



# COME AND SEE THE BEAUTY OF THE KING

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

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1 Samuel 16:1-13

First Message

Brian Morgan

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Stories...the Bible is full of them: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts. The gospel isn't merely illustrated by a story, it *is* story, pure and simple!

As children, we all loved stories, especially when we ourselves were part of them. Some of our more precious memories center around our parents reading to us at bedtime. The tragedy is, as we grow older, we lose both the art of storytelling and our appreciation for stories. The ancient art has been replaced by instilling doctrine through proof texting. Doctrinal teaching, of course, is fine if it is balanced with all the other approaches that the Bible uses. But when doctrine is preached to the exclusion of everything else, this has the effect of side-stepping our emotions.

This explains why the stories in the gospels (the climactic event of God's Divine Drama) have limited impact on our Western, scientific minds. We have lost the art of storytelling! We have missed the first three acts to the drama where all the stories of the gospels have their beginnings. This is why, in the decisive fourth act of the drama of redemption, when Jesus comes to earth and all the stories of Israel are repeated, this time with a new twist, we see nothing new in them. It is because we are unaware that there was anything old to compare them to. "Nice story," we say, but it hasn't truly touched us. It's like renting the movie *Gone with the Wind*, and fast forwarding through that lengthy classic to learn the plot, and then returning the machine to normal speed in order to learn the climax. "Nice movie," we would say, but it would have left scant impact upon us.

My goal in this series on the life of King David from the Old Testament is to slow down so that we can take in the entire story, to enter into it and enjoy it for its own sake. The story of David in the wilderness is a tale of a boy who would become king. And, unlike King Saul, David would be a king after God's own heart. He would be trained in God's school, a wilderness, the same school that Israel went to following the Exodus from Egypt. It was the very school of Christ, and the school of all who would follow him. In the wasteland, David fled for his life from Saul. The wicked king had everything at his disposal: the army, priesthood, spies, all the weapons of war, but David had no political or earthly assets. Through the gift of Spirit and prayer, however, he emerged victorious. Scripture reminds us, "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord*" (Zech 4:6). In the Psalms, his prayers, David bequeathed a spiritual legacy in these utterances that were forged in the darkness of his own soul, in the dampness of the caves of Adullam and Engedi. These prayers, which were to become the heart of Israel's book of hymns, were sung by every king in Israel who followed David. Jesus himself was schooled in them. They reflected the yearnings of his soul, his longings to bring God's kingdom to earth.

Today, then, let us begin our study in the fifth act of the redemption drama. Let us take our places as the Holy King invites us on-stage to share in his story, his prayers, and partici-

pate in acting out the closing chapter of the Divine Drama.

We will begin with some historical background. 1 Samuel records this description of the man who would become David's arch-enemy:

**And he had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people** (1 Sam 9:2, NASB).

Saul was a man of vast potential, but he lacked faith. Instead of serving the interests of God, he served himself. David Roper describes him in these words: "He squandered his potential away. Driven by sullen pride and self-will, he turned away from God into superstition and fleshly frenzy, and the light faded from his soul. Clinging to his faults and withering in his resistance to God's forgiving grace, he eventually went stark, raving mad."

1 Samuel 15 records that Saul failed to execute holy war on the Amalakites. He spared and took for himself what God had called wicked. Confronted with his sin, he blamed his own people and refused to repent. Finally, when at last he admitted his sin, he told Samuel to accompany him and give him honor among the elders of Israel. 1 Samuel records what followed:

**Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeath of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel** (1 Sam 15:34-35).

So the account of the life of David opens with Samuel the prophet grieving over Saul. How often do we grieve in the same way over an investment we made in someone. We thought they had tremendous potential for the kingdom of God, but they rejected ministry and chose instead the idol of self-glorification. The work of a prophet, or a pastor, is at times a grievous thing.

But into that dark place of grief now comes the light of God's word to Samuel.

## Scene 1: God Appears to Samuel (16:1-3)

Now 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 **selected** (lit. *seen*) a king **for Myself** among his sons. But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me." (pause) And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you (lit. *in your hand*), and say, 'I have come to **sacrifice** to the LORD.' And you shall **invite** Jesse to the **sacrifice**, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint **for Me** the one whom I designate to you." (16:1-3)

### "Come and See"

Grieving is an appropriate emotion for God's prophet.

Samuel has invested a lot of time in Saul as *the* instrument of the kingdom, but Saul has failed utterly. Even God regrets that he made him king. God's question, "How long?" indicates that sufficient time has passed; he is about to do a new thing. The Lord has *seen* a king, whom he wants for himself. "See" is the key word in the chapter. It is used seven times as a verb, twice in the noun form. Here it is used to convey the sense that God has selected someone else. Samuel's grief will turn to joy when he sees how God sees and how he selects a king for himself.

