

# Vessel Of Clay

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[0:00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you for tuning in today. We are excited to preach the Word of God, to get into this Word, but most importantly, let the Word of God get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ.

Today, I want to start off with an anonymous poem that goes like this. Oh, I will do. Place me on your table for all men to view.

Look at me, called the goblet of crystal so clear. My transparency shows my contents so dear. Though fragile am I, I will serve you with pride, and I'm sure I'll be happy your house to abide. The master came next to a vessel of wood. Polished and carved, it solidly stood. You may use me, dear master, the wooden bull said, but I'd rather you use me for fruit, not for bread.

[1:27] Then the master looked down and saw a vessel of clay, empty and broken, it helplessly lay. No hope had the vessel that master might choose to cleanse and make whole, to fill and to use.

Ah, this is the vessel I've been hoping to find. I will mend and use it and make it all mine. I need not the vessel with pride of itself, nor the one who is narrow to sit on the shelf, nor the one who is big-mouthed and shallow and loud, nor the one who displays his contents so proud.

Not the one who thinks he can do all things just right, but this plain earthy vessel filled with my power and might. Then gently he lifted the vessel of clay, mended and cleansed it, and filled it that day.

I love that poem. But listen, their cry was for a king.

They looked around at all the nations around them, and they had kings. Why couldn't Israel have a king too? Tall, strong, proven in battle, a faithful man to lead them forward against the enemy, a confirmed warrior to return Israel to its proper place?

[2:40] If only they could get rid of these selfish judges and get a king! Then everything would be perfect and complete. Or, so they thought. But the problem with this plan was it sounded great, but God was not in the equation.

Hey, welcome to our new series we're starting today called After God's Own Heart. Over the next five weeks, mainly in the month of July and then the first week of August here, we're going to jump into the pages of Scripture from 1 and 2 Samuel, and we're going to look at the life of the only person in the Bible that is called a man after God's own heart.

We're going to see David's humble beginnings, his godly heart, his rise to fame, the countless victories in battle, his patience, his reign over Israel, and even some big mistakes that God used to grow him.

So this morning, why don't you join me as we start at the very beginning of David's journey here. Go ahead and open your Bibles to 1 Samuel. 1 Samuel chapter 16, verse 1.

And if there's anybody listening who's wondering, like, where in the world do you find 1 Samuel? Let's just start from the very front of your Bibles here, okay? And I want you to say these with me if you know them.

[3:53] Starting with the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and then you come to 1 Samuel.

It's the ninth book of the Bible. So turn with me to chapter 16, and let's start here in verse 1. The Lord said to Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul since I've rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I've chosen one of his sons to be the king. But Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he'll kill me. The Lord said, Take a heifer with you and say I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate. Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. So they're thinking he's bringing judgment here, okay? It says, They asked, Do you come in peace?

[4:57] Samuel replied, Yes, in peace. I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me. Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

Well, this morning, guys, as we begin to look at David's life, I want you to see three things right off the bat that we can learn from his humble beginnings that we can also apply to our lives if we want to be that person chasing after God's own heart.

And the first one I want you to see today is that God has this under control. God has this under control. Whatever your this looks like, whatever situation you're walking through right now that may even seem crazy or impossible, God has it.

He is more than big enough for you. And you know what? You've probably heard this maybe most of your life that God is your shepherd. He's your protection. He never changes. His promises never fail.

He's faithful. His power is unmatched. His love overwhelming. His grace sufficient. He sees you. He knows you. He loves your stinking guts. But you know what?

[6:06] How often does that message get lost in translation? Because when it comes to our lives, we're constantly grabbing for control so that everything turns out the way that we've planned it.

Anybody else besides me willing to admit that we do this? Yeah. Sometimes we're so afraid to let go that we don't allow God to be God in our situation.

Listen, I've needed to do this for a long time. So here goes. My name is Ray Sweet and I am a perfectionist. God has given me the ability, the strength of being able to organize and plan things out.

But there's a point where our pursuit for excellence in everything we do can easily turn into this unhealthy obsession called perfectionism. See, God wants us to work for him with all our hearts. No question about that. And he wants us to do everything with a heart of excellence and integrity and authenticity. But the moment our service to him becomes all about me, then I have a control issue.

