

Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue our sermon series titled, □ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through the book of 1 Samuel.

Our biblical text for today is □ 1 Samuel chapter 16:1-13.

Here’s the big idea I draw from this text: □ God sees what we cannot, so we live by faith, not by sight.

This idea is certainly not unique to this text; it is reflected elsewhere in Scripture. For example, David says to the Lord in □ Psalm 139:16,

ESV Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

The Lord sees everything about you and me, and he sees everything that we are going to experience in every day of our lives. But we can’t see it.

In light of this, the apostle Paul encourages us in □ 2 Corinthians 5:7 saying,

ESV 2 Corinthians 5:7 . . . we walk by faith, not by sight.

That is to say, we should trust the Lord who sees what we are not able to see. The Lord is our seeing-eye God. God sees what we cannot, so we live by faith, not by sight.

This idea is probably familiar to you. It is common church talk.

What is not so common is knowing exactly what this looks like in real life and how we can apply it. And that is what we're going to learn from our text today. It begins in □ 1 Samuel 16:1, where it says,

ESV 1 Samuel 16:1 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 for myself a king among his sons."

As you may recall, Samuel is a Jewish priest and prophet who had appointed Saul to be the very first king of Israel. Only Saul didn't work out so well. Saul is an example of someone who walks by sight, not by faith. Saul trusts in himself more than God. Saul does not have a heart for the Lord. So, God rejects Saul as king over Israel, and Samuel is the man who conveys the rejection.

Saul is not immediately removed from office; he is a lame duck who will still serve for some years, but Saul's royal lineage will end with him. His successor will not be his son, but instead will hail from a different family.

Samuel is grieved by Saul's failure. The original Hebrew word translated □ "grieve" is commonly used for mourning the dead. Samuel's high expectations for Saul have died. Saul's kingship did not turn out the way Samuel had hoped.

In the midst of Samuel's grieving, the Lord says to him, □ "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?" In asking this question, the Lord is not seeking out a specific answer. He is serving up a swift kick. This is a reproof.

This catches us by surprise because Samuel is the good guy. Samuel is the mature man of God who is faithful and respected. The book we're studying is even named after him.

So, what's the problem with Samuel's grieving that it draws the Lord's rebuke?

A clue is provided when the Lord says, □ "I have provided for myself a king." The original Hebrew term translated "provided" is רָאָה (*rah-áh*). The primary meaning of the word is to see.¹ This could literally be translated, "I have seen for myself a king." In this case, the seeing is with a view to selecting or choosing. So, rendering it "I have provided" is suitable, but the idea of visualization gets lost in the translation.

The Lord sees what Samuel cannot. He sees Saul's successor among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite. He sees that Jesse and his hometown of Bethlehem in Judah will be forever associated with the coming Messiah.² God looks at the situation and sees the lineage that will lead to Jesus.

But what does Samuel see?

A train wreck.

Samuel is grieving because he focuses only on what he himself can see. And all Samuel can see is a rejected king—a king he had anointed, a king in whom he had invested, and king on whom he had pinned his hopes for a bright future. Samuel may have been asking himself, "What

¹ Holladay, William Lee, and Ludwig Köhler. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill, 2000 (hereinafter referred to as HALOT).

² Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Kings (Revised Edition)*, edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland. Vol. 3. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 165.

do I have to show for my life's work? All the effort, all the prayer, all sacrifice to do what is right, and it boils down to this, a royal failure?"

I imagine the Lord's motivational reproof of Samuel is something along the lines of, "Samuel, stop focusing exclusively on the things you can see, and start trusting me for the things you cannot see. Trust my vision, not yours. Let's get to work on what I can see."

I imagine Samuel responding, "Well, as far as I can see . . ."

And I imagine the Lord interrupting, saying, "That's the point. As far as you can see is not very far. Not compared to what I can see. So, now is the time to stop wallowing in your shattered dreams and unfulfilled expectations and the train wreck you never saw coming. Instead, fill your horn with oil, and go. I have already seen and chosen a new king you need to anoint. I got this."

Sometimes our grief stems from fixating only on the things we can see. And if a godly person like Samuel is prone to such fixation, we can all fall victim to it as well. I know I do. Sometimes I need a swift kick to fix my fixation on my unfulfilled expectations.

It is not that grieving is bad in and of itself. We learned last week that the Lord himself was heartbroken over Saul. But the Lord's question, "How long?" suggests there is a limit. There is a time to move on in faith—to trust God with the things we cannot see.

The Lord says to Samuel, "I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."

In verse 2, Samuel raises a legitimate concern.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:2 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.’”

As far as Samuel can see, the Lord is sending him into a dangerous situation. If Saul gets so much as a whiff that Samuel may be about to anoint his successor, Saul may try to kill Samuel. It is reasonable to expect that Saul has Samuel under surveillance.

And Samuel’s fear is not exaggerated. We have already seen that Saul is a courageous warrior in battle. And we are going to see in coming chapters that Saul is inclined to kill innocent people who make him look bad.

