

## **“The Lord Looks at the Heart”**

### **(The Great Story of the Bible, Chapter 76)**

1 Samuel 16.1-13

Rev. Bill Pinches

Mason First Presbyterian Church

Mason, Michigan

February 21, 2016

Three thousand years ago, the nation of Israel needed a new king ... and God sent Samuel to find one. The first king, Saul, wasn't working out very well: he was disobedient, rebellious, and arrogant. Samuel, that wise spiritual leader who had anointed Saul as king, was heartsick: how could things have turned out this badly? But God interrupts Samuel's ponderings. "Fill your horn with oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have found my next king among his sons." (1 Samuel 16.1) Samuel protests – he's worried Saul will hear of it and kill him – but God sends him on his way.

Now if you'll remember, Bethlehem was the city where Boaz lived, where Ruth the Moabite found redemption and protection under Boaz's care. Ruth and Boaz got married and had a son named Obed; Obed got married and had a son named Jesse. It is to this Jesse that God is sending Samuel now.

Samuel surveys Jesse's crop of sons. Beholding Eliab, the oldest, Samuel thinks: "That must be the LORD's anointed." (1 Samuel 16.6) He must have *looked* like a king – strong, mature, wise. But God reveals: *that's not the one*. "Have no regard for his appearance or stature," God says, "because I haven't selected him." (1 Samuel 16.7) So Samuel turns his attention to the next oldest, Abinadab. *Is this the one, God?* asks Samuel; God says, *No*. The next oldest, Shammah, comes forward. *Is this the one, God?* *No*. Samuel makes his way one-by-one through seven of Jesse's sons. God says *No, No, No, and No*. But hadn't God said, "I have found my next king among Jesse's sons"?

Samuel turns to Jesse. "Is that all your boys?" he asks. "There is still the youngest one," Jesse replies, "but he's out keeping the sheep." (1 Samuel 16.11) The young shepherd is summoned. "He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good looking." (1 Samuel 16.12) Saul had been handsome too, but this young shepherd has something Saul lacked. "God doesn't look at things like humans do" – those were God's words to Samuel. "Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16.7) As Samuel beholds the shepherd, undoubtedly dirty and smelly, God says: "That's the one. Go anoint him." (1 Samuel 16.12) So, right there, in the presence of all his brothers, Samuel anoints Jesse's youngest son as the second king of Israel. His name ... was David.

"The LORD looks at the heart." There was something about young David's *heart* that made this lad stand head and shoulders above his seven elder brothers, above every other man in Israel. David

ultimately goes down in history as Israel's greatest king; he is remembered for "following the LORD his God with all his heart" (1 Kings 15.3; cf. 1 Kings 11.4). After his death, God says that that David "kept my commands and followed me with all his heart by doing only what is right in my eyes." (1 Kings 14.8) That doesn't mean he was perfect, flawless, or free from sin; indeed, he committed *great* sins with Bathsheba and afterward (2 Samuel 11) – but what's remarkable is that once David recognized his sins *as sins against God* – once he realized just how badly he had messed things up, he offered genuine, heartfelt confession and repentance. We'll get to that story later, probably this summer. The point, for now, is that following the LORD your God with all your heart doesn't mean that you're perfect, flawless, or free from sin, but it *does* mean that you want to be in a right relationship with God, and that you will work to *restore* the relationship when you have broken it. This was the quality that David had that no other man in Israel possessed. This was the quality that made him worthy to become Israel's next king.

How's your heart? What *God* looks at your heart, *what does he see?*

We understand today that the heart is a muscular organ that pumps blood, providing the body with oxygen and nutrients. For the biblical writers, the heart is more than that. The heart is the seat of all our emotions, and our devotion to God. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart," said Moses (Deuteronomy 6.5); Jesus said that was the most important commandment of all. Our relationship with God flows out of our heart. So does everything else. That's why Proverbs says "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." (Proverbs 4.23) But things can go wrong in the human heart. Things can go *badly* wrong. The Bible describes three heart conditions that we can succumb to:

First, we can become *broken-hearted*. Those of you who have lost a loved one have experienced this. "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted," says the psalmist; "he saves those whose spirits are crushed" (Psalm 34.18). Again, "God heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds" (Psalm 147.3). The prophet Isaiah declares, "The LORD God's spirit is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me. He has sent me" – among other reasons – "to bind up the brokenhearted" (Isaiah 61.1). Jesus quotes that verse in his inaugural sermon (Luke 4.18); he understands that is part of his mission. All sorts of things can cause a heart to break, not just the death of a loved one: experiencing neglect or abuse as a child, being picked on by a bully at school, being dumped by someone you love, losing a job, never achieving success in your chosen career, experiencing an acute medical crisis that changes your life forever ... the list is endless. There are legions of people in our country struggling with depression or anger or lack of self-confidence or eating disorders or addictions of any sort; those issues all arise from a heart that, somewhere along the way, has been broken or wounded by the circumstances of life.