[7:14] And I've learned through way too much trial and error that things go so much better when I get out of the way and I let God do what only he can do. I want to show you two examples of this leading up to Samuel's visit with David.

First, if you'll flip back a few chapters with me to 1 Samuel 8, chapter 8, verses 4 through 7. And this is the time where Israel is being led by Samuel's sons, who, by the way, were not as focused on God as Samuel.

That's a very nice way of saying it. And they definitely weren't good leaders either. So starting here in verse 4, here's what it says. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.

They said to him, You are old and your sons do not follow your ways. Now appoint a king to lead us such as all the other nations have. But when they said, Give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel.

So he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him, Listen to all that the people are saying to you. It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.

[8:20] See, this wasn't about getting ungodly judges out of there so they truly have a godly man on the throne. To the people, it was about keeping up with the other nations. Having a king who would strike fear into the enemy's heart.

It was superficial. It was all outward appearance. And God says, Okay, I want you to see firsthand what will happen when you're more concerned about having a king on the throne over your nation than you are having me, God, as the king of the throne of your hearts.

And if we fast forward back to 1 Samuel 16, we can see that Saul had been anointed king as the people had wanted. At first, things were going well. He seemed humble.

He was seeking the Lord. They were victorious in battle. But it wasn't too long before Saul started to reject the counsel of the Lord. That authority and that power went to his head.

And that's when God, after many attempts to pull him back, to try to change his heart. And Saul finally just will not repent. And that's when he's rejected as king.

[9:22] Then God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king over Israel. So look with me here at 1 Samuel 16 again. And let's start in verse 6.

Now, we're talking about Jesse's firstborn here.

So in this Hebrew culture, there was a lot of weight put on that firstborn boy. They were the next in line to take over. They were revered often more than the rest of the sons.

And there's no question that Samuel's impressed with what he sees physically here from Eliab. He's got king written all over him. Tall, muscular, handsome, battle-tested, got the brains, probably well-spoken.

This is the guy that the girls are chasing and the other guys want to be. If anybody can give Saul a run for his money when it came to looking like a king, it was this guy.

[10:36] Surely the people would line up to follow someone like Eliab. He's everything they ever wanted in a king. And that's when God interrupts. He says, you're focused in the wrong areas.

Do not consider his appearance or his height. I've rejected him. Even Samuel, probably the most spiritually mature man in the country, is ready to take control and crown him.

But there's a good chance this will be kind of Saul 2.0 here. Just like the people of Israel demanding a king, Samuel, in his own wisdom, says to himself, listen, this has to be the one.

And God very quickly makes it known, uh-uh, you're not in control here. I am. And God says this, if you look back to Isaiah 55, verse 8.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

[11:35] In other words, you were never designed to be in control of your life. Let me say that again because I think this needs to sink in. At least with me it does. You and I were never designed to be in control.

You were designed to be dependent on a perfect God who has everything under control and whose plans don't always make sense to us in the moment.

David Edwards, a preacher, put it like this. He said, the more we try to gather the control over our lives, the more everything in our lives falls apart.

And let me add this to that. God didn't create us to control. He created us to trust and to follow his leading. What does that old hymn by John Samus say? Trust and obey.

For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to what? But to trust and obey. And one thing you'll see as we go throughout this series that made David a man after God's own heart, is that he understood that God had put him in the palm of his hands.

[12:37] His job was to simply be faithful to follow the Lord every single step of the way. So let me ask you and me both this hard question. Are you in total control of your life?

Or as hard as it could be, are you letting God lead you and your family every step? It's tough. I know. I struggle with this too. Maybe more than you do.

But there's no better place to be than in the center of God's will, trusting his perfect care and love.

Now the second thing I want you to get today is that God looks at the heart.

I want to share a story with you that I shared here just a few years back, but it's just too good not to share again. When Mike Collin, who was a graduate of Auburn University, so pretty impressive to play at Auburn in football, he was a linebacker at the time for the professional Miami Dolphins.

And his former college coach, Shug Jordan, asked him if he would do some recruiting for him. And Mike said, sure, coach. I'd be glad to do that. What kind of player are you looking for?

