My goal this morning is for you to see how God is committed to gently but firmly overcome the obstacles in your heart that prevent you from "seeing" and entering into the new thing that God has for you, which is the key to moving beyond loss.

The first thing to observe is that God initiates the healing process. Being mindful of the prophet's vulnerable heart, God takes the ini-

tiative and with renewed urgency, rouses him out of his lethargy to enter his world of new beginnings – “Fill your horn with oil and go!” With his ceremonial horn full of oil, Samuel is to go to Bethlehem, which lay beyond the reach of Saul’s northern kingdom, and anoint one of Jesse’s sons whom he has provided (lit. “seen”) for himself. The verb “see” is the keyword in the chapter (used 8x) and speaks of God’s penetrating spiritual perception that penetrates to the very heart of an individual.

This is exactly what God’s Spirit does with us. When we’re stuck in sorrow, he gently lifts us out of the dust of mourning, brushes us off, then redirects and encourages us on to a new path.

B. Accommodating fears (vv. 2-3)

2 And Samuel said,

“How can I go?

If Saul hears it, he will kill me.”

And the LORD said,

“Take a heifer with you and say,

‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’

3 And invite Jesse to the sacrifice,

and I will show you what you shall do.

And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.”

While Samuel has been living in the past, God has been intimately (“for me”) courting a new son and is excited about his choice, for this new candidate has an interior like his own. But Samuel is not yet able to enter into joy of the moment. We can hear the dread in Samuel’s voice – *’ek ’elek* – “How can I go?” In days past, God’s command would have ignited Samuel’s faith by reminding him of his mother’s poem, “He will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Sam 2:10 TNIV). But the light of his faith is dim and fear has moved into its place. Bruce Waltke explains why:

Samuel resists because the road from Ramah to Bethlehem passes through Gibeah, Saul’s hometown, and Saul, knowing he has been rejected by the prophet, dogs every step of the prophet lest he anoint another. That Samuel fears the king more than God both implies that Saul has already developed a harsh and arbitrary administration and is symptomatic of Samuel’s more serious spiritual torpor.⁴

Though Samuel’s inability to get past his sorrow has taken a serious toll on his faith, God does not chide him or discard him. Instead he accommodates his weak faith and addresses his fear with practical and concrete support. He creates a ruse as a cover for Samuel’s real intentions, and gives him the exact words to use upon his arrival. The ethics of Holy War allow for deception on the part of God’s people in order to preserve life.⁵ Once the sacrificial ceremony begins, he will personally lead him through every step of the process so that nothing will be left to chance. All that is required of Samuel is to show up and be obedient to God’s voice.

What a gracious God we serve! First he encourages us out of our lethargy; then he accommodates our fears to get us moving on a road to a new destination.

II. Arriving in Bethlehem: God’s Cover Works (1 Sam 16:4-5)

4 Samuel did what the LORD commanded
and came to Bethlehem.

The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said,
“Do you come peaceably?”

5 And he said,

“Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.

Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.”

And he consecrated Jesse and his sons
and invited them to the sacrifice.

When Samuel arrives in Bethlehem, the elders, being well aware of the fractured relationship between the prophet and the king, come to meet him with shaking knees. They waste no time in getting to the heart of the matter: “Does your arrival bring *shalom*?” or is Samuel coming with a sword, like the one he cut Agag to pieces with in chapter 15? This suggests that God’s new work will often be a threat to others in positions of authority and power. You’ll recall how a century later “O little town of Bethlehem” was subjected to a bloodbath, when king Herod gave the order that all male children under the age of two be killed.

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,

weeping and great mourning,

Rachel weeping for her children

and refusing to be comforted,

because they are no more.” (Matt 2:17 TNIV)

Saul will do no less to Israel’s innocent priests in Nob later in our story (22:17ff). To keep his mission secret, Samuel assures the elders that his intentions are merely sacrificial and ceremonial. Then he commands them to consecrate themselves for the feast, while he himself consecrates Jesse and his sons.

This short encounter serves to calm Samuel’s fears. When Samuel left Ramah, I imagine he had mixed feelings about his mission. But after he gets safely past Gibeah without incident and finds that his cover works in Bethlehem, doubt and fear give way to a renewed trust in God’s word, and with it a growing excitement that perhaps this will indeed be a historic day for the nation.

III. Samuel’s Eye Exam (1 Sam 16:6-10)

A. First Impressions: Near Sighted (vv. 6-7)

6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought,
“Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.”

7 But the LORD said to Samuel,

“Do not look on his appearance

or on the height of his stature,

because I have rejected him.

For [the LORD sees] not as man sees:

man sees according to the eyes,

but the LORD sees according to the heart.”

