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AN UNUSUAL ROSE CEREMONY 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Nearly every day we get an email message from the Travel Channel urging us to enter their \$10,000 sweepstakes. They say we can enter every day. And every day I don't. I have entered in the past a number of times and haven't won. I've given up. Part of the reason for that is Laurie and I have entered countless contests in our lifetimes and have never won a single thing. Wayne Gretzky said you miss 100% of the shots you don't take. You also don't win 100% of the contests you don't enter. My problem is I haven't won 100% of the contests I have entered.

I could easily grow sad because I have never really been chosen for anything. I have never been singled out for a special award. When I was in college our country still had a draft. My sophomore year they instituted a new lottery system based on birthdays. I had a friend whose birthday was selected number 1. He said it was the only thing he had ever won. His award was an all expenses paid trip to exotic southeast Asia. I was pretty happy that I did not win that lottery.

Today we are going to look at the beginning of the story from long ago of a young man, probably about the age he would not yet have taken the SAT, still wasn't eligible for driver's education, who didn't have any expectation that he would ever be singled out for anything unusual. In the story we look at today he, and pretty much everyone else is going to be surprised. You might ask why you should care. The answer is that what happened to him speaks directly to something that is true of followers of Jesus and how we think about ourselves and this place in the world. Through his story we are going to find that we have been given something amazing, even though we may not recognize it. Let's look at 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

GOD ORDERED A REGIME CHANGE

The events we will be looking at in the coming weeks occurred in the latter half of the 11th century B.C. Israel had been a theocracy, ruled by God, but they decided they wanted to be like everyone else and have a king. A king could unify them against the threat of the Philistines, a people group living primarily in the coastal region of Canaan, who were a constant thorn in Israel's side. God had told them to be different, but they preferred to do it the world's way. It made sense to them, and having God be the leader was entirely too nebulous for them.

God essentially said, “This is a bad idea, but I see that you won’t be happy until you get what you want, so have it your way.” He instructed Samuel to anoint Saul, who came from the tribe of Benjamin, to be Israel’s first king. 1 Samuel 9:2 notes that Saul was “a head taller than anyone else.” In American presidential elections the taller candidate wins the majority of the time. Presidents are almost always taller than the average man. The last time we elected a President that was shorter than average was 1896. In the animal world there tends to be a correlation between an animal’s size and its social status in its group. The larger the animal, the higher its status. As things turned out it appears that being tall was Saul’s greatest asset as a king. Well, maybe not only, since he was also handsome, so he looked good on TV. No doubt that helped a lot.

Saul’s administration started out well, but it wasn’t long before he began having problems. Saul was impulsive, impatient and insecure. But worst of all for a leader of God’s people, he did not have a lot of trust in God. He believed in him, but he was mostly focused on what he could control and what he could do, rather than trusting God. In 1 Samuel 13 as he was leading the army against the Philistines he was waiting for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to God before they went to battle, but Samuel didn’t show up on his timetable. Saul grew impatient because he believed the battle’s outcome was totally in human hands, so even though God explicitly forbade this he offered the sacrifices himself. That might seem like a small thing to us, but it was evidence of his heart. He was going to do things his way regardless of what God said because he thought everything was up to him. It wasn’t about trusting God in the battle.

When Samuel did arrive he told Saul he’d done a stupid thing. God would have kept him on the throne, but now that wasn’t going to happen. In verse 14 Samuel said, “Now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.” God had decided to replace Saul as the king of Israel. Two chapters later Saul once again chose his own way rather than God’s way. He thought he had a better idea than God did so he disobeyed him directly.

1 Samuel 15:35 says that Samuel mourned for Saul. I get why. First it felt to him like the people had rejected him as the judge leading Israel, now the guy he anointed as king was turning out to be a bust as a draft pick. That’s where we pick up the story in chapter 16. It opens with the Lord telling Samuel to stop mourning for Saul. Then he tells him go to Bethlehem to see a man named Jesse. Samuel was to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the next king of Israel. Samuel was not happy about this assignment. In verse 2 he objects, “what if Saul hears about this?”

Samuel was afraid of what Saul would do if he heard that the prophet was anointing someone else to be the new King. Samuel had good reason to be afraid.

