

The LORD Looks at the Heart

1 Samuel 16:1-23 (Key verse 7b)

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

In the previous chapter, God rejected Saul as the king over Israel. In today's passage God anoints David as the new king of Israel. Humanly speaking..... Saul was the cream of the crop.....and the most ideal person to be king over Israel.....He was in the prime age of 30 years old.....he was the most handsome man in Israel.....also he was the biggest and strongest man in Israel..... standing a head taller than anyone else (9:1-2, 10: 23) Indeed, when it comes to looks and human ability, Saul was the best of the best! Or as the bible puts, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites. (9:2) Yet God could not but reject him as the leader of Israel.....David on the other hand, was the youngest of 8 brothers, a young and a mere shepherd boy. He was so lowly that even his own father, Jesse, did not acknowledge nor respected David in his own home.

This begs the questions: How can this be? If Saul was such an extraordinary man, why did God reject him as leader of His people? And if David was still just a mere shepherd boy without any standing even in his own home, how could God appoint him as king over the entire Israelite nation? It is within this contrast between Saul and David.....**that the LORD vividly reveals the meaning of today's key verse.** *The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* In today's passage we will learn that **when it comes to choosing men and women to take care of His people, God does not look at the things people look at. People looks at the outward appearance.....things like how tall or how handsome or how educated or smart someone is when determining who should be leaders. But when setting up leaders in His ministry, the LORD looks at the heart.....**at spiritual wellbeing of inner being to see if they will obey and follow God's instructions like Samuel and David....or reject God's word and rebel against God like Saul? I sincerely pray that through today's passage, each one of us may be encouraged to ALWAYS accept God's words into our hearts, and obey them. Then God will set us up as leaders for His ministry – just like Samuel and David. Amen

Let's look at verse 1. Here we see that Samuel mourned a long time for Saul, after God rejected him as king. Indeed, what happened to Saul..... was a great disappointment.....if not a national tragedy....As a young.....extremely able and talented man..... Saul showed so much promise to be a good king for God's people. Yet, like so many other kings..... Saul ended up rejecting the word of the LORDto serve his selfish agendas. Then God could not but reject Saul as king.

But after some time God was ready to move on, by anointing David as the new king over Israel. Yet at the time, Samuel's heart was too troubled. Samuel mourning for weeks for Saul. So he was left paralyzed.....without hope.....and direction.....He did not see the need to appoint another king, while Saul was still sitting on the throne..... But then.....in a moment..... God's word struck Samuel's heart..... like a lightning bolt striking down to earth in the night sky..... Look at what said to Samuel in verse 1-2a. God 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." But Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." God's word somehow revived Samuel's spirit. Yet, the lingering effects of months of mourning was still evident. Instead of fully accepting God's word, Samuel feared that Saul would kill him. Then God's word again came to Samuel. Look at verse 2b-3. The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate." With this clear word of direction, Samuel's heart was restored, and he jumped into action. Look at verse 4-5. Samuel did what the Lord said....He boldly told the elders at Bethlehem I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. One moment Samuel's heart was still paralysed with despair and fear.....the next moment he was standing in Bethlehem doing the work of God. What a remarkable transformation!! **But what caused this quick change in attitude.....this sudden change in Samuel's behaviour? Yes, it was the powerful working of God's word in Samuel's heart. Unlike Saul, when Samuel heard God's voice, he**

immediately accepted God's word into his heart. Then his inner-being.....his heart.....was filled with the power and courage of God...And he behaved differently.....clearly and absolutely obedient to God. This, is exactly why, God accepted Samuel and continued to use him as leader over His people.

Tragically, the exact opposite was true for Saul. If we carefully observed the previous chapters, we notice that Saul rejected the word of the LORD several time.....and then disobeyed the word of the LORD to do what he thought best. For example, do you remember the time when God told Saul to wait 7 days for Samuel at Gilgal? Then Samuel would come to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings and tell Samuel what to do? (10:7) However, when Saul's men began to scatter in the face of the Philistine attack, Saul rejected God's word and did as he please by offering the burnt offerings himself. (13:19)

Another example is when God send Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites. God clearly and expressly commanded Saul: Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' (15:3) But Saul again rejected the word of the LORD. He spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and also the best of the livestock and everything that was good (15:1-9). And when Samuel confronted him, (15:17) Saul made many excuses and continued to reject the word of the LORD. Then, God had no choice, but also to reject Saul as king over Israel. Let's refer back to chapter 15, verses 23 and 26. (For those of you have bibles, please read with me.) Samuel said to Saul, because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." (15:23) And again in verse 26, Samuel said to Saul, You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" (15:26) Here we can get our first clue of what it means that God looks at the heart. When looking at someone's heart, God specifically checks whether that person rejects or accepts His word when God gives it. This is very clearly evident in the behaviour of the person. There are many people who claims that they love the word of God.....and therefore accept it into their hearts. Yet, when we look at their behaviour, it is self-evident that instead of following the word of God they are still following their sinful desires. Then what about you and me. We come to church every Sunday and hear the word of God. Most of us also have weekly bible studies. The question, however is, in doing so do we accept God's word into our hearts, and obey God's direction? This is something that God specifically looks for when He looks at you and me. When we accept God's word like Samuel, God will most certainly use us.....but if we reject God's word like Saul, God will have no choice but to reject us.

