

48 The Heart of the Matter

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 am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16.1).

So Samuel came to Bethlehem, in some secrecy for fear of Saul, to perform this sacred task of anointing the divinely-chosen individual to be the next king.

The sons of Jesse were brought in for inspection, one by one: first, Eliab, then Abinadab, then Shammah, and then four more sons.

Samuel was all set to anoint the very first son he saw, Eliab! We gather (verse 7), that he "looked the part" - tall, good-looking, and with an authority and presence arising from his being the eldest son. Eliab was obviously the one the Lord would have gone for, as far as Samuel was concerned.

But he was mistaken. The Lord had to have "a word in his ear", and promptly, before Samuel got things seriously wrong. Samuel was reminded that the Lord is not so concerned with what man sees - mere appearance. Instead the Lord looks at the heart itself (verse 7b).

It got to the point where there were no more sons outside the room waiting to be summoned before the prophet. "Is that it?" asked Samuel. Jesse had not bothered with "the littl'un" - too young, of no importance, not even an after-thought on this momentous day.

And yet, the lad David was the one. He was the chosen one, chosen above all his older brothers. He was the one whose heart displayed what the Lord needed to see for a future king of His people.

Jesse sent, and brought him in. We read of David being "ruddy, and of a beautiful countenance, and handsome" (verse 12). Samuel was firmly told, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he".

We live in an age where the lesson Samuel had to learn in this incident is widely ignored. Never mind the heart, the inner reality, of what a person truly *is*. That is old-fashioned, which is one thing in this trendy world that we must *never* be! Instead all the emphasis is on the outward appearance. Is such-and-such "good on the telly?". Is he or she popular, attractive, funny, witty, etc, etc?

Think of how the candidates striving to gain the US Presidential nomination for the Republicans or the Democrats slug it out for months beforehand in all those primaries. It's all about "the stump" - jetting round the country at vast expense, giving the same hackneyed speeches, appearing on chat shows, raising funds, promising this, that and the other. Gradually the list of hopefuls is whittled down, until finally - bringing us back to 1 Samuel - the chosen one is anointed!

But what a different process has been followed! How much is really known of *the heart* of the victor who finally makes it, be it to the White House or 10 Downing Street or the Elysee Palace or wherever?

How important it is that we remember that scene at Bethlehem all those years ago: the old prophet Samuel, the proud father Jesse, his seven fine sons - and the forgotten one coming last of all. The Lord sees the heart, your heart, my heart, the hearts of kings and queens and presidents and prime ministers and all the rest of them.

We are bidden to pray for all those who are set in authority over us (as in I Timothy 2.1). When all is said and done, these leaders are ordinary sinful human beings like the rest of us, albeit often with many gifts, entrusted with positions of great responsibility. May our prayer be that those who gain such positions of power may have hearts that are truly pleasing to the Lord Himself - the Davids of today rather than the mere Eliabs.

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