We are going to watch Saul descend into paranoia so deep that it becomes a serious mental health issue as he loses touch with reality. This was not merely because he really liked being king and wanted to hold onto his job. Fear was a large factor. We are currently in an election year going through the process of selecting a new leader for our nation. It is a flawed process and you may not necessarily be thrilled with where things stand right now, but it has one thing to recommend it. It is peaceful. That was generally not true of the transfer of power in ancient times. Most of the time power got transferred by way of assassination. That would've been bad enough, but there was a worse aspect to it. If one person assassinated a ruling king he faced the possibility that the descendants of the now deceased king would return the favor and assassinate him in order to regain power. So the usual procedure for the new guy was not just to assassinate the current ruler but to kill his entire family as well.

Saul felt that the very possibility of a new King, one who was not a member of his family, was an existential threat to not just his life, but also to the life of everyone in his family. That possibility will loom larger and larger in Saul's life until it overshadows everything else. This put Samuel in a less than desirable position. Unfortunately it was now open knowledge that the clock was ticking on Saul's time on the throne. But as was typical of Saul's character, rather than accepting God's will, he determined to do everything he could to make sure that what God had ordained would not happen. This meant for Samuel to go someplace with the intent of anointing a new King was to put his life at risk because of the threat of what Saul would do.

God gave Samuel a cover story. He told him to inform everyone that he was going to Bethlehem with the purpose of offering sacrifices. This was a duty of a prophet so no one would be surprised by it. God told him that while he was there he could also anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the next king. He just didn't have to announce that fact.

GOD MADE AN UNEXPECTED CHOICE

The selection process was a bit strange. As soon as Samuel saw Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, he thought, "Ah, here's the one." That was natural because he was the oldest son. In their culture the first son was the next patriarch of the family, the new leader. So he would be the likely choice among Jesse's sons to be the next king. Apparently this impression was aided by the fact that he was tall and good-looking.

Samuel, according to verse 6, thought, “surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.” In other words, “We have a winner!”

But God told him that Eliab was not the guy. God said to Samuel, “do not consider his appearance or his height.” Apparently Samuel on his own would have made the same mistake with Eliab that he made with Saul. Hey, he’s good looking, makes for great optics on TV, and he’s tall. He’s the perfect candidate. I suppose he would have been great running for President of United States today, but he was not the chosen king of Israel. What God told Samuel in verse 7 is one of those profound truths that often crop up in the Bible. He said, “the Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Obviously God was looking for something inside a person that wasn’t there in Jesse’s first son.

At that point what happens is kind of odd. Jesse trots out one son after another for Samuel to look at. It’s kind of like the television show *The Bachelor*. I was dismayed to learn that in the next generation in our family there is a *Bachelor* fantasy league. They have a fantasy draft at the beginning of each new season. Toby was the winner this past season. What is this world coming to? Anyway it appears that Samuel was actually the originator of the *Bachelor* concept. Seven sons but only one rose. Which boy will win the rose and become the next king of Israel? However, what happens reminds me of some other television shows we watch.

Laurie and I have enjoyed watching recently the shows *Hawaii Life* and *Caribbean Life* on the HGTV network. They feature people who are looking to buy a home in some beach locale in Hawaii or the Caribbean. Typically in each show they will take the prospective buyers to three different properties. Then the buyers decide which of the three they want to buy. Occasionally the shows aggravate me because after shown you the three properties the buyers end up saying they don’t want any of them. Then they go off and buy some place that you haven’t even seen. That’s pretty much what happened to Samuel. He saw all the sons and God gave thumbs down to all of them. That must have been a confusing moment for the prophet. Great, Jesse has 7 sons and we’ve just gone 0 for 7. What does this mean? What was Samuel supposed to do now?

Confused and a little desperate he asks Jesse in verse 11, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse admitted that actually there was one more son. But he was the youngest of the litter and he was out tending the sheep. Some scholars say that the Hebrew words used to describe David in verse 12 suggest that he was probably in

his early to mid teens. Apparently Jesse was aware that this reality show was intended to select a new king for Israel. The idea of David being the winner was so unlikely that they didn't even invite him to be on the show. It simply was not possible that he would be the one chosen to be the new king. However, the process of elimination left him as the only remaining possibility. Despite the unlikelihood that David would be the winner Samuel requested that Jesse send for him. To the shock of all when David arrived the Lord told Samuel, "give this guy the rose!"