[13:44] And the coach said, well, Mike, you know there's that fellow that you knock him down and he stays down. And Mike says, well, coach, we don't want him. And he says, that's right. And then there's that fellow, you knock him down, he gets up, you knock him down again and he stays down.

And Mike says, well, coach, we don't want him either. And coach says, no, we don't. But Mike, there's a fellow, you knock him down, he gets up. You knock him down, he gets up. You knock him down, he gets up. Mike said, well, coach, that's got to be the guy that we want, right?

But coach said, no, we don't want him either. I want you to find the guy who's knocking everybody down. That's the guy we want. Listen, that works in football.

And that is definitely the way that our world will often look at things. But the thing I love most about our God is that he goes deeper. He looks at the heart.

That's what he cares about. Someone who's running after him. It doesn't matter at all the earthly ways that we measure success. It's all about the heart that beats for the Lord.

[14:45] So look with me here at 1 Samuel 16. And let's pick up here in verse 7. But the Lord said to Samuel, do not consider his appearance or his height, for I've rejected him.

The Lord does not look at the things that people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. So this is probably the second oldest son. But Samuel said, the Lord has not chosen this one either. Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, nor has the Lord chosen this one. Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel.

But Samuel said to him, the Lord has not chosen these. Verse 11. So he asked Jesse, are these all the sons you have? And you can almost see his head drop here. He says, there is still the youngest.

He is tending the sheep. Samuel said, send for him. We will not sit down until he arrives. So he sent for him, had him brought in. He was glowing with health and fine in appearance and handsome features.

[15:49] Then the Lord said, rise and anoint him. This is the one. I love that story. I love that story so much.

So here are the seven sons of Jesse that are very impressive. I mean, in the world's eyes, they each have what it takes to be king. And let me be the first one to tell you, when it says that God rejected them, it wasn't saying that they were wicked guys.

To be honest with you, it seemed like they were probably a great family. The men were honorable. They were faithful to their country. But they were rejected to be the next king over Israel to lead this nation.

He wanted someone who wouldn't be changed by the power a king has. Because authority, and you've seen this just like I have, authority can change us in a hurry when our hearts aren't fully surrendered.

And they'd already seen a good guy like Saul become this egotistical, paranoid, power-hungry, selfish leader when he started off on such a good note.

[16:51] He wanted someone whose heart, God wanted someone whose heart was sold out for the Lord. He wanted someone who was 100% all in. A man after his own heart seeking the Lord without any title, without any limelight, without a microphone, at least these days, without a microphone in their hand.

And that's exactly who David was at the core. That's who David had been all along as a shepherd boy in the fields when no one saw him but God. And he loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

See, the Lord wasn't looking for perfection. And as you're going to find out throughout this series, David for sure made his fair share of mistakes. But God was looking for someone who was sincere, sold out, and authentic about following him 24-7.

No Pharisees, no phonies, no part-time followers, a man after God's own heart. And here's my favorite part of this. In 2024, God's still looking for a man, a woman, a teenager, a child who loves him and who's willing to allow their life to be used for the glory of Christ.

See, God's still looking for that heart that says, Lord, I know I've made mistakes. I know that I am lost without you, but I'm so thankful for your grace and mercy over my life.

[18:12] I'm so thankful that you've forgiven me, tossing all my sins into the depths of the sea. I'm so glad that I'm an original masterpiece in your eyes. And God, because you are so good to me, I will spend the rest of my life trying my best to glorify you in everything I say and everything I do.

Lord, let your Holy Spirit lead me. To copy the words of David from Psalm 19, it may have sounded something like this. May the words of my mouth and may the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

That's the heart that God is looking for. That's the heart he wants to use to let his light shine into the world. And I love this quote by John Piper that says, And then the last thing I want you to see this morning, the future is bright with God.

Look with me here at 1 Samuel 16, verse 13. And we're going to close out our story here. So Samuel took the horn of oil and he anointed David in the presence of his brothers.

And from that day on, the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. So what a moment this had to be for this shepherd boy. And I want to be very careful not to over-dramatize this story.