Let's look at verse 6. Jesse and his sons arrived where Samuel prepared the sacrifice. Now remember, at this moment God did not yet revealed to Samuel.... which one of Jesse's sons He had chosen as Israel's new king. All that God said was once Samuel gathered Jesse's sons..... God would indicate to Samuel who to anoint as king. But the moment Samuel saw Eliab, Jesse's oldest Son, and before the LORD could say anything, Samuel thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." Just like Saul, Eliab was a tall, good looking young man.....someone who **looked** like he would be a great king and leader..... Then was Samuel right, was Eliab the one God chose? Look at verse 7a. But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. Samuel made the mistake of judging Eliab based on his **appearance.** This was the same mistake Israel made with Saul, their first king. Saul also *looked* the part, but ultimately God rejected him.....just as God now rejected Eliab.

This begs the question, does God have something against good looking and able men or women? Why then did God reject them? Let's look at today's key verse, verse 7b. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Take Saul as an example. As we said earlier, when it came to appearance and human ability.....Saul was the cream of the crop.....and the most ideal person to be king of Israel..... he was the most handsome man in Israel.....also he was the biggest and strongest man in Israel..... standing a head taller than anyone else (9:1-2, 10: 23) Indeed, when it comes to outward appearance and human ability, Saul was the best of the best! Yet, God rejected him. Because God did not look at all these fine qualities, but rather looked at his heart.....specifically whether Saul accepted or rejected God's word. And God saw very clearly, that Saul was a man who rejected His word.

But what does this say about Saul's heart.....what does his rejection of God's word.....his disobedience reveal about the characteristic of his heart? Yes, it so vividly reveals that Saul's heart was set against the LORD.....with rebellion and disobedience. Here we can get another clue of what it means when God looks at the heart. It means

that God specifically looks at the inclination of your heart and mine.....whether like Samuel we are inclined to obey the LORD or from the very start we rebel and disobey, like Saul? Ultimately, this will determine whether God can raise us as a leader in His ministry or not.

The same went for Eliab. Although Samuel only saw his outward appearance, God carefully looked at Eliab's heart. And immediately knew that Eliab's heart was just as rebellious and disobedient to God, as Saul's heart. In fact, God looked at all 7 of Jesse's sons. Look at verses 8-10. Then Jesse called Abi-na-dab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Sham-mah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." We can be certain that humanly speaking, there was nothing wrong with any of Jesse's sons. Then why did God not choose any of them as king over Israel? It was because, they all had the same problem, as Saul.A heart problem! Their hearts either rejected the word of the LORD. Or they accepted God's word but then later on disobeyed it; which means their hearts were just as rebellious and disobedient to God.....as Saul's. So God refused to appoint anyone of them as king.

But this left Samuel in a predicament. For God definitely said that he had chosen of Jesse's sons as the next king. Look at verses 11. (Read) Here we can infer that in comparison to his brothers, David must still have been very young. This is why, like many parents do with little children, Jesse did not think it necessary to bring David along to the sacrifice – which was only for grownups. And surely, if Samuel did not insist, Jesse would not have sent for him. But Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." So [Jesse] sent for David and had him brought in. What do you think Samuel saw?.....*(Imagine a young boy walking into the room)* Yes, in walked a young shepherd boy.....glowing with health and with handsome features. But Samuel could surely understand why he was not invited.....David was simply too young.....He did not for one moment look like a king or any kind of leader. But at that very moment, "the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." (12) What a huge surprise!! In a room filled with handsome and able grown men, God told Samuel to anoint the least among them all.....the youngest.....as king over Israel! Why? Because the Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

And when God looked at David's heart – he saw someone who loved God's word.....someone who unconditionally accepted God's word.....someone who obeyed God's word.....just like Samuel. Consequently, despite his young age and lowly position at home – God confidently said, Rise and anoint him; this is the one."

At this point of the message, I am sure most of us by now understand what God looks at in choosing whether to appoint you and me as leaders over His people. Yes, God does not look at the outward appearance but looks at the heart. But what exactly does God mean by "the heart?" The heart in scripture refers to a person's spiritual life. As we all know, when God created the first man, Adam, God formed his outer appearance (or his flesh) from the dust of the ground. But it was only after God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (or God's spiritual life) that the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7) Hence, created you and me to have both a physical and spiritual nature.....or put differently a body of flesh and a heart of spirit. Even though you and I can see only the flesh, it does not mean our spiritual heart does not exist. It does exist and God can see it, as clearly as you and I can see each other here today. It is with this spiritual heart that you and I communicate with God.....it is with this spiritual heart that we pray to God.....It is with this spiritual heart we accept or reject God's word.....It is with this spiritual heart that we obey or disobey the word of God. Indeed.....our spiritual hearts are something real.....just as our fleshly bodies are real.....and the Lord sees it and looks at it.

In conclusion

The question is, what does the Lord see as He looks at your heart? Does He see someone who accepts and obeys His word, like Samuel and David? Or does He see someone who either rejects His word outrightly or accepts his word half-heartedly and then disobey it – like Saul or David's 7 brothers?

I've been in the UBF ministry for almost 14 years. During this time I came to know many brothers and sisters in Christ. Many of them came and also many left. But regardless, one thing have always remained the same.....God's word and people's reaction to His word. Many of those who deeply and sincerely accepted God's word are in leadership positions in our ministry today. Not because they are able or have good leadership qualities.

But because God was pleased with their hearts and so set them up in those leadership positions to take care and lead his people, according to God's will.

I see many young brothers and sisters sitting here in front of me this morning. I can only see your outward appearance....but God sees.....and He looks at your heart. My deepest and sincerest prayer is that God may see in each one of you someone who accepts and obeys His word, like Samuel and David. I also pray that god may raise each one of us as a leader in His ministry, so we can all participate in leading and taking care of his sheep. Amen.