

This morning we continue the sermon series that Pastor Eric started for us last Sunday, which will be focused on the life of King David – and most specifically we will be seeking to find the reason that King David is biblically known as “a man after God’s own heart.” Over the years much has been said and written about what that phrase means. In many ways, those words seem beyond our ability to be that kind of person, but then we have hope when we read the Bible and see the raw humanity of David’s life.

What does it mean to be “a man after God’s own heart”? One of the favorite fruits is the honeydew melon. Every time Nancy and I go to the grocery store I find myself wandering over to where the honeydew melons are to see what they look like. Most of the time I don’t buy one because I’ve not had good luck picking out a ripe melon. More often than not they tend to be under-ripened which means the melon is hard and tasteless. This past Friday, as I passed by the honeydew melons again, I again asked myself: “*What do I need to look for to choose a honeydew melon is perfectly ripened?*” At the very same time I was pondering the sermon I was writing for today, and I also asked the question: “*What was God looking for in David’s heart that caused God to choose David to be the king of Israel?*” Well, I did some research – and when it comes to honeydew melons, the melon is ripe when its white skin turns to a light yellow and when its skin makes a loud squeaking noise when you rub it with a clean thumb. Pretty easy. But is a bit more difficult when it comes to knowing the reason God chose David to be the King of Israel – and so this morning we are going on a journey through 1 Samuel 3-15 that will give us the context by which we begin to see why King David is biblically known as “a man after God’s own heart.”

Last week at the beginning of 1 Samuel we learned that there was a time in history, about 1100 years before Jesus was born, when the nation of Israel was at low a spiritual low point, we learned that there was a barren woman named Hannah who prayed that God would bless her with a child – and if God would do so, she vowed to fully dedicate her child back to God. And we saw that God did so she named the baby Samuel which means “God has heard.” And we read that after the young boy was weaned, Hannah gave Samuel to Eli the priest and 1 Samuel 2:11 tells us that “*the boy was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.*” These words remind us that all of this was clearly of God’s doing, which is affirmed in 1 Samuel 3 when we read of God calling Samuel to be a prophet of the Lord, much to the detriment of Eli and his sons, who were corrupting the priesthood for their own selfish gains and pleasures. At the end of chapter three, after Samuel’s prophesy of judgment against Eli’s household, 1 Samuel 3:19-20 tells us that “*Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord.*”

Twenty-five year later, in 1 Samuel 4:1, we read that “*the word of Samuel came to all Israel*” and “*Israel went out to battle against the Philistines.*” The rest of the chapter documents the Israelites’ war with the Philistines, in which Israel suffered two *defeats* by the Philistines – the first, in which 4,000 soldiers of Israel were killed, in spite of the fact that the Ark of the Covenant was carried to the battlefield to encourage them - and the second, in which the Philistines killed 30,000 Israelite soldiers, including Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, along with capturing the treasured Ark of the Covenant. Chapter four ends with Eli’s tragic death after hearing of the death of his sons and the loss of the Ark of the Covenant.

Chapter five continues the story by telling us about the problems the Philistines had with taking possession of the Ark of the Covenant. God doesn’t take kindly to anyone who thinks they have the right to do what they want to do with the things of God. The Philistine’s stone idols fell face down on the ground before the Ark, and wherever they took the Ark, everyone broke out in tumors and boils. In 1 Samuel 6 we read that after seven months of this the Philistines had enough, and so their priests devised a way to send the Ark back to Israel – and when it arrived in the town of Beth-shemesh, seventy men of the nation of Israel looked inside of the Ark and the Lord killed them all. God doesn’t take kindly to anyone who thinks they have the right to do what they want to do with the things of God.

1 Samuel 7 tells us that, as a result of all this, after 20 years of spiritual decline, Samuel leads the God's people to repentance. The Israelites destroy their idols and they worship God. Samuel becomes Israel's judge. It's abundantly clear that God is now with them as the Philistines attack the Israelites, God's voice thunders down from heaven, throwing the Philistines into confusion, allowing the Israelites to defeat them. It's here where Samuel sets up a huge stone to remind the people of God's help and he calls it Ebenezer, which means "the stone of help" (Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing: "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I come, and I hope by Thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home"). The Philistines are forced to return the land they captured from Israel and they do not invade them again for a long time. Samuel travels throughout Israel for many years, serving as judge over the people.

