

A fresh way of seeing

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Date: 09 January 2022

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[0:00] What does God look for?

I think we'll see that God looks for the heart of an individual.! He looks for the heart of a congregation.! God is not superficial.

God always looks deeply, always looks beneath the surface rather than the way that we sometimes look, which is superficial, seeing just what can be seen by the naked eye.

In the last few weeks, we've been thinking about Bethlehem. And Bethlehem is a really important town in the story that we've been thinking about in terms of Christmas.

In fact, we're still in the season of Epiphany when people remember the coming of the Magi to Bethlehem. Because we need to remember that the story of Bethlehem does not begin with Jesus.

[1:08] The story of Bethlehem is a story that goes back much further than that. The story of Bethlehem goes back to the time when Rachel was buried in Genesis chapter 35.

It is a place which is deep in the history of God's people. It features in that lovely story in the book of Ruth when Ruth and Naomi return to their hometown of Bethlehem, the house of bread.

And ironically, the place that they left because there was a famine. It's kind of interesting. You could perhaps preach a sermon on the bread of life being born in Bethlehem.

It's a promising Christmas message, maybe for another year. Bethlehem is also the scene of this reading that we have here.

Jesse, the descendant of Ruth and Boaz. His hometown is Bethlehem. And that's where we find the story here.

[2:21] And the prophet Samuel being sent to Bethlehem to choose a new king. And that's a really important thing for the nation of Israel.

Up to this point, their first king had been appointed, Saul. And Saul was an impressive man, physically. He was kind of probably taller than Jerome. You know, people looked up at him.

Quite literally, looked up at him. He was impressive, physically. But spiritually, he was a car crash. And Samuel has been sent to appoint a new king who will not simply be externally pleasing, but will fit the bill on the inside.

It's possible, isn't it, to make our choices in life on the basis of externals, what's on the outside, rather than what's on the inside. So Samuel is sent to Bethlehem to choose a new king.

And that phrase there, the Lord said to Samuel, how long will you mourn for Saul since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way. I'm sending you Jesse of Bethlehem.

[3:39] I have chosen one of his sons to be king. And the word there for chosen is the word that is used elsewhere in the reading for seeing. And the word for seeing is the word that also means providing.

You know, someone says, you know, I'm going to pay for lunch. I'll see to it. It means that they're going to provide for it. Seeing and providing and choosing, they kind of all roll together in the meaning of this word.

It's about seeing. I have seen the one who will be king. I know who it's going to be. I have that person in my mind's eye. And I just want you to recognize him.

Of course, that's the challenge, isn't it? Challenge for Calvary Church. God sees a new pastor for Calvary Church. The challenge is for Calvary Church to see that person, isn't it?

To kind of line up what God sees with what we see. It's kind of a little bit like those puzzles, like those Mars bar puzzles. You know, you have half, well, go back a few years now.

[4:48] Mars bar puzzle. You had half a plane ticket in the Mars bar wrapper. And you had to find the other half of the plane ticket in order to fly.

You know, the challenge was that however many Mars bars you ate, you ended up with hundreds of right-hand sides of the ticket, but no left-hand sides of the ticket.

God has the right-hand side of the ticket about what his plans are for you individually and for the church. The challenge is for us to find the left-hand ticket and marry them together so that we actually take off.

Otherwise we, yeah, with all those Mars bars, we just get a little big and have to buy some bigger trousers. Choosing the right path is harder than we sometimes imagine.

Probably many of the problems that we have as individuals and as churches is deciding the right path. Some people are kind of riven with indecision, aren't they?

[5:58] Some people can't even choose what color socks to put on in the morning, let alone choose something important like a pastor. Making a decision is challenging. And it was going to be challenging for Samuel.

He arrived and Jesse presented seven sons to him. And Samuel has to choose. He knows that amongst Samuel's son, amongst Jesse's sons, there will be a new king.

He just doesn't know which one. And Jesse presents him with seven sons. And the first of Jesse's sons arrives before him and we read there when they arrive, Samuel saw Eliab and thought surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.

Now there's a certain language in the church, isn't there? The language in the church is I believe that we have found the man. I really believe that this is a man that God has for us.

That's what Samuel will say. It's quite obvious, isn't it? This is the man. He looks like a king.

[7:22] He looks every inch a king. But of course Samuel, the mature prophet, and we as individuals and as a church frequently need re-education.

We need our our vision readjusted. Saw someone this week who had a cataract operation and suddenly everything was clearer. She saw my wrinkles.

She saw the colors around her. Re-education, helping us to see clearly, helping us to get on the same page as God.

God. We all need that. And there are five stages. I often forget to mention all five, so if you're taking notes, please forgive me, but there are five steps to this re-education.

And the first step is to be taught the limits of our own assessments. The first stage is that we need to be taught that what we see, what we understand, is not always the whole picture.

[8:36] People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart there in verse 7 that we've already considered. You can't judge a book by its cover.

Not all that glitters is gold. There is more to this than meets the eye. Appearances can be deceptive.

We saw that, didn't we, with the pictures earlier. Don't always immediately get what's in front of you. You can miss what is before your eyes.

