

**Focus:** God judges the heart.

One of my favorite Internet posts going around right now shows a bunch of college students posing for pictures hanging off this impressive looking cliff hundreds of feet above the island below. The caption says: “In Brazil, people take pictures tempting fate by hanging from this famous rock. 😬 No photo-shops. These are real pictures. Make sure you check out the last one.”<sup>1</sup>

I could not believe these kids! My first thought was, “They are all going to die.” The comments went much the same way, including one who just said, “NOT ME” ALL CAPS. But then as I read more comments, I saw, “You miss the part where there is ground 4 feet underneath them.” And another, “You guys obviously didn’t look at the last photo.” I turned to the last photo, and sure enough, with a wider view, they were all close enough their feet could touch the ground.

What can we learn from this? As the post itself says, “All that is required is the proper perspective!...Sometimes, the truth is a lot different than what it appears.”

Perspective is all over our reading from 1 Samuel. After losing the great debate last week, Samuel went on looking to find the king the people demanded. Now keep in mind, a king back then was basically someone who fought your battles and collected your taxes. So you wanted someone strong, and in this young man Saul, Samuel thinks he’s found him. We’re told Saul was “a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else (1 Sam 9:2).” In other words, Saul could fill out a suit or a suit of armor. Good enough. Samuel anoints him king.

And it’s a disaster. For all the things that Saul does well—and he is genuinely loved at least at first and even wins some battles!—he has one big problem, he doesn’t listen. In Saul, we meet someone who is *self-reliant*...to the exclusion of the voice of Israel’s real king: God.

So God tells Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and anoint another king. This is a dangerous mission. Saul is still king! He is not going to be happy about this idea! God basically tells Samuel to tell a white lie and go and anoint a new king anyway.

So Samuel goes and one by one these impressive young men that could also fill out a suit or sell a pair of jeans come by, and each time Samuel thinks, “Aha! This must be the man!” And each time, God tells him, “Nope! Not yet!”

Samuel is still judging by appearance. By strength. By height. By confidence. By all the things that the world values. Samuel still hasn’t learned the lesson from the failure of Saul.

And God reminds him with words that are so important then and in our day, too, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

And God chooses David. David, who was an afterthought; even his dad forgot him. David, who was out in the fields. David, the youngest. David, who as biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10158655802087545&set=pcb.10158655804527545>

puts it, “is one of the marginal people. He is uncredentialed and has no social claim to make.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, it is David who God will make an unbreakable covenant with, David whose line will finally culminate in the birth of God’s Messiah Jesus.

Why does God choose people like David: the small, the uncredentialed, the seemingly unimportant? Why does Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, “the smallest of all seeds,” which even when it germinates grows into... “the greatest of all shrubs.” *Not exactly awe-inspiring.*

Because it turns out God isn’t looking for the things we are looking for. Fame. Money. Title. Strength. Smarts. Looks. Charm.

Unlike ourselves who spend our entire lives worrying about these fleeting things and chasing after them, God could have any of those things right now if he wanted. But when God was born, we knew him as Jesus: friend of sinners, among the poor and suffering, born in a manger, died on the cross. A man, whom as Isaiah prophesies, “had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him...and we held him of no account (Isa 53:2-3).”

*We* held him of no account, but *God who sees the heart* did. Jesus’s heart that listened to the word of God his Father and that was always being given in love to others. That’s what matters to God.

And Paul in his letter to the Corinthians says this changes everything, not just for God, but for us! “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.” A human point of view. It’s not like we should necessarily be blamed for this. We’re human after-all! But the thing about a human point of view, is, like that Internet post, we humans often tend to think we see the full picture when we don’t. We often see things from our own backgrounds or upbringings. We don’t see the small seeds germinating deep underground. Only God can. And that’s not even counting that cloud that always fogs our judgment: sin. It’s almost like Paul is saying, “if we were wrong when we saw Christ, and God was right, what else might God’s perspective have to teach us?”

And the answer is twofold: humility and faith. God didn’t pick David *in spite* of the fact he didn’t have all the answers. God picked David *because* David and God both knew darn well David didn’t have all the answers. The less room we take up for ourselves, the more room we give God to work. And when God works, God does amazing things, things in David’s life that we’ll hear about the next few weeks.

And faith. We know as a church we can’t work without faith. And yet so often, we try to do it by sight anyway. We look to the people who give the most, do the most, speak the loudest to, or just have been here the longest to make our decisions. We think our own opinions speak for everyone. We miss people who are quiet or from different backgrounds or slower to speak or young people or folks newer to our church family. That’s natural. That’s human, all too human.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 124.

But faith is taking a step back, looking and listening not in the obvious places, but getting to know each other on a not just face-to-face, but heart-to-heart level, and trusting that the God of David, the mustard seed, and Jesus will raise up the people to do the work the kingdom needs here and now in our day. **Amen.**