Twenty years later, in 1 Samuel 8, we read of the nation of Israel asking Samuel for a king because Samuel is old in years and they didn't trust his sons because they were as corrupt as Eli's sons – and hey, all the surrounding nations have kings. This request upsets Samuel, but the Lord assures him that the people are rejecting God, not him. Samuel explains the consequences of allowing a king to rule over them. A king will impose heavy taxes on them and force their sons and daughters into military service and slave labor. Despite Samuel's warning, the people still demand a king. And so 1 Samuel 9 is all about God choosing a tall, handsome man from the tribe of Benjamin named Saul to become the first king of Israel. 1 Samuel 10 opens with Samuel anointing Saul to be king and then continues to relate events and signs from God that affirm that Saul is the chosen of one God all throughout chapter eleven.

In 1 Samuel 12-13 we begin to see the consequences of demanding a king that Samuel warned the people about. 1 Samuel 12 opens with Samuel's farewell address. He speaks of how faithful he and God have been to Israel. He reminds them that obeying God will bring good things but forsaking the God will bring punishment. It's here God affirms what Samuel just said by displaying his disapproval of Israel's desire for a king by sending loud thunder and heavy rain. Chapter 12 closes with Samuel declaring: "*Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.*" (1 Samuel 12:24-25).

In chapter thirteen Israel is back at war with the Philistines. Saul's son Jonathan and his army destroy the garrison of Philistines at Geba, but the enemy mobilizes its entire army of chariots, horsemen, and soldiers against - Israel which strikes fear in Saul and his men. To rally his troops, Saul illegitimately assumes the role of priest and offers up the burnt offering. In 1 Samuel 13:13-14 we read that Samuel arrives and rebukes Saul for his actions: "*You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.*" After this statement Saul's army quickly dwindles before his eyes to only 600 men.

The war continues in 1 Samuel 14–15. Saul's son Jonathan demonstrates great courage before the Philistines; he and his armor bearer kill 20 Philistines while scaling a cliff. The Lord sends an earthquake, throwing the Philistines into terrified panic. Saul and his men make a vow to the Lord and they continue to gain victories over the Philistines. This makes Saul feel securely in control of the throne, and he vigorously attacks his enemies in every direction. The Lord commands Saul to attack and totally destroy the Amalekites and all their animals. Saul attacks and kills them, but he spares King Agag and some of the animals. Samuel meets Saul on the morning following the battle and Samuel condemns Saul's disobedience, refusing to accept his excuse that he saved the animals so he can sacrifice them to God. Saul confesses his sin and begs Samuel to forgive him and give him another chance, but Samuel tells him: "*You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel. As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.'*" (1 Samuel 15:26-28). 1 Samuel 15 ends with Samuel putting King Agag to death.

*The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you."*

1 Samuel 16:1-3

1 Samuel 16 opens with God asking Samuel: "*How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?*" These words clearly reveal that Samuel was mourning for Saul, because Saul had become so disobedient to God. It seems as though Samuel was unwilling to give up on Saul. But God's question to Samuel is worded as a mild rebuke. How long will Samuel grieve over the one whom God has rejected? How long will Samuel have a different opinion than God? God had rejected Saul, and it is time for Samuel to get on board with what God is doing. God tells Samuel that he is to fill his horn with oil and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, where he is to find and to anoint one of his sons as Saul's replacement. Samuel responds to God's command with reluctance; if word reaches Saul that he is anointing a new king, Saul will kill him. After all, Saul did not hesitate to annihilate nearly all the Amalekites (chapter 15) and he would not be reluctant to kill off any who support a rival king. God understands Samuel's fear, so He tells Samuel to take a young female cow that has not borne a calf with him and tell the people of Bethlehem that he has come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. He is to invite Jesse to this sacrificial meal, which will provide the occasion for him to anoint one of his sons as king.

*Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.*

*When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah." 1 Samuel 16:4-13*

The elders of the city of Bethlehem are fearfully taken aback when Samuel arrives. In the midst of all of the on-going warfare, they fear that his arrival will not be peaceable. But Samuel's words put their minds at rest. He has come to offer a sacrifice to God and they are invited to attend. They dedicate themselves to God and join Samuel in the sacrifice; Samuel dedicates Jesse and his sons to the Lord. As Samuel begins his search for a new king, he finds it more difficult than when he found Saul. God told Samuel in advance that the king-to-be would come the following day. God made it clear at the outset that Saul was the one He had chosen. But this time, while Samuel does know where and whose son the new king will be, he does not know which one of the sons it would be. Samuel has his own criteria for selecting the new king, along with the standards he used for Saul, reinforced by the two criteria for kings of that day: 1) the expected choice for king would have been the first-born, as headship of the family was passed on to the first born, and 2) the expected king-to-be would be evident by his royal appearance. 1 Samuel 9:2 says Saul was, "*a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*"