So here we have our introduction to David. God invites Samuel to "come and see" this new king. Three vignettes introduce him: First, as a shepherd boy (16:1-13), second, as a musician (16:14-23), and finally, as a mighty warrior (17).

### *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Samuel is directed by God to leave Ramah and go to Bethlehem, a place "outside the reach of Saul's northern kingdom and outside the Ramah-Bethel-Mizpah circuit familiar to Samuel" (Walter Brueggemann). In this new territory, God would do a new thing. Bethlehem ("house of bread") is reminiscent of the stories of Ruth and Boaz, and of the new thing that God did for Naomi in her grief.

Samuel, however, is *fearful*. "How can I go?" he pleads. The Hebrew, which rhymes, is much more emphatic. Samuel says, "No way, Jose!" What a dangerous mission he was called to accomplish! Anointing a new king while the old still remained in office would cost him his life. Of this Samuel was certain. So he puts the question to God: "How can I go?"

God makes allowances for Samuel's fear. He tells him to go about the task of anointing the new king under the cover of a sacrificial feast. Many of you are probably asking, Is it ever right to use deception? We had to face this issue when we first began to go to Romania for ministry and we brought Ray Stedman's books with us, complete with mystery novel covers. How should we have responded when the security police asked the reason for our visiting Romania? Should we have said, "We are ambassadors for Christ and our mission is to undermine the dictatorship?" When you are fighting a war, it is hardly good strategy to let the enemy know exactly what you are going to do. One doesn't lay all his cards out on the table, so to speak, for all to see. Deception is a necessary tactic in war. Many thousands of Jews were saved from the death camps by Christians who deceived the Nazi authorities. Jesus did not lay all of his cards on the table at once. His own unbelieving brothers mocked him for failing to publicly declare that he was the Messiah. But Jesus told them: "Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come...But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then he Himself also went up, not publicly, but as it were in secret" (John 7:8, 10).

So Samuel went up to the feast.

### **Scene 2: Samuel Anoints David in Bethlehem (16:4-13)**

So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to **meet** him and said, "Do you come in **peace**?" And he said, "In **peace**; I have come to **sacrifice** to the LORD. **Consecrate** yourselves and come with me to the **sacrifice**." He also **consecrated** Jesse and his sons, and **invited** them to the **sacrifice**. (16:4-5)

### *Under Cover of Shalom*

Earlier, Samuel was the one who was fearful, but now, in Bethlehem, it is the elders' turn to be terrified. The prophets were king-makers and king-breakers. The last time Samuel

left his circuit to go to Carmel, he was on a death mission. He confronted and denounced Saul for his failure, and slew Agag. If Samuel had come to Bethlehem to oppose Saul, the prophets had good reason to fear. No wonder they asked him, "Do you come in peace?"

In his reply, Samuel repeats verbatim for the elders the words of the Lord, saying that he has come in peace to sacrifice to the Lord. His deception works. Then he adds that the elders should consecrate themselves, emphasizing the exclusive and holy character of the upcoming feast. Next, he invites Jesse's family to the sacrifice. It is interesting to note that peace is offered by God's prophet to the fearful elders of Bethlehem under the guise of a sacrifice when, in fact, Samuel is seeking God's king. A thousand years later, angels will announce peace to fearful shepherds in Bethlehem because the new King whom they worship will be the sacrifice. David's story becomes Christ's story...

This brings us to Samuel's first impressions of Jesse's sons.

Then it came about when they entered, that he **looked** at Eliab and thought, [Before I didn't know who I was looking for, but here he is...] "*Surely* the LORD's anointed is before Him." (16:6)

As the young men parade in front of Samuel, their father Jesse and the elders have no idea they are witnessing a decisive event in the history of Israel. Eliab, the eldest, impresses Samuel. He is tall, and he has an impeccable name ("*My God is Father*"). Samuel allows himself to be borne along by the force of his visual impressions. His eye takes precedence over what he hears. ("Before I didn't know who I was looking for, but here he is..." *Surely* the LORD's anointed is before Him.) The prophet has to be rebuked by God.

This brings us now to the key verse, the center line of the story. Clear theological or moral statements are rather infrequent in biblical narrative. When you discover one, you can be sure that it is the point of the passage. Here, then, is the critical verse:

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not **look** at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because *I have rejected* him; for He does not (see) what man **sees**, for man **looks** at the outward appearance (lit. *according to the eyes*), but the **LORD looks at the heart** (lit. *according to the heart*). (16:7)

God speaks to Samuel in the quietness of his ear: "Pay no attention to outward appearances." Samuel was impressed by Eliab's height. Saul, too, was a tall man. He stood head and shoulders over everyone else. This statement, then, is the center line, the turning point of the two scenes. Samuel at last begins to see as God sees. From now on he will utter what God tells him in his ear.