(v. 7b is my translation to preserve the word plays of the original)

Once the family and elders had gathered, Samuel was to arrange the feast, much as he did in chapter 9, and then wait for specific instructions from the Lord for what to do and whom to anoint. But as soon as Jesse’s family enters the hall, Samuel is stunned by the line up of Jesse’s seven (the perfect number) sons. These boys look like the starting lineup of the New York Yankees and Samuel is so visually impressed that his emotions run way ahead of his reasoning. Fokkelman captures the scene:

Tension rises in him. The mass of impressions on his retina overwhelms him. His eyes deceive him and seize on the most striking: the tall stature of the first-born. By hastily taking the decision “that must be him!” he wants to dissipate the great tension that held him.⁶

God is forced to break into plot and intervene directly before Samuel acts prematurely and anoints Jesse’s firstborn, Eliab.

At the beginning of the chapter Samuel was rebuked for spending too much time in mourning; now he receives one for being too quick to pull the trigger on the anointing ceremony. This gives us an idea, of just how far the prophet has lost his spiritual sensibilities. Being

governed by what he “sees,” he forgot to quietly order the sacrifice and to listen to the voice of God. The prophet, who berated Saul for not being able to wait seven days in order to “hear” God’s voice, succumbs to the identical sin. He is unable to wait through the parade of Jesse’s seven sons to hear God’s instructions.

God’s rebuke in verse 7 becomes the pivot verse of the chapter, which suggests that Samuel’s faulty vision is the third and greatest obstacle that God must overcome. God’s correction reveals how clouded Samuel’s vision has become, for Eliab is an exact replica of Saul (1 Sam 9:2 and 10:23).

Samuel’s haste to run ahead of God is exemplary of our attempts to be healed from loss by reconstructing the past. But God never walks backwards in history, choosing instead to break out in unpredictable and fresh new ways. To this way of thinking God thunders an emphatic “No!” It is a rare occurrence in Biblical narrative that we hear God’s voice giving his evaluation of characters or events in explicit terms.

**For [the LORD sees] not as man sees;
man sees according to the eyes,
but the LORD sees according to the heart.**

The poem is a poignant picture of the great chasm that exists between human and divine thinking. There is absolutely no meeting of the minds here. The subject in the first line is gapped, and the reader is unable to fill it in until the end of the poem. Fokkelman concludes that, “By devoting so many words to man in general, Yahweh presents Samuel as one example of a fallible species.”⁷ The apostle Peter received a similar rebuke when he attempted to rebuke Jesus regarding the necessity of the cross.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (Mark 8:33)

Jesus words confirm the great divide between human and divine thinking. Samuel has lost his prophetic vision because he has slipped back into worldly ways of thinking. Because of this he is unable to penetrate into the interior of Eliab’s heart. Later in the story we discover that his heart is just like Saul’s – arrogant, mean spirited and blind to matters of faith (1 Sam 17:28).

I often wonder what “Graduation Sunday” says about our own prophetic vision. Our high school graduates step up on stage, and we feel so proud of our talented, ambitious young men and women. And we should feel proud! Then the microphone is passed among them and they are instructed to tell us where they are headed for college. As the roll call is played out, we applaud their acceptance into top-tier universities across the country. But then, in a quiet voice, one young man or woman will mutter almost apologetically the name of a local community or junior college. And then there is the student who doesn’t even come that morning, too ashamed to name their destination or admit they don’t really have one. And I wonder: Are we unwittingly encouraging our young people to be like Saul? In our enthusiastic approval, do we reinforce external achievement and teach them that even in the Church what matters is their ability to march to the world’s definition of success? How would we do things differently on Graduation Sunday – and all the weeks that lead to it – if we set out to raise a generation of Davids instead? How would it change the way we parent our children if, instead of pressuring them to be perfect in everything, we gave them the freedom to find their spiritual gifts and trusted God to ignite in them a passion for his kingdom regardless of their academic or vocational choices?

B. 20/20 Vision (vv. 8-10)

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel.

And he said,

“Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”

9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by.

And he said,

“Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”

10 And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel.

And Samuel said to Jesse,

“The LORD has not chosen these.”

After having his eyes examined, Samuel receives God’s corrective lenses, and instantly his prophetic 20/20 vision is restored. After Eliab is rejected, Abinadab and Shammah come up to bat and they are quickly disposed of and benched. Jesse goes through his entire lineup and Samuel delivers seven strikeouts in rapid succession.

With no batters left in the lineup, the tension mounts and we are presented with one final obstacle to our quest. God had told Samuel that he had chosen a son of Jesse, and yet he rejected every son outright. What is the purpose of going through the lineup, only to come to the end empty handed? God’s ways are often fraught with perplexities, twists and turns. Why does God suspend our emotions in a waiting game that appears endless and sometimes even pointless?

Let me suggest two thoughts. First, the seven-fold “no” is not a dead-end road, but a necessary part of the healing process. It is designed to give renewed strength to our convictions so that we not compromise in the future. By the time all 7 boys have been sidelined, Samuel is finally ready not to trust in his own sensibilities, or even in what he thinks God will do based on past experiences with God. He’s finally willing to enter into a new thing. Secondly, when we finally arrive at the long awaited “yes,” there is not only surprise and relief, but also an intensified joy and appreciation. After Emily and I lost two children in consecutive years, I thought that we might not ever be parents. But then miraculously, when were able to adopt Becky just two weeks after Jessica’s death, I was so overjoyed that every diaper change became a privilege.