[19:42] But if anybody in the family was the runt of the litter, if anybody was the black sheep treated more like a servant than a son, it was David. And that was common with the youngest son in that culture a little bit.

And the reason we know this to be true is because all the other sons were there with their father to see Samuel. But David was left off. They were there to make a good impression.

And David wasn't even invited to the party. He wasn't seen. He wasn't seen as the one to have present to put your best foot forward.

They were enjoying the good life. And here David is out in the field tending sheep, fighting wild animals. He's doing a job that one of his father's servants could have been doing. And listen, sheep were dumb, stinky, defenseless.

Did I say dumb? But what I love about David's heart was that he not only accepted the responsibility, but he took it seriously. He served his God as the best shepherd he could be.

[20:42] And what a moment that had to be when he was called out of the field. He comes walking into the house looking nothing like your traditional king, probably smelling a little gnarly too.

And God says to Samuel, That's my guy. Anoint him as the next king over Israel. You know, as I read that this week, I said out loud in my office, I said, I want to be that guy.

Not to be famous. Not to be seen. Not to be put on a pedestal. Well, I want to be that guy that is so grateful for the grace of God that he's shown me in my life, that my heart is always open to serve no matter where or what he calls me to do.

Because I know that there's no better place to be than in the center of God's will, even as that vessel of clay. And I'll tell you what, when I felt God's call on my life as an 18-year-old, 19-year-old kid, I felt overwhelmed and unworthy.

And one quote the Lord used in my life says, God, I am so small, but I want to do things so big that they would fail without you. Just like that anonymous poem we started with today, we are vessels of clay.

[21:55] And yet God can take our brokenness. He can mend us back together and he can use these lives for his glory. And just like David, God wants to use your life, no matter how old or young, no matter how rich or poor, tall or short, introverted or extroverted, no matter how familiar to the Bible and church you are, or maybe you're brand new to it all, and you're like, whoa, this stuff is different.

He wants to use you for his glory. But it starts with each of us letting go of this death grip that we sometimes have on our life and surrendering to him, letting him be God.

Even as that broken vessel of clay, we are loved beyond what we can wrap our minds around. And listen, you better put on your seatbelt because if you'll let him, God is ready to take you on the ride of your life.

He's ready to use you to make a difference in this world. He's ready to use that vessel of clay. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we just give you glory for your words of hope and your words of life that you have spoken over us today.

We just pray, as we look at David's story, one of the probably most godly, most well-used men throughout the words of Scripture, as we look at him, we also see, wow, he was the runt of the litter. [23:21] He was the guy who was not voted most likely to succeed. And yet, God, you took his life and you took his heart and you used him in amazing ways. And Lord, like we're also going to see in this series, he wasn't perfect.

He had some big falls. He made some big mistakes. And yet, God, you were able to restore him. So we just praise you that you are a God of grace and forgiveness and mercy, that you can take us broken vessels of clay and you can put us back together as that vessel that can be used for your glory.

So God, right now, we just give you permission. Have your way in our hearts. Do what only you can do. And may we be, like David, a man or woman or child running after your heart.

That's our deepest desire. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ. God's people said, Amen and Amen. Hey, earlier you heard me say the word surrender.

And that's where it starts. Maybe you're listening to this message and you're not a follower of Christ and this stuff is maybe kind of new to you or you haven't really heard a sermon in a long time and for whatever reason, God has led you to this radio broadcast.

[24:42] He's done it on purpose. You are listening for a reason because God loves you because He died on the cross to say, I love you big time, to take your sins upon His shoulders that if you will choose by faith to surrender your life to the Lordship of Christ, to repent of those sins and say, Jesus, my heart is all yours for the rest of my days.

If that's your deepest desire, God will come into your life, forgive you, transform you, begin that process and then He will use your life in ways that you could never imagine.

So today, if you have that desire to talk to someone, we would love to come alongside you. Once again, this is First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray.

I'm the lead pastor here. We would love to come alongside you and just help you on this journey.

So here's a couple things you can do. If you just have faith questions or maybe you want to talk about salvation in Jesus, we would love to do that.

You can contact us in the church office Monday through Thursday from 8 to 4.30 and you can do that at 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com.

[26:06] Hey, God bless you. I hope you have a great week.