Jesse proceeds to bring on the rest of his sons.

Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD **chosen** this one." Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD **chosen** this one." Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not **chosen** these." (16:8-10)

Just as God rejected Saul in Scene 1 ("I have seen my son"), now Samuel learns to reject what his eyes tell him in Scene 2. He rejects all seven sons.

Then he puts a question to Jesse:

And Samuel said to Jesse. "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There *remains* yet the youngest, and behold, he is *tending the sheep*." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "**Send** and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes

here." (16:11)

There still remained one son, the youngest. He had been passed over in the roll-call. The little one, the "runt of the litter," was assigned to herd the sheep. In Hebrew, the word for "youngest" has three meanings: small, young, and insignificant. All three describe David. Neglected and deeply wounded by his parents, he was not even invited when the family roll-call was read.

David's brothers, too, looked upon him with disdain. There is an example of this in chapter 17. David hears Goliath taunting the army of the Living God, and he asks, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" This same Eliab whom Samuel found to be so attractive harangues his brother, saying: "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you come down only to watch the battle." David, the whipped little brother, asks plaintively, "Now what have I done? Was it not just a question?" (1 Sam. 17:28-29).

Yet it was the very pain of rejection that drove him to God at an early age. It was rejection that taught him to pray, as he did in Psalm 27,

*"Though my father and mother have forsaken me,  
But the Lord will gather me in."* (Ps 27:10)

Is David's story your story, too? His needs were not met by his earthly family. He was wounded and scarred. Yet this was what drove him to God and prepared him to be king over Israel. It was the same with Christ. His own brothers hated him. He had no home to go to. "The foxes have their holes, the birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head," he said. Your family may never have met your needs, but this can be the very circumstance that will open your heart to God and teach you to pray. I have participated in some very moving times of worship with men and women who were driven to God in their pain. There they found an intensity of love they never thought possible.

Mickey Cook, who is such a man, wrote this psalm to describe his journeying in the wilderness:

The rule had been to "toe the line"  
to smile, be solid, fit in, a name  
don't be too concerned with what's inside  
Just always look good to them

But deeper things pent up and growing  
would slow me down and grind  
soon, of them I began to struggle  
behave—look good to them

Except in darkness I would play  
give in to subtle games  
effects of which I sensed might come  
just hide it—look good to them

Darkness, illusion though quite complete  
a light appeared, but low  
and powerfully pierced my naked thoughts  
look good, how can I when?

Insides turned out, pride too revealed  
now faced with what God sees  
how can it be, his arms to reach  
I can't look good to Him

From deep within a hope defined

accepted I desired to be  
though never being quite good enough  
and yet you looked at me

Your grace sufficient, your Son revealed  
your arms reached out to hold  
and in them I am fully yours  
Accepted. That's how you see me

A sense of awe, beyond my grasp  
such themes too great to hold  
yet overwhelmed—my ease to fail  
still yet You see me whole

With patience greater, by far yet seen  
by me, I'm coming to know  
Your lovingkindness, your faithful hand  
as you bring your life in view

Still looking out upon my life  
old longings at times I hold  
but softening now because your eyes  
on a son you've claimed as your own

God's "softening eyes" gather us in the wilderness.

It is ironic that David's own family, who did not even think of him when the roll-call was made, now must stand and wait for him to arrive, for the prophet won't sit until he comes.

So he **sent** and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance (looking). And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him *in the midst of his brothers*; and the **Spirit** of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose, and went to **Ramah**. (16:12-13)

Samuel is struck by David's appearance. He is "ruddy" (the reference is either to reddish skin or auburn hair), and he has beautiful, radiant eyes. Was this surprising to Samuel, who might have been tempted to think that ugliness was proof of ability? One commentator wrote: "David's beauty as a sign of his choosing, is evident only when the spotlight of Providence is directed upon it."

Then, David is anointed "*in the midst of his brothers*." This evokes memories of the story of Joseph. Joseph's brothers cast him into a pit, but one day he would become the savior of Israel. When they finally saw him for who he was, and all the nation gathered around him, they wept. This, too, is the story of Jesus. Israel cast him off and nailed him to a tree. But they will get a second chance to look upon him. Finally, when they gather in a circle and see the believing Gentile nations, they, too, will weep for what they have done.