You ever had that experience? You know someone at church, and on a Monday morning you see them perhaps with a uniform on in another place, and you don't recognise them, because you've got used to them being here without your uniform, and they're now in another place with a uniform, and you just don't get it immediately.

You have to take a double, perhaps a triple take, before you actually recognise it's them. Not always obvious, not always easy. So the first thing he had to do was to be taught the limits of his own assessment.

[9:53] Do not consider the appearance or height, for I've rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at, man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart, verse 7.

So he had to adjust, secondly, that's the second thing, he had to adjust his way of seeing. Do not adjust your sets, is sometimes something that's said.

Well we need to adjust our sets, we need to adjust our vision. Samuel is told with the first person who comes, there's no king material here.

And then we read, Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass in front of Samuel and Samuel said, the Lord has not chosen this one either. Jesse then made Shammah pass before Samuel. Samuel said, nor has the Lord chosen this one. Jesse had seven of these sons pass before Samuel and none of them fitted.

[11:01] Then if you were Samuel whether you began to panic at this point, whether you began to think whether you got everything completely wrong. Maybe it wasn't Bethlehem after all, maybe it wasn't Jesse, maybe you simply put the wrong postcode in the sat nav.

Maybe it was some other family with seven boys that you needed to go to and you just got it completely monumentally wrong. At that point, I suppose it would be very easy to give up. But the third thing we see in this re-education process is that he had to look under the surface. If we don't find a way of making two rows of five coins by moving two coins of the seven, in the way that we think about it, we need to think about it in a different way.

Look beneath the surface. And he asks the question there in verse 10, are these the only sons that you have? You kind of go out on a limb like that, don't you?

He's just rejected the seven. Is this it? Now remember, seven, seven, that's the perfect number. If you had seven sons, in Israel, the three cherries had come up.

[12:24] This was as good as it could get seven sons. What do you mean? You can't improve on perfection. Have you got any more than seven?

Who wants more than seven? You've got seven, you give up. Have you got any more? Is this all you've got? What? sometimes the overlooked, sometimes the undervalued becomes the most important.

Jimmy Greaves has just died. He was a great footballer. He was part of the 1966 World Cup winning team, although he didn't play in the final.

he was replaced before the final, in fact, because he'd been injured by a man called Jeff Hurst. Jeff Hurst was not the first name on the team sheet.

Jimmy Greaves was the first person on the team sheet, but he was injured. Jeff Hurst played in the final and he scored three goals. They think it's all over. It is all over now.

[13:36] Someone who wasn't immediately in the frame, not only was in the frame, but became the winner. Sometimes what we don't immediately expect or don't immediately see might be what God is actually doing.

A footballer is on the bench for 75 minutes. His team are struggling a little bit. And the manager decides to freshen things up and he puts him on the pitch.

And the man decides that, well, he's only got 15 minutes left to play. In this game, so he'll give everything he can. And he scores an equalizer and a winner. Remarkable.

Sometimes the overlooked person, the marginalized person, is the very one that God might use. Someone has said that David is a basic rebuke to the minimizing He's rebuke to the minimizing! objective just. He's just a kid. He's just a shepherd. He's just the youngest. Ever had that for you? Sometimes the youngest can be treated somewhat differently.

[14:49] They're just a kid. You know, they say in football that if he's good enough, he's old enough. If he's good enough, he's old enough.

enough. And it's kind of an interesting concept, isn't it? We need to be very careful not to impose rules and restrictions upon those that God might use, that God might bring forward, because of our understanding, our prejudices perhaps.

If he's good enough, he's old enough. And the fourth thing that we notice in this re-education process is waiting. Samuel and Jesse and Jesse's family, they have to wait.

The story waits. There is an eighth son. There is a son beyond perfection. But he is out on the hillside looking after the sheep.

And I guess probably that means some distance. Where are the closest sheep to Calvary? I guess somewhere like Lewis maybe. Or getting on towards Lewis. Sorry?

[16:06] Just up the ditching road. Okay. But if you were walking up there now and we needed to bring him down to take part of the service, it would take a while, wouldn't it? So probably, I don't know, I walk pretty quickly, but probably an hour and a half to get there and get back.

I'm walking. I'm walking. I walk fast. So there was a wait. You know, waiting is hard. We don't like to wait. Now, as a church, you've been waiting to appoint a new leader.

You've been waiting a year or so. And there have been one or two false starts, stuttering starts. And waiting is difficult. We want it now.

And we want it quick. That's life, isn't it? We want it instantly. We don't want the ring of death on the computer. We want things to load up straight away.

We want God to provide things straight away, make it plain straight away. But there is waiting. They are made to wait. They're made to wait and the story waits.

[17:17] But it's a reminder, isn't it, that David is not an accident. You know, sometimes they say about the youngest child, oh, they were an afterthought, maybe a bit of an accident. But David wasn't an accident.

He was God's intention. God's intention for this family and God's intention for this nation. And Samuel had to learn to search for confirmation.

How can we be sure? How can we be sure that this, in fact, is the one? And it's an odd thing, really. Jesse's last child comes and Jesse's last child is anointed.