Why this elaborate process? Why didn't God simply instruct Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse, as the new king of Israel? If God could communicate to Samuel that he should go to a particular town and seek out a particular man's family, surely he could've identified which of that man's sons was the one chosen to be the new king. So why this unusual process? We aren't told, so we can't know for sure why God used this process. However I do have a personal theory about why this reality show took place. It is only my guess so take it with more than a grain of salt. I think Samuel had to be taken through this process to be convinced that David was indeed God's chosen King because everyone in that society figured all the brothers would have been better candidates for king than David. Even David's own father, Jesse, could not believe that David would be the one. So I suspect God took Samuel through the process of elimination so that there would be no question in his and everyone else's minds that God had picked this unlikely young man to be the next king. After the reality show there would be no doubt for God had clearly eliminated all the other possibilities.

So Samuel anointed David in the presence of his brothers. Verse 13 tells us, "from that day on the spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David." From then on David was marked by God's hand upon him. He began manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit in his life just like those who have the Holy Spirit in them today will manifest that fruit.

IMPLICATIONS

THE WORLD LOOKS AT THE OUTSIDE

It is both sad and unfortunate that in our country today elections seem to hinge on image. Who looks best and comes across best on television? That plays a major role in elections. Wouldn't we do better if elections were determined on the basis of things like character and true leadership ability? Unfortunately that is not the way of the world. We may lament that people make judgments on such a shallow basis, but that is nothing new. God identified what human beings look at when evaluating people, and it mostly has to do with what they can see on the outside.

To some extent that's inevitable because we can't see people's hearts. We don't know what is inside of a person. Nevertheless generally the world evaluates on a lot of the wrong things. In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul wrote, "so 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." Paul said he once regarded people from a worldly point of view. Most notably this impacted how he saw Jesus of Nazareth. The world evaluates people on the basis of status, education or intellectual achievement, wealth, power, and external appearance. Paul would have regarded people on the basis of how much rabbinic training they had and their standing in the religious power structure. Jesus had no training and no status whatsoever. He was a nobody from a nowhere town. He was the son of a woodworker. He had an 0 and 2 count on him before he even opened his mouth.

Paul was hit by a lightning bolt out of a clear blue sky when he was confronted by this same Jesus risen from the dead. He was brutally confronted with the reality that he had completely misjudged him, taking him to be able rabble rousing heretic commoner, when in fact he was the Messiah, the Lord of all. One result of that shocking turn of events among many in Paul's life was that he would never look at people the same way again. Now that he knew who Jesus truly was and worshiped him, he said, "I'm never making that mistake again." From then on he saw everyone in a completely different way.

Some people in Corinth were regarding Paul in the world's way. Sure Paul had led many of them to faith in Christ and had planted a church there, but now they felt they had outgrown him. They didn't think he was a very impressive leader. He was unimpressive in appearance and he wasn't very charismatic. He didn't have great depth in wisdom, they thought, and he wasn't a spellbinding orator. They wanted someone with more pizzazz. In 2 Corinthians 10:10 Paul said, "some say, his letters are weighty and forceful, and in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing."

That's pretty ironic given who the Corinthians themselves were. In 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 Paul said to them, "brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are." If you applied the same worldly perspective that the Corinthians were using to judge Paul to them, you would

consider them to not be wise, influential, or of noble birth. Instead they were the foolish things, the weak things, the lowly things and the things that are not. In other words, they were the nothings, the nobodies.

2 Corinthians 5:16 begins with the word so. I believe that should be translated therefore. It is the transition from verse 15 which says, “and he (Christ) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Jesus died for us so that we should no longer live for ourselves. Since he died for us we should also no longer regard people from a worldly point of view. What is the connection? It is that regarding people from a worldly point of view is a way of living for ourselves. There is something about valuing ourselves and others on the world’s basis that aims at serving some selfish interest.

The world’s system is all about using other people for our benefit. We evaluate others from a worldly perspective so that we can look down on them, just like the Corinthians looked down on Paul or Paul looked down on Jesus of Nazareth. We can think that we are somehow better than them and put ourselves above them. We may judge them out of fear to protect ourselves and our cherished self image. Conversely we may elevate people from the world’s perspective with the desire to somehow get something from them, perhaps hoping that they will use their position, power or fame to benefit us. God never regards people from the perspective that the world does. And that leads us to the next point we can derive from this passage.