At this point, we would probably prefer it if the Lord were to assure Samuel by saying something like, “Don’t worry. There is no danger. Saul is not going to kill you. I guarantee it because I am placing you in my divine protective bubble.”

But there is no such guarantee. Instead, the Lord essentially says, “In doing what I am commanding you to do, just go about your business as a priest.” On the one hand, this is a cover, because showing up in Bethlehem to sacrifice a heifer would not be seen as odd or unusual for a priest like Samuel.³ On the other hand, the elders in the town are not expecting him, and a surprise visit may draw attention.⁴

So, a seemingly important question is left unanswered: “Will this work? Will Saul’s suspicions be aroused?”

³ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, Vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 178.

⁴ *Ryrie Study Bible*, note on 1 Samuel 16:4.

As far as Samuel can see, he doesn't know. This may or may not work. It's dangerous.

And this points to another aspect of living by faith. It can be scary. Sometimes God calls us into situations that strike fear. If we do what the Lord calls us to do, we might lose something or someone important to us. To disobey often feels like the safer option.

If we obey, we may lose control. Or we may lose a relationship. Or we may lose some financial security. Or we may lose some status. Or we may look foolish. Or we may lose popularity.

Or if you are Samuel, you may lose your life.

The Lord provides more instructions for Samuel's mission in verse 3.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:3 "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."

This verse is significant for what is not there. What is not there is a specific identification by name of who will be anointed. Nor are there complete instructions for how all of this is going to work. In effect, the Lord just says, "Take the next step. Invite Jesse. Then I will show you what to do. Just take the next step. I will declare to you the identity of the next king when the time is right."

I don't know how Samuel felt about this, but a part of me doesn't really like this step-by-step-gradual-disclosure approach to leading. I want all the details up front. I want it all mapped out. Every step. Every turn. I want to be able to visualize everything that's coming. Forward me the guy's profile, so I can see who his is and how I can reach him. Drop me a pin so I can see exactly where to find him. Text me the instructions so I

can see exactly what I am supposed to do and say. I want to see what I am getting myself into. I want to be in control.

But God does not seem too interested in accommodating my compulsion for control. His dealing with Samuel seems typical. “Here’s the next step. Take it. Trust me for the next steps you cannot see.”

□ Verse 4 continues.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:4 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?”

At this point, we are left to wonder why the Jewish spiritual leaders—the elders—are trembling at Samuel’s unexpected arrival in Bethlehem. They seem to know that things between Samuel and Saul are not exactly peaceable. Remember, it was an angry Samuel who had recently denounced and rejected Saul for disobeying the Lord. It was also an angry Samuel who had recently “hacked Agag to pieces,” finishing the job Saul was supposed to do. So, it is understandable that the elders are worried that Samuel might be angry again.

But Samuel assuages their fears in □ verse 5.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:5 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.

Samuel invites the elders to join him and Jesse and Jesse’s sons at a small, by-invitation-only worship service. In preparation, they are consecrated, which probably means they washed themselves ceremonially.

At this point, Samuel does not know for sure who the Lord sees as the next king. But he thinks he has a pretty good idea. □ Verse 6 explains,

ESV 1 Samuel 16:6 When they came, he [Samuel] looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.”

Eliab is Jesse’s firstborn son. As the firstborn, Eliab would have been the culturally expected choice. Moreover, there was apparently something about Eliab’s appearance and stature that made him look the part. As far as Samuel can see, Eliab is the perfect choice. Samuel is so predisposed to select Eliab that the Lord must intervene. □ Verse 7 explains,

ESV 1 Samuel 16:7 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 looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

Notice how many times the words □ “look” or “see” are used here. In three of these cases, the Hebrew word, *ראָה* (*rah-áh*) is used—the same word used back in verse 1 for God seeing a new king.

Look. It’s a theme. Do you see it?

Samuel cannot see what the Lord sees. Samuel’s eyes can only see outward things, but the Lord looks inward, to the heart.

Eliab is not the guy.

So, Jesse parades his other sons before Samuel in descending birth order, as recorded in □ verses 8 through 10.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 16:9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 16:10 And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.”

At this point, put yourself in Samuel’s sandals. The eldest son he thought was the shoo-in was rejected. And now, as far as he can see, all the other sons have been rejected as well.

If you were Samuel, what would you be thinking and feeling in that moment?

“Lord, I thought you said it was going to be one of Jesse’s sons.”

“Lord, I thought you said you were going to show me.”

“Lord, didn’t you say that you were going to declare to me your choice?”

In that moment, Samuel, the godliest man in Israel is baffled.

Have you ever been baffled by what the Lord is doing? Does the Lord’s leading ever make no sense at all to you in the moment? Do the Lord’s ways ever leave you scratching your head in bewilderment?

Join the club. You’re in good company.

The best of us are sometimes confused. Because we can’t see what God sees.

Whether prompted by the Spirit or not, it finally dawns on Samuel to ask an important question, as recorded in □ verse 11.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:11 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.”