And we read there, so he sent, verse 12, and had him brought in. He was ruddy with a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the Lord said, rise and anoint him for he is the one. That's an odd one, isn't it? David was a looker. He had Hollywood looks. And you kind of think, okay, wait a minute.

[18:26] You rejected all these other people because outwardly they were impressive, but they were not king material. How come I'm now looking at the one who kind of looks much more magnificent than the other seven rolled together?

This is an odd thing, isn't it? this is an odd thing. Rise up and anoint him for he is the one. So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers.

From that day on, the spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah. Yeah, he's chosen not because he is handsome.

That's just a bonus. it's nice to know, isn't it? You're not necessarily going to get an ugly pastor. You haven't got to be ugly to be godly, have you?

You haven't got to be dull to be godly. You know, a sparkling personality might be a lovely bonus in the right person that God has for you here at this church.

[19:39] Interesting, isn't it? It's not until verse 13, that David has actually mentioned. He's nameless up to this point. He's just the kid on the hill. He's just the eighth child. If you're the youngest child, Isaac, you know, what happens sometimes is that, you know, your brother and your sister, they've had all the photographs taken of them when they were small.

And you're looking around and you think, where are the pictures of me? Because they're so busy with them, you see. They haven't got time to take pictures of you. Yeah, we've all got photo albums like that.

David wasn't even mentioned, but now he's called David. And of course, David means beloved. So of course, Jesse didn't think that he was an afterthought. He was beloved.

He was a special son to Jesse too. He just didn't. He just didn't, for the life of him, imagine that David could be the man that Samuel was looking for.

He just couldn't imagine that. He had no categories in his thinking to imagine that David would be what God was looking for. Of course, what made him qualified was the spirit of God being upon him.

[20:59] we can do nothing without the breath of God. We can do nothing without the spirit of God being upon us. We are a husk, aren't we, without the spirit of God.

The church is an organization without the spirit of God. It is the spirit of God that brings life to us. You know, that statement that the Lord sees not as men see, man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart.

It is a really important lasting principle, isn't it? Samuel had to pass over the first seven because God wanted to choose the eighth son, David, because he saw something there that was

exceptional.

He had set him apart for this great work. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament set people apart for works of being a prophet, a priest, and a king. David is set apart as the future king.

We read these words in 2 Corinthians 5, 16 earlier. From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

[22:15] To become a Christian is to begin to see. To become a Christian is to begin to see clearly, clearly what God wants us to see. We can't see the world the same again.

Our vision has been transformed. The old ignorance, the old prejudice cannot exist. We can't see like that anymore because we've been made new.

Of course, the supreme example of this principle at work is on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who is despised and rejected by men is the one that God uses as his agent of salvation.

The one who is perceived to be the reject is the one who is the rescuer. The one who is seen to be deserving of death is the one who brings life.

Life for us. People couldn't see it. They couldn't see it on the cross. If he is the son of God, let him come down from the cross. he couldn't see it.

[23:25] But Jesus is the son of God, is the prophet, priest, and king for those who have eyes to see. So the great challenge for us is to see as God sees, which involves as we saw, radical re-education in our lives.

The Bible calls it repentance, to rethink, to recalibrate the way that we think and feel and believe and choose and will.

A re-education initiative because God is looking for the heart. God is looking for what's on the inside. God is not interested in the phony, the fake, the sham.

He wants reality. The reality of God is what's required. He doesn't want someone who simply looks good, but someone who is good. Now we are warned by this, aren't we?

That our eyes can be turned. Even Samuel, the mature prophet, his eye could be turned, in the wrong path by the wrong criteria. We mustn't sit down thinking, hey, we're just too smart, too mature to be befuddled in our thinking.

[25:02] No, none of us are. We need to constantly renew our vision by the grace of God. Interesting statement in the New Testament from Acts chapter 13 verse 22.

After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him, I found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart.

He would do everything I want him to do. I found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who would do everything I want him to do.

Now we know, don't we, that did not mean that David was perfect. No human leader is perfect. No human leader avoids every misstep.

But the fundamental governing heart of David was toward God. What do we look for in a leader?

[26:05] We look for someone whose heart is toward God, who loves God, who is Christ-centered, who is submissive to God's word, who is willing to respond to God's direction, who serves the Lord God and serves his people.

We pray, don't we, that God would lead the church here to such a man in the coming year, sooner rather than later.

by his grace. That means that we need to have our eyes wide open by the grace of God to see as he sees.

Let's pray together. Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me.

If you are God, my saviour and my hope is in you all day long. Father God, we need your wise and loving direction every day. Help us to have a heart that beats in time with your heart.

[27:19] Give us eyes that see what you see. Give us ears that hear your word. Give us minds that discern your will. Give us hands that do your work.

Give us feet that walk in your ways. For Calvary Church, I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know

him better.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in all that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance and his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked not only in the present age but also in the one to come. God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who feels everything in every way.

[28:29] Pray for Phil as he returns as a part-time elder at the end of January for Mark and Annika serving in the church and all the deacons and members. They might know unity of mind and purpose.

Direct the church here we pray to a pastor who is a man after your own heart. We constantly pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.

We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.