IV. A Brand New Ball Game (1 Sam 16:11-13)

A. Extra Innings (v. 11)

11 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.”**

After the seven sons are rejected, Samuel asks Jesse if he has an eighth. Because Samuel’s faith is back in full swing, it doesn’t occur to him that something has gone wrong. He simply concludes that, since God is faithful, there must be an answer to the dilemma that is not obvious; therefore there must be another boy in this family somewhere!

Jesse’s words sound almost incredulous: “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” The eighth son is the “youngest,” which can also be translated “smallest,” making David the least significant among his tall brothers. He is exiled with the sheep outside the family circle. Like a bat boy who never gets to play, David was a virtual nonentity in Jesse’s home, and so easily passed over.

Samuel commands Jesse to send for him and keeps everyone standing until the guest of honor arrives. Stand up and stretch, we’re going into extra innings. It’s a brand new ball game!

It is an awesome and unlikely scene, all the elders standing and waiting deferentially for this eighth son, the one whose name we

are not even told. We do not know how long they waited, but it must have taken a while, for the eighth son was outside the house, tending the sheep... The narrator makes Jesse's household wait, and makes the reader wait, for the arrival of David.⁸

B. Finally! (v. 12)

12 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.”

Finally he comes, the one for whom Samuel was searching and Israel was waiting. When he is brought forward, we see him through Samuel's eyes – “Behold he was ruddy (like Esau!) and had beautiful eyes and was handsome.” Samuel, who was earlier rebuked for gazing on outward appearance, is struck by David's outward beauty which, in this case, “confirms, not influences, the divine choice... although God looks at the heart, not outward appearance, it does not follow that God chooses the ugly.”⁹ On the other hand, a friend of mine suggested that, if eyes are indeed the windows to the soul, David's internal beauty makes his external beauty even more captivating. And in a narrative that is all about seeing, this may suggest that David had beautiful eyes, because he had eyes that could see as God sees. I find her interpretation compelling.

As the story of Samuel's mother reminds us, the Lord loves to use the disenfranchised members of society to do his most significant work. This truth would be further confirmed by the life of Jesus and Paul's teaching to the church.

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men;

a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces

he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53:2b-3

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor 1:28-29)

C. Anointed in the midst of his brothers (v. 13)

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil

and anointed him in the midst of his brothers.

And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David

from that day forward.

And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

The youngest, the smallest and the outsider is placed at the center of his family and anointed “in the midst of his brothers.” As the oil flows and the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon their little brother, Jesse's sons have the opportunity like Samuel, “to take a new unprejudiced look at the youth who was passed over.”¹⁰ But Israel's history gives little hope. “In the midst of his brothers” is a poignant phrase that evokes memory of Joseph's story and the hostilities he endured at the hands of his brothers that eventually led to his exaltation as savior of all Israel.

After David is set apart as God's property Samuel returns home to Ramah, having completed his greatest act as prophet. The gift of the Spirit is the final step in the process of Samuel's healing and the down payment of the kingdom for David. The fact that it “rushed upon David from that day forward” indicates that this new era inaugurated

by Samuel will have permanent results in Israel. The gift of God's spirit has been given to David and it is irrevocable. His spiritual gifts are given to us too, and are equally irrevocable. God gifts his people, not based on our natural talents or skills, but on his wisdom and anointing. Once we discover what our spiritual gifts are, they form the basis of our lives and fuel our passions for a lifetime. Perhaps this is the way we raise up “David's” in our families and in our congregation: by setting our children free to discover how God has gifted them and rejoicing with them as God calls them uniquely into his service.

For Samuel, his story is over. He can now retire, confident that God will be faithful to his covenantal promise through David. This is the grace of God, that whatever loss we have endured, the gift of the Spirit will lead us to new life, and the new life he brings outweighs the loss.

Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ... And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 1:13; 5:10-11)

1. Adapted from Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, & God, Rediscovering An Ancient Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

2. Borgman, *David, Saul, & God*, 37-38.

3. I have heavily depended on Fokkelman's outstanding work for my insights of this text. J. P. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, (Assen: Van Corcum, 1986), 92.

4. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology, an Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 641.

5. Rahab is commended in the books of Joshua and James (2:25) for her faith in hiding the spies; Michael lies to preserve David's life (1 Sam 19:14); and Jesus, knowing his time had not yet come, is forced to deceive his brothers about going up to the feast of Jerusalem (John 7:1-10). “Reconnaissance, espionage, and deception are necessary components even in holy war.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 515.

6. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 119-120.

7. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 125.

8. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 122.

9. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 641.

10. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 131.

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