

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 12/8/'18) **“THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART”** (1 Samuel 16-17)

Introduction Have you ever experienced being judged by your appearance? What about the other way around? Are you influenced by people’s appearance, especially when you first meet them? I think we all are to some extent. When God sent Samuel to anoint a new king, I am sure that he would have said sincerely that he was going to be guided by God rather than by appearances. And eventually he was. But this proved to be more difficult than he might have expected.

Samuel’s Hard Task (16:1-5) Listen to God giving Samuel his task, and listen to Samuel’s response to God. **Read 16:1-5.** God tells Samuel to stop mourning for the past, and sends him to take an important step toward Israel’s future. At first glance the task doesn’t look very difficult. Samuel just has to take a horn full of oil and anoint one of Jesse’s sons. But Samuel immediately sees a great difficulty – Saul might kill him! So God gives Samuel a second task, the task of offering a sacrifice in the company of Jesse, a second task under the cover of which Samuel can safely perform his primary task. So now Samuel does exactly what God has told him to do. The task is now much less dangerous, but we will soon see that Samuel still faces a lesser difficulty.

God Leads Samuel to the Right Man (16:6-13) Samuel, understandably, looks first at Jesse’s eldest son Eliab. What God says later implies that he is tall and good-looking, and Samuel immediately thinks that he must be God’s choice. But God immediately tells Samuel that he is mistaken. Samuel has judged by outward appearance, whereas God looks at the heart. That is, God looks at the inward reality, what a person is really like. So Jesse calls his second son Abinadab, and he comes and stands before Samuel. But Samuel now holds back from quick judgment, and soon says, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” Jesse does the obvious and calls forward his third son Shammah, but Samuel says, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” By this time Jesse must have felt somewhat puzzled, and possibly frustrated. “Why not my eldest son? Surely he is the most fitting choice! And if not the eldest, then at least one of the three eldest. Does Samuel really know what God wants to do?” But Jesse goes ahead with the process, calls forward another four sons, presumably in order of age. And Samuel continues to say of each one that he is not God’s choice. Eventually it seems that he has seen all of Jesse’s sons, and so he asks, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse then admits that there is one more, but it seems that Jesse has assumed that he didn’t even need to be present. His youngest son is out tending the sheep. Samuel then insists that Jesse should send for this youngest son. When he comes he proves to be healthy and good-looking. But he is the youngest, and apparently quite young – young enough to be allocated the task of looking after the sheep, and young enough to be overlooked for this

important family occasion. God reveals to Samuel that this youth is the one whom he should anoint, and Samuel does so. Only now are we told his name- he is David. And we are also told that the Spirit of God comes upon him in power. He not only receives the outward endorsement of being anointed by God's prophet, but he is empowered inwardly by God himself for his task of leading God's people. One question has been answered. The son of Jesse chosen by God to be king is the youngest son, called David. But another question has not been answered. We might well wonder what God has seen when he has looked at David's heart, and up to this point we have not been told anything to help us to answer this question.

The Intimidating Appearance of Goliath (17:1-16) It seems to me that we begin to get an answer to this question when we come to Chapter 17, so I have omitted the last ten verses of Chapter 16 in order to proceed immediately to the story of David and Goliath. The opening three verses of Chapter 17 tell us that the Philistine and Israelite armies prepared for battle by occupying hills on either side of a valley. Then the intimidating figure of Goliath is introduced. He is described as enormously tall, about 9.5 feet or 2.9 metres, as wearing bronze armour, and as carrying a huge spear with an iron point weighing about 15 pounds or 6.9 kilograms. An intimidating figure indeed! Goliath comes out every morning and evening for forty days, and challenges the Israelites to send out a warrior to meet him in single combat. **Read 17:8-11.** The reaction of the Israelites is entirely understandable. The appearance of this giant of a man is immensely intimidating, and no one dares to face him. But between the description of the Israelites' terror in v.11 and the record of this challenge being issued for forty days in v.16 we are prepared for a dramatic change in the narrative. We are reminded of David. His three oldest brothers are part of Saul's army, but David is looking after the sheep, and only going back and forth to take supplies to his brothers and news back to his father. He will soon become the central figure of the narrative.

David Not Intimidated (17:17-58) The new stage of the story begins when Jesse sends David to the army camp with supplies for his brothers and a gift for their commander. David arrives just in time to hear Goliath issuing his challenge again, and to see the fear of the Israelite soldiers. David shows interest in their talk about great rewards for the man who kills Goliath, but he also expresses indignation that Goliath should be allowed to "defy the armies of the living God". Despite his eldest brother's attempt to discourage him, David continues to speak out, so that Saul hears about him and sends for him. Their conversation is revealing - **read 17:32-37.** Saul initially dismisses David's offer to fight Goliath, making a comparison based on appearances. Goliath is obviously a mighty warrior with much experience, whereas David, in Saul's eyes at least, is little more than a boy. Certainly his experience is as a shepherd, not as a warrior. But David speaks out of that experience, and in a way which

suggests what God has seen when he has looked at David's heart. David speaks first of his success in killing both a lion and a bear in defence of his father's sheep. But when he says that he will also kill Goliath his reasons are significant. He says that he will kill Goliath because he has defied the armies of the living God, and that the God who rescued him from the lion and the bear will rescue him from Goliath. David cares deeply about the good name of his God, and trusts in the power of his God. This is at least part of what God sees when he looks at David's heart. We're not told what Saul sees, but he sends David out against Goliath. I suspect that it is an act of desperation rather than confidence. I think that you all know what happens next. Saul's armour proves to be unsuitable for David, and he goes out against Goliath armed with a sling and five smooth stones. Goliath again looks at what is apparent to human observation, and scorns this unimpressive opponent. David's response to Goliath, however, goes beyond appearances, and gives us another glimpse of what God has seen in his heart. **Read 17:45-47.** David's confidence is based not on his experience or skill, although he has more of both than is apparent to Goliath. It is based on his faith in God. The actual contest between David and Goliath is described extremely briefly - **read 17:48-50.** I think this brevity is because the concern of the narrative is not with military details but with David's faith and God's working through David. This part of the narrative ends by recording the great victory over the Philistines which results from David's killing of Goliath, and the impression made upon Saul by David's actions.

Conclusion What can we take from today's passage? I think we can learn from it in two ways. First, it reminds us of our limited understanding when we rely on our own observation, particularly when we are choosing someone for a responsible position. We need to seek God's guidance, and it is best to seek his guidance together. We will need to do this soon when we begin to look for a new pastor for our church. Secondly, we are also reminded that God sees our hearts rather than what other people see, and we're given some idea of what he values. We should not imagine that David was a paragon of virtue - you only have to read the rest of 1 Samuel and all of 2 Samuel with an open mind to realise that this is not the case. But David, despite his many faults, was a man of faith. He cared about God and the things of God, and he trusted God enough to put his faith into action. What does God see when he looks at our hearts? Let us ask God this morning to strengthen our faith. Let us tell God that we are willing to serve him wholeheartedly, or if we can't yet say that truthfully, that we are willing to be made willing.