GOD LOOKS AT THE HEART

If you had regarded David from the world’s perspective of his day, you would’ve said he was not a likely candidate for kingship. But God was not operating from that basis. He never does. God looked at what was inside David rather than what he might appear to be from the outside. What did God see in this young man? We go back to chapter 13 where in verse 14 Samuel said, “the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him or of the people.” What God saw in David was a heart that beat with the same passions that God has. In Acts 13:22 Paul is quoted as saying in a speech, “God testified concerning him I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” David would do everything God wanted him to do because David cared about the same things God cared about. That was the problem with Saul. He did not care what God cared about. He cared about himself more than anything else. He cared about making sure he got what he wanted, and that’s what led him to disobey

God's commands when he thought obeying them might put what he wanted in jeopardy.

When God he looked at David's heart he saw Psalm 27: 4 where David wrote, "one thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." David only wanted one thing, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of life. In Psalm 19:14 David wrote, "may these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." What David wanted more than anything else was that all he said and all he wrote and all he did was pleasing to God. In 2 Samuel 6:14 when the ark was rescued and brought back to Jerusalem after being captured by enemies David was so excited over its arrival that he danced with all his might. His wife was so disgusted by his undignified leaping and dancing that she despised him. David was not concerned with how he looked or what people thought of him. He was simply filled with joy in his Lord.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." God was looking for someone who his heart was fully committed to him and he found it in David. He is still looking for those whose hearts are fully committed to him. What God wants most is people whose hearts beat with love for God.

GOD CHOOSES UNLIKELY PEOPLE

God chose someone that no one else expected to be the next King for Israel. Even David's own father saw the idea of David being the king as so improbable that he didn't even invite him to the Rose ceremony. He didn't invite him because in his mind he wasn't a possible candidate. This was not an anomaly in God's plan. In fact, it is practically a consistent theme. Do you remember the reaction Moses had when God told him he had picked him to deliver his people from slavery? In Exodus 3:10 God said to him, "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." In verse 11 Moses responded, "who am I that I should go to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" A modern paraphrase of that would be, "who, me?" God's response was an emphatic, "yes, you!" Moses was certain that he was the most unlikely leader imaginable. He had actually tried early in life to help his people and ended up making a mess of the situation. So Moses argued, insisting he was the wrong guy. God finally ended the discussion with what amounts to the earliest form of the old Nike advertising motto, "Just do it."

In Judges 6 the people of Israel were being severely thrashed by a neighboring group called Midianites. In verse 14 the Lord informed a guy named Gideon that he was going to use him to defeat Midian. In verse 15 Gideon answered, “pardon me, my Lord, but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” Does that sound familiar? Again I will paraphrase his response as, “who, me?” Gideon essentially said he was a nobody. Surely God had the wrong guy. In Jeremiah 1:5 God told Jeremiah that he had been set apart even before he was born and appointed to be a prophet. In verse 6 Jeremiah answered, “alas, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” Do you detect a theme?

How about the disciples that Jesus picked to be the leaders of his church? Were they first round draft choices as great leaders in the world’s eyes? And consider that guy Saul of Tarsus. He hated Christians with everything in his being. He was death to all things Jesus. By his own admission he was the chief of sinners. How about him as a candidate for greatest church planter of all time?

We think God is going to use people who are the most gifted, the most charismatic, the most dynamic, those obviously suited to lead. And God pretty consistently picks the last person you would ever put on the list. Why do you think he does that? I believe it is because of something he communicated to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12: 9. He said, “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” For God’s power to work requires people who are so weak and unable on their own that they have no choice but to rely on his strength. No amount of human ability or power can actually change other people, and when we depend on it all we do is get in the way of what God is doing. So God says he needs people who will depend on him to work. And when that happens, who gets the glory? It is God.

APPLICATION

BE ENCOURAGED

Isn’t it encouraging that the one guy in Jesse’s family that no one thought could be God’s choice for the next King of Israel turned out to be the very one he chose? I personally find it comforting that Moses, Gideon and Jeremiah when called by God to serve him all responded “who, me?” I am comforted by the fact that Jesus picked people like Peter, James, John and Thomas to be his apostles. No one viewed them as great spiritual leaders. That’s because it wasn’t their great spiritual depth and wisdom, or their tremendous charismatic leadership ability that Jesus wanted to use. It was because his power is made perfect in weakness.

I believe that most of us struggle with feeling inadequate as followers of Jesus. We believe that we're terrible candidates to be used by God. Perhaps you feel that you are too flawed and too weak for God to use. God has always chosen and used those unqualified by the world's standards. Rejoice and be encouraged because in his grace if you are a believer in Jesus God has chosen you. He wants to use you and he is dependent not on your ability or great spiritual maturity, not on your great strength, but on his power, which is perfected in weakness.