David's brothers form a ring around him. They were attractive "*according to the eyes*," but in the middle stands one who is different. The witnesses get a second chance to take the log out of their own eyes to look upon the youth whom they passed over. David has something more than a beautiful appearance: He has a heart that loves God, a heart that found God in a wilderness of pain. To this one the Spirit comes (literally *rushes upon* him) to equip him for the task ahead. Covered in the anointing oil, he is bound to Yahweh, the King of kings, forever. This anointing as king took place in secret. Although it was done in public, in full view of his brothers, no one knew about it, because nothing about David changed outwardly.

The scene ends where it began. Samuel returns to Ramah, David returns to the wilderness. But there is one great differ-

ence: one small child has the full measure of God's Spirit. Israel will never be the same again. And we who follow Christ will never be the same again.

## Reflections

I want to end by giving three reflections on this introduction to the life of David. I wondered if there were any verses in the psalms that give a hint of what went on in David's soul. Psalm 8 probably reflects some of his feelings:

### *David's Reflections: Psalm 8 "Out of the mouth of babes"*

O LORD, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name in all the earth,  
Who has displayed Your splendor about the heavens!  
From the mouth of infants and nursing babes  
You have established strength,  
Because of Your adversaries,  
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.

When I consider Your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which you have ordained;  
What is man, that You remember him?  
And the son of man, that you care for him?  
Yet You have made him a little lower than angels,  
And you crown him with glory and majesty!  
You have made him to rule over the work of your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet. (Ps 8:1-6)

It is the Word of God that keeps the universe in harmony. When David looked to the heavens, he saw the mighty power of God's rule, but when he looked at the earth, what he saw was a man. The rule of heaven comes to earth when a man recognizes his weakness, and in his helplessness cries out to God. Then the rule of heaven comes to earth, man becomes a king and he begins to rule. "What is man that you remember him?" I think this was what was in David's mind when he reflected on this anointing.

### *David's Story becomes the Christ Story: "Come and See"*

Samuel is the focus of this drama which is recounted from his perspective. It opens with the prophet's grieving over Saul, and God's overcoming his grief through teaching him to see as God sees. In Scene 1, he is told to "Come to Bethlehem and see." These are the key words of the chapter, where they are used seven times (*see*) and eight times (*come*). In Scene 2, Samuel rejects seven sons and anoints the eighth. This is the way out of grief: "Come and behold the beauty of the new king."

The gospel story has a similar introduction. The nation was grieving because there was no king in Israel. Then came John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness, with his mission to anoint a new King from Bethlehem. Like Samuel, he did not recognize the one to be crowned: "'I didn't recognize him...' He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit." To those who would become the disciples of Jesus, John said "Come and see." Jesus himself said to the disciples, "Come and behold the beauty of the Lamb." What is the cure for grief? When everyone and everything disappoints you, go into Bethlehem and see the beauty of the new King. In the person of Christ, God has instituted a new thing. Believe on him. He is not like Saul. He will never disappoint you. Simeon said of this one,

*"Lord, now let Thy servant depart in peace,*

*according to Thy word;  
for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation  
which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to Thy people Israel."* (Luke 2:29-32)

### **How Do We Enter Into the Story?**

Are you grieving today over the Saul in your life? Has the person you invested in turned out to be a disappointment? Perhaps that Saul is yourself. Is your own striving for glory more important to you than spirituality? Are you tired of the habit, the sin that has dominion over you? If you are, God is willing to initiate a new thing. He has already provided for a new King. He calls. He sends. He invites. He provides the sacrifice. He reveals what to do. Most important of all, he gives his Spirit to those who call out to him. Our task is to pray, "O God, where is Bethlehem today? Where is that outcast son or daughter, the runt of the litter, whom you have selected? Lead me, like Samuel, to find them."

But, like Samuel, what keeps us from entering in is our fear. "How can I go?" we ask. Our fear stifles us from venturing forth into unknown territory. We fear that by identifying with this new King we will offend someone. But the Kingdom of God is not seeking a merger with the old order; it intends to take it over. Christ is a threat to all the powers that be. And you are going to be a threat, too, so get used to it. We have two choices: We either must die in the old order or be persecuted in the new.

At an meeting of our elder board a few weeks ago, a group of people from our body came to share with us a ministry they had become involved in. They had found a new Bethlehem in Juvenile Hall, ministering among and sharing the gospel with a group of troubled, abused teenagers. One of the team members was a widow, Pat Bradley. Her late husband, Jack, was one of the great Christian men of our generation. She told me once that Jack had never raised his voice to her. He honored and served her all through their marriage. But now he is gone. Pat could have spent the rest of her life grieving over her loss, but she found her Bethlehem in Juvenile Hall, and God has given her 30 children to shepherd.

Grief is overcome by seeing. Fear is overcome by obedience.

My friends, is God saying to you today, "How long will you grieve over Saul? Arise, come and see the beauty of the Lord."

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