Second, we can become *hard-hearted*. This was Pharaoh's problem, when the Israelites were trying to leave Egypt (cf. Exodus 7.13): a stubborn refusal to let God be God. Many Israelites became hard-hearted later on (cf. Psalm 95.8; Isaiah 63.7); Zechariah describes it like this: "They refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets." (Zechariah 7.11-12) Later, the Pharisees were hard-hearted, fixing their attention more on laws and rituals than the living God, and it made Jesus angry (Mark 3.5). Jesus even wondered if his own disciples had hardened hearts (Mark 8.17). What about you? Do you care more

about church traditions and rituals than faithful obedience? Are you reluctant to open the Bible for your own edification and enrichment? Are you so busy that you show up for worship once a month, or less? Do you spend more energy looking at the speck in my eye than dealing with the log in your own? Any of that may indicate a hardness of heart toward God. Whenever hearts are hardened, Jesus grieves.

Third, our hearts can become impure. “Blessed are the pure in heart,” says Jesus, “for they will see God.” (Matthew 5.8) “Who can stand in God’s holy sanctuary?” asks the psalmist. “Only the one with clean hands and a pure heart; the one who hasn’t made false promises, the one who hasn’t sworn dishonestly.” (Psalm 24.3-4) Clearly, not everybody has a pure heart. Jesus explains: “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and insults. These,” he says, “contaminate a person in God’s sight.” (Matthew 15.19-20) Whenever you find yourself doing any of those things, it’s a sign that your heart has become impure. That doesn’t mean you’re irredeemable – as Paul puts it, “There is no righteous person, not even one” (Romans 3.10), and thank *God* for the cross of Jesus Christ – but it *does* mean that you have some work to do to get your heart right with God.

How’s your heart? Broken? Hard? Impure? Which one of those conditions most aptly describes *your* heart right now? Or are you somehow, by the grace of God, *free* from all of that?

If you are broken-hearted, know this: *Jesus cares about your healing.* Jesus *wants* you to get well. Don’t just use *busyness* as a way of avoiding your pain. *Deal* with it. *Face* it, head-on. There are all sorts of resources – counselors, support groups, retreats, conferences, books – that can help you deal with your pain. Granted, some of those are better than others. God has given some people the gift of healing. Why not avail yourself of them? The sooner you start, the sooner you’ll be free from your pain.

If you are hard-hearted – ask yourself: *what’s that about?* Why are you rebelling against God? Do you not trust God? Do you have false notions about God? Are you *angry* at God? Are you not really sure that he’s *real*? Something’s getting in the way of your relationship with God. You may not even know what that is. I think the *best* thing you can do if you find yourself in this category – in addition to a whole lot of prayer! – is to get yourself into a Bible study where you can listen and learn and ask questions and grow. Let the group – and the scriptures – and the Holy Spirit – work on your heart.

If you are impure in heart, if you engage in activities that you *know* aren’t right ... well, deal with that. Don’t avoid it, don’t pretend it’s not there, don’t delay. Again, you may need a good counselor to help you work through it. You may need to learn how to pray more effectively. Usually there’s not just a switch you can flip to turn off the unwanted behavior. You have to deal with what’s *causing* it.

There’s a lot more that I could say on all these topics. A *lot* more. If my words have stirred something in your heart and you need to talk or pray, I’m available. Just grab me sometime. Jesus does not want you wandering around weeks or months or years feeling brokenhearted, hard-hearted, or impure in heart, and I don’t either. Your maturity in Christ is directly related to what’s going on in your heart. Jesus *cares* about your heart. He cares a *lot*. He wants your heart to be *whole* and *healthy* and *strong*. He’s offering you healing. He’s offering you *life*. *Trust* him. Let him heal your heart.

© 2016 Rev. Bill Pinches