
The New King Anointed

1 Samuel 16¹⁵

Russ Kennedy

Modern media talks so much about *optics* – how things appear. This week, after the beheading of an American journalist by an Islamic jihadist group, ISIS, there was much discussion about the “optics” of the president of the United States giving a quick statement and then running off to play golf with his buddies. Even to his political allies, this was just baffling particularly when the British Prime Minister canceled his vacation to return to London. How did this appear to people?

But there is also the eyes seeing it. Evaluating, perspective, insight, externals... words that make up our thinking about people and events. They are about our idea of vision, sight, what we see and how we see. On what basis do we judge and evaluate?

The Bible is deeply concerned about how we evaluate people and situations. That concern comes to the forefront in the text we are considering.⁶

The current king of Israel, Saul, was a man of imposing height and carriage. He was what people thought a leader should look like. But the narratives show that he struggled with fear of man. He was a little person in a big man. Unfortunately, as he grew in internal stature, he also grew in pride and arrogance.

This problem of optics even afflicted the prophet Samuel. God has rejected Saul as king of Israel because Saul had rejected God as king over him. He may still be in the place and power of ruling, but he no longer has God’s blessing. He accomplishes much in making Israel a functioning kingdom. But he knows he has been rejected and the kingdom will not pass to his son. Given the rejection of Saul, God sends Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel.

The Mission of Samuel

(v.1-5)

Our story opens with a rebuke, with God's servant corrected. Samuel’s perspective is contrasted with the Lord’s. Here are two points of view.

¹ 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.” ² 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.’” ³ 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.” ⁴

¹⁵ Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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?"⁵ 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.

By his Rebuke

(v.1)

Samuel was deeply saddened by the failure of Saul. It was a tragedy for Saul and for the people of Israel. Samuel's grief initially might have been godly, but it had gone on too long. It had begun to trust in God's wisdom and decisions. Samuel knew what the Word of God said would happen to the people of God under a king like Saul.

But God had provided for Himself a king. This is a fascinating statement.

God had provided... The next steps that Samuel was to take in anointing a new king was to recognize the one God had provided. Clearly, there is a contrast with Saul who was the one the people had demanded. They had their king. Now God will give them His king.

People want and expect a certain kind of king for themselves. But God will provide the King for Himself. This phrase is full of Christ-centeredness. The king Samuel would anoint would be a "for God" king. But he is a shadow, a type, a picture of the coming "for God" King.

Samuel's perspective needed to align with God's. Saul was rejected. A new king is to be anointed. The old is gone, the new is coming.

In his Fear

(v.2-3)

Samuel has a second concern. To go to Bethlehem he must travel through Saul's hometown. Samuel is afraid that if Saul hears that he will have Samuel killed. This is telling. This is not just a broken relationship between Samuel and Saul. This is sin and corruption in Saul. Samuel knows that Saul will do almost anything to hold on to what is being taken away from him.

So a kind of cover story is provided. Take along what is required for a sacrifice. If asked, say that is what you are going to do. Samuel was to offer a sacrifice. But any way you look at it, it is a pretext, a cover for what he was actually doing. And God commanded it. Since God commanded it, then it is not sin. Samuel does what he says he is doing; and he is doing more as well.

With his Obedience

(v.4-5)

Samuel obeys the Lord. Once again, this is contrasted with Saul's disobedience in the previous narrative. What he is going to do is both difficult and delightful. When he arrives in Bethlehem, the village leaders are worried. Has Samuel come in peace? Have they sinned? Has God sent Samuel on a mission of correction or condemnation, particularly since he has a heifer with him for the offering?

Samuel has come in peace. He has come to sacrifice. It is a sacrifice of consecration. It is a call to commitment to the Lord. A special invitation is extended to Jesse and his sons.

In this act of obedience Samuel has set the stage for the next scene in the home of Jesse of Bethlehem.

In this same town a millennium later, a mother will lay her firstborn son in a manger while on a nearby hillside angels sing and shepherds wonder – O holy night.

The Anointing of David

(v.6-13)

God's chosen servant is sought and finally identified. Here are two ways of seeing. Listen to the words that talk about sight and seeing.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." ⁷ 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." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." ¹¹ 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." ¹² 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." ¹³ 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.

With the Wrong Standard

(v.6)

Samuel looks at Eliab, the eldest of Jesse's sons with the same eyes that saw Saul. Tall, strong, powerful – surely this is he. The Lord is using this to teach Samuel and all of us something very important.

We all tend to evaluate on what can be seen with our physical eyes. What if all we can see is not all there is? What if all we do see is shifting shadows and dim pictures and outlines in portraits? What if the truth of things is just out of sight?