Jesse and his seven sons knew what Samuel had come to do. As Jesse's sons pass by Samuel one by one, beginning with the oldest, they must have been awe-struck at the possibility of one of their family being the next king. But one also wonders how they felt as, one by one, each son was rejected by God through Samuel. Surely Samuel must have also been perplexed when it seemed as though none of Jesse's sons had met God's standard of measure. Samuel then asks Jesse if there are any other sons. Jesse responds by saying, "Well, there is David, of course, but we still consider him to be a child -- not a man. How could he be the new king? He has been given the child's work of watching the sheep." But Jesse sends for David, and he is brought before Samuel. David is also a good-looking young man, lacking none of the qualities found in his older brother save his age and position as first-born. Here we see that God does not disqualify David for his good looks, but neither does He choose him because of them. God chooses His anointed ones not by position or appearance, but by the character of their heart.

*"For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7). God chose David to be the King of Israel because of the character of his heart for God. What was it about the character of David's heart that caused God to choose him? Well at this point we don't know. But we will see more about what that means in the weeks ahead. But at this point – because we have the whole canon of God's Word in a book called the Bible – we find that the all-encompassing, predominant, supreme characteristic of David's heart that caused God to choose David to be anointed as King of Israel in Acts 13:16-23, where the apostle Paul was speaking to the Jewish rulers of the synagogue in Antioch: *"Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised."*

God said, *"I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will."* God chose David to be the King of Israel because the character of his heart for God was to do *"all"* of God's *"will"* - so that through David's descendants the promised Savior, Jesus Christ, would come into the world and die on a cross for the forgiveness of sin and rise from the dead, so those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior would also rise from the dead and be rescued and redeemed and restored back to God, and live with Him in the glory of heaven forever and ever. Now we will see in the weeks ahead, that while the character of David's heart was to do *"all"* of God's will – there will be times when it surely does not appear that way. David did not do *"all"* of God's will *perfectly*, just like we all do not do *"all"* of God's will *imperfectly* - because we are all fallen human beings. But where David was different, was that his heart was so in tune with God's heart, so sensitized to the depraved nature of his sin, - that when David did something out of God's will, he always mournfully grieved about what he done, he always sorrowfully confessed what he had done, he always humbly repented of what he had done, and he always passionately praised and thankfully worshipped God for the mercy, grace and love God had shown him. *"I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will."*

We don't see those things about David at this point in Bible, but we will see them in the weeks ahead because we see David's heart all over the Scriptures – especially in the Psalms. At this point we see a boy – about 12-15 years old – who was anointed by Samuel to be the future King of Israel. But while David's heart for God was not overtly seen or known yet – the anointing of God provided David with all he needed to be the King of Israel: *"And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward."* God does not anoint people to serve him because of their position or appearance or education or skill-set or experience; but rather He anoints those who He calls because of their heart to do all of God's will - and any deficiencies they might have will be provided for by the Spirit that God has planned for them.

*Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him." Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him. 1 Samuel 16:14-23*

Undoubtedly Saul has no idea of what has taken place in the first thirteen verses of this chapter. Even if he did believe Samuel's words that he will be replaced by a man of God's choosing, Saul does not know that Samuel has anointed David to replace him as King, nor is he aware that the Spirit which God had given to him has now been given to David. What Saul most likely does know was that things are very different than they were. Saul never sees Samuel again and he no longer senses the Spirit of the Lord's presence and power. What Saul does sense now is that "*a harmful spirit from God*" now comes upon him, "*tormenting*" him. There are numerous opinions about what this *harmful spirit from God*" is – but when God's Word is not specific, we dare not make our own conclusions. What we do know is that God is sovereign and while Satan cannot do anything to anyone without God's permission, there are times when God allows the evil one to exercise a "*harmful spirit*" in a person's life to work out God's will.

Saul's servants believe that soothing music will calm his troubled spirit and they recommend that Saul find a skilled musician who plays the harp, so that when the spirit overtakes him, the musician could play and calm Saul's spirit. One of Saul's servants remembers he has seen and heard a man named David in Bethlehem. David is not only a gifted musician but also "*a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him.*" Ironically the very things which seem to qualify David *to be the king* are the very things which qualify him *to serve the king*. Saul summons David; the request is made of Jesse, since David still lives under his roof. Jesse sends David, along with gifts of food, to the king where David begins to serve as the king's attendant. As David's character becomes more evident to Saul, we read that "*Saul loved him greatly*" and David is promoted to the position of Saul's armor bearer, the most intimate and personal job of any of Saul's staff. Saul requests of Jesse that David be allowed to enter into permanent service with him. So we read that whenever Saul was oppressed by a harmful spirit, David played his harp and soothed the troubled spirit of the king.