GUARD YOUR HEART

A second thing that strikes me in this story is that God doesn't look at what people see, he looks at the heart. What he is looking for, what his eyes are roaming about the world continually in search of, is hearts that beat with a passion for him. Again this is the sort of thing that we can feel guilty about because we ought to be more passionate about God we actually are. We can get down on ourselves so easily. But sometimes we are so focused on the trees we fail to see the forest. In other words we lose track of the big picture. Why are you here today at our church? I submit to you it is because you have a heart for God. There are many other things you can be doing on Sunday morning besides going to church. And even if you decide to go to church there are places you could go that will put on a better show than we do. You are here because you want to honor God. You want to know him better and walk with him more closely and you want to praise him.

At the core of who we are as believers in Jesus there is a heart that beats for God. In Ezekiel 36:26 God promised that in the new covenant, the new relationship he would establish with his people through the Messiah Jesus Christ, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." You know what it means to have a heart of stone? I have a friend who is a huge and passionate fan of NASCAR. He loves to watch the races on television and he goes every year to at least one to watch in person. When he waxes eloquent about the glories of that particular competition I try to show interest, but the truth is that I could not care any less than I do. I try to be polite when he talks about it because he is my friend, but when it comes to NASCAR, I have a heart of stone.

Do you know how many NASCAR races I have watched on television? If I remember accurately I believe that number would be 0! Do you know how many NASCAR races I have attended in person? I am absolutely certain that number is 0. Regarding NASCAR I have a heart of stone. I just don't care. It sparks nothing in me. If you didn't have a heart for God that's how you would feel about him. If you had a heart of stone you would have no interest in attending worship services.

You would not be even a little bit interested in this sermon. And you certainly wouldn't want to sing songs of praise to God.

Inside you there is a heart that beats for God. You are a man or a woman after God's own heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, "above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." That heart for God is there but it is constantly under attack. The world, our spiritual enemy Satan, and even your own fallen human nature try to deaden your heart. But having a heart for God is what breathes life into everything you are and everything you do. So guard your heart. Never let it be deadened by the lies of the enemy or the world around us.

DON'T REGARD PEOPLE THE WORLD'S WAY

One last thing this passage says is that as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:16 we should not regard anyone from the world's perspective. Had Samuel done that he would have rejected David as Israel's next king. And David turned out to be the greatest king of Israel would ever have apart from the Messiah himself. If we don't regard people as the world does we are not going to be as enamored of the powerful, the rich, the beautiful as our world is. Neither are we going to look down on people the way the world does.

But how easy it is to fall in the world's habits. Several years ago Laurie and I were on vacation in the island of Kauai. We decided to rent a tandem kayak and paddle up the Wailua River. The place that had the most reasonable kayak rentals was a couple of miles from the river. However they had a system of helping you mount the kayak on top of your rental car, then you drive to the river, unload it and put it in the river. It all seemed simple enough until we got to the river where we found that it was a little more complicated than it seemed. On our way to the river that day we had been talking about how the locals felt about tourists like us. Though much of their economy is dependent upon tourism I know that it can be kind of annoying having tourists always underfoot in places the locals liked to go. As we pulled into the parking lot by the river a man pulled into a parking space not far from us. He was obviously planning to go stand up paddle boarding on the river because he had his board in his truck. When he got out I could see he was a local who might resent tourists being in his way. He was very tan and had long hair in a ponytail, he was dressed like most of the locals we saw. I wondered if he might roll his eyes when he saw us annoying tourists ineptly fumbling around with their rental kayak. I was judging the whole situation and the person from outward appearances. As we were wrestling with our kayak he saw our plight and came over to help us out. He was very friendly and extremely helpful. Once we got the boat off the car he insisted on helping me haul it down to the river and put it in the

water. Later when we returned after spending a couple of hours on the river it coincidentally happened that he returned from his paddle boarding excursion at exactly the same time. Once again he insisted on helping us haul the boat back to the car. Here's the irony of the situation. He wasn't a local at all. In fact he was from Carlsbad.

It is so terribly easy to judge people the way the world does. This passage reminds us not to do that. It calls on us to value most of all in ourselves and in others the same thing he does, and that is a heart for him. And if we care about what he cares about we won't judge others like the world does, which is seeing others through the lens of what we can use them for, how we can advance our own cause through them. We will see them as people God loves, people often abused and enslaved by a terrible, cruel enemy, people lost and in desperate need of grace, hope and love.