Jesse’s youngest son is so young, it didn’t even occur to Jesse that he would be considered. His youngest was so far from being on Jesse’s radar that he hadn’t bothered to bring him; instead, he left him to tend the sheep. Jesse didn’t see this coming.

Samuel bids Jesse to fetch the boy. But the Lord still has not confirmed what now seems inevitable.

□ Verses 12 and 13 round out our text.

ESV 1 Samuel 16:12 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.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 16:13 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.

This is the first time David is mentioned in the Bible.

At this point, it is easy to make an assumption that is not supported by the text. I did. I assumed that everybody present for the anointing

knows that David has just been chosen the next king of Israel. But we have no evidence that anyone but Samuel knows.⁵

Conspicuous by its absence is any declaration to the group gathered that David will be king. David will be anointed two more times later in his life, as recorded in 2 Samuel 2:4 and 2 Samuel 5:3. In both those later anointings, David will be explicitly declared king. But not here in our text. It will be years before he ascends to the throne, and Samuel will not be alive to see it.

When Samuel anointed Saul back in 1 Samuel 10:1, he plainly declared him to be the king. But there is no such declaration for David in our text.

And the absence of such a declaration is understandable. Declaring David to be the next king right now would probably have endangered the young boy's life and perhaps Samuel's as well.

So, what is everybody thinking?

It is likely that everybody except Samuel assumes that David is being anointed for some special-but-unknown purpose. Old Testament scholar Alfred Edersheim explains, "Both Jesse and David may have regarded it as somehow connected with admission to the schools of the prophets, or more probably as connected with some work for God in the future, which at the proper time would be pointed out to them."⁶

This raises questions. If nobody but Samuel knows that David is going to be the next king, then what is the purpose of this anointing?

⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 80-82; David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 423.

⁶ Edersheim, *Bible History*, 82.

There are at least two unseen purposes.

First, Samuel is being granted the honor of anointing David, who will be the most famous and significant king of Israel, whose progeny will include the King of kings, Jesus Christ. Samuel can't see it. But God does.

Second, while this first anointing may not be an official coronation, it is the inauguration of David's **preparation** to be king. □ Verse 13 says, "the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward." The anointing initiated the work of the Spirit to equip and to train and to refine David to serve as king.

Spoiler alert: We are going to see in the coming chapters that David's preparation will be excruciatingly difficult. David will be hunted and threatened. He will have to endure the crucible of suffering. And he will be perplexed because he can't see why it's happening. It will make no sense to him because he can't see that he is being prepared for the throne.

But God sees.

And that brings us back to the big idea: □ God sees what we cannot, so we live by faith, not by sight.

You may find yourself in a situation right now that looks like a train wreck. What the Lord seems to be doing baffles you. His leading makes no sense at all. His ways have you scratching your head in bewilderment.

Perhaps you are grieving some loss. Your dreams have been shattered. Your expectations are unfulfilled. As far as you can see, there's nothing

good about it. As far as you can see, God is not taking care of you or others you love. As far as you can see, obeying God is simply not worth the trouble.

But as far as you can see is not very far.

God sees what we cannot. And he invites you and me to live by faith, not by sight.

Part of the reason God gave us the account of biblical history in our text is so that we can see in retrospect what the biblical characters could not see in real time: that God was at work for good in their lives in unseen ways. Through Scripture and the unfolding of history, God pulls back the curtain to reveal to us his good work that Samuel and David could not see.

It seems that God is ever preparing us, but he doesn't always reveal what he is preparing us for. Not in advance.

Today, it encourages us to live by faith, trusting God for his good work on our behalf that we cannot always see in real time.

How do we know that the Lord is at work for us when we cannot see it?

It requires faith. But it is not a blind faith. Because he has given us the strongest possible evidence in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We need to keep coming back to Christ's loving sacrifice on the cross as a reminder of the lengths to which the Lord will go to secure our wellbeing.

And God even helps us with the reminding! The Lord instituted regular observance of communion as a needful reminder for us.

When we eat the bread, we are reminded of his body sacrificed on the cross in payment for our sins.

When we drink the cup, we are reminded of his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

When we partake of these elements, we are proclaiming our faith in Jesus as our Savior. And we are reminded that it is also by faith that we are to live out our salvation as followers of Jesus day by day. We live by faith, not by sight, trusting that God sees what we cannot.

In a moment, I am going to pray. After that, some music will be played. During the music, whenever you are ready, you may come forward to either one of the tables in front to receive the elements.

You may partake of the elements immediately at the table. Or you may take the elements back to your seat. The outward details are not important; our inward disposition is. Because “the Lord looks on the heart.”

If, for any reason, you would prefer me to serve you the elements where you are seated, that would be my privilege. Whenever you are ready, just raise your hand, and I will come to serve you.

Let’s pray. Lord, we are so grateful for your sacrifice on the cross in our place and on our behalf. There is so much that we cannot see. Our lives were in your hands before we were born. Your love reaches beyond our field of vision. May this observance of communion remind us to live by faith, not by sight, trusting your eyes to see for us. Amen.