Here again we see the providential hand of God in all of this in that while God had rejected Saul's call to serve as King of Israel, and Samuel had anointed David to be the next King of Israel, God sovereignly allowed that David would not immediately replace Saul, but rather that David would serve the King that he would replace in a kind of spiritual internship, which would reveal and build the character of David's heart for God to do "*all*" of God's "*will*" – preparing the way for promised Savior to come. Of course, at this point in our next nobody is aware of that. In fact, what has already happened was beyond expectation. The nation of Israel demanded they serve under a human king, rather the God. God chose Saul to be their first king, using the human standards of position and appearance. But the reign of Saul reflected the character of war against God and others within Saul's heart. God rejects Saul's kingship and God chooses David to replace Saul as King of Israel, using the divine standard of humility and obedience, reflecting the character of unity and harmony with God's heart to do all of God's will. Yet, even though God had rejected Saul's kingship and He had anointed David to replace Saul as the King of Israel, God placed David under Saul's authority to prove and to build the character of David's heart.

The measure God that uses to deem us worthy of *servicing* Him is the character of our heart for God to do all of God's will. Now God does not call us to *salvation* by that measure; if so, none of us would be saved. God does not save us because He looks into our hearts and likes what He sees. God saves us because we are sinners, because we are wicked in our hearts, so that He can have mercy us, by placing our sins on His Son Jesus, so that Jesus could die in our place on the cross. Christ alone is sinless and thus able to die for the sins of others. There is only one person in all of human history whose heart was free from sin, and that person is Jesus Christ. God saves those who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and for the gift of eternal life. And then it's after that where God measures our hearts to see if we are worthy of *servicing* Him is the character of our heart is for God to do all of God's will. Jesus is our example here; his whole life was about doing all of God's will. Even on the night he faced death on a cross, Jesus' prayed: "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*" This is our common call to discipleship that our Lord Jesus spoke of when he said: "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*" (Luke 9:23).

*"For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* In the context of the world we live in, there is a great deal of talk about leadership these days – and both in the United States and Canada the qualities and qualifications sought in contemporary leaders are clearly not those which God sought in David. Sadly, evangelical churches often choose their leaders on the same basis and standards as secular society does. God sought a man who had a heart for Him – and that is the character that should be the first and foremost prerequisite for leadership. It should not be the only one, but it should be the first and foundational one. Next month we will begin our leadership development training and I pray we would look for the kind of leaders that God chooses – and that we would use the measure of God to discern the kind of men and women whom God seeks for His service.

What does it mean to be "a man (or a woman) after God's own heart"? Chuck Swindoll writes:

When God scans the earth for potential leaders, He is not on a search for angels in the flesh. He is certainly not looking for perfect people, since there are none. He is searching for men and women like you and me, mere people made up of flesh. But He is also looking for people who share the same qualities He found in David. . . . What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart? It means your life is in harmony with the Lord. What is important to Him is important to you. What burdens Him burdens you. When He says, "Go to the right," you go to the right. When He says, "Stop that in your life," you stop it. When He says, "This is wrong and I want you to change," you come to terms with it because you have a heart for God. That's bottom-line, biblical Christianity. When you are a man or woman after God's heart, you are deeply sensitive to spiritual things. Second Chronicles 16:9 explains it this way: "*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him*" . . . What is God looking for? He is looking for men and women whose hearts are His—completely. That means there are no locked closets. Nothing's been swept under the rugs. That means that when you do wrong, you admit it and come to terms with it. You long to please Him in your actions. You care deeply about the motivations behind your actions. God is not looking for magnificent specimens of humanity. He's looking for deeply spiritual, genuinely humble, honest-to-the-core servants who have integrity.

The integrity God is looking for is an integrity of the heart. The measure God that uses to deem us worthy of *servicing* Him is the integrity of the character of our heart for God to do all of God's will. What is our standard of measure? The truth be told, for the most part, the standard of measure we use for ourselves and for others and even for God - tends to be the standards of the world. God chooses His anointed ones not by position or appearance, but by the character of their heart. The measure God that uses to deem us worthy of *servicing* Him is the character of our heart for God to do all of God's will. Jesus said: "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*" May we know the blessing of God of seeing God because our we have completely given our hearts to God to do all of God's will. Amen.

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