We all tend to evaluate according to the standards of our culture and experience. We are too often impressed by the impressive.

We need to see as God sees; this is called *faith*. Faith is not a hand that obtains; it is the eyes that see. Hebrews 11 says many had a commended faith who did not obtain (yet) but who saw things clearly.

We need to be heart oriented in our discernment of people and situations. Yes, the heart is hard to know. But God knows and has given us His Word and Spirit that we might see as He sees.

If we do not learn these lessons then:

We may miss God's anointed David and worse, God's anointed Son, Jesus Christ.

We may evaluate God's men and mission by its outward appearance rather than its spiritual significance.

We may not see the Spirit's mighty work in the meek, quiet and humble people serving in all the vast corners of God's family and kingdom.

Think of all the ways we tend to evaluate primarily on external...

When we are seeking someone to marry...

When we are seeking a leader for our...

When we evaluate a church, a ministry...

Give us vision, O God, to see what should be seen – grant us faith and discernment.

In the Procession of Sons

(v.7-10)

So, there is a procession of sons. No, not that one. No, not this one. Seven sons; seven no's. Not chosen. Rejected. Minutes pass. Maybe hours. But long centuries will pass with no, no, no until the Amen, the Yes, the Shepherd-King comes.

By the Summons of David

(v.11-13)

One more son? Yes, but he is not here. He is out shepherding. Bring him in. Ah there he is. From the fields with sheep this young man will be called to shepherd the people of God. And behold, he is a handsome and strong and beautiful-eyed young man. Does this fit him to be king? Are we still looking on the outward?

No, he is fit to be king because:

He is given by God for Himself;

He is chosen by God for His people;

He is anointed by God for His throne;

He is enabled by God for His work.

And so the Spirit of God rushes in upon this young man. He is a believer already. But in the Old Testament sense, the Spirit of God comes upon him for ministry and service. Unlike many, I believe David is aware of the significance of the anointing. It is a mark of his Spirit enabled life that he submits to God's timing to wait more than ten long years to ascend to the throne. Through all that trouble, trial and testing, God shapes a king. There is no easy path from the saving call of God and the Spirit's enabling presence to the fullness of serving and ministering. There is often long dark days of hardship. They will come to David and they will come to you.

Beloved, even the prophet Samuel was easily taken by evaluating according to how things appeared. But God was transforming his heart. See as God sees. See by faith.

The Affliction of Saul

(v.14-23)

The Spirit came upon David. But from God's chastened servant, the Spirit departs.

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. ¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. ²² And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." ²³ 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.

In His Spiritual Troubles

(v.14)

This text raises some interesting and troubling questions.

Can the Spirit be in an unbeliever? Is Saul a Spirit indwelt unbeliever?

Can a believer lose the Spirit? How does the Spirit of God leave Saul?

How can God send an evil spirit to trouble Saul?

We must remember where we are in redemptive history. We must remember that the indwelling of the Spirit is a New Covenant, in this age, privilege. Yes, Old Testament saints were regenerated by God's Spirit. But there is no Biblical, textual evidence for a continual indwelling of the Spirit until the after the coming of the Christ and the descent of the Spirit upon Him and then later, at Pentecost. So the Spirit comes and goes in Old Testament saints. If there is something beyond this, the Bible does not tell us.

So here we are with a text that says that God withdrew His Spirit from Saul. This is in marked contrast to the Spirit rushing upon the newly anointed David.

And God sends a harmful spirit to torment Saul. I hope you have room in your theology for such a statement in the Bible.

God will deal with the disobedient and rebellious. Saul-like people may be afflicted by Saul-like troubles...

Evil (harmful) spirits are under God's control. They may have rebelled but they are still under the powerful control and sending of God Almighty...

So this raises a question: is Saul one of God's people? Is he a believer? Was he "saved" and then "lost his salvation"? Does the Bible even answer the question? Why doesn't the Bible seem to submit itself to some of our theological inquisition?

The evidence for Saul's being a true child of God is simple: God gave him a new heart (1 Samuel 10:9). This is clear salvation language. But the situation of the Old Testament is complex and at times, unclear. After his illegal sacrifice, Saul never refers to "his God". The Spirit that rushed upon him in 1 Samuel 11:6 now leaves him. He sinks deeper and deeper in depression, defeat and despair. He is a deeply disturbed man. And the harmful spirit sent from God afflicts Saul, but does not appear to indwell him.

So, our problem is that sometimes we are trying to evaluate Old Testament believers in New Covenant terms. The Bible tells us that God gave Saul another heart and that the Spirit both came upon him and also departed from him. The Bible tells us he was afflicted by a spirit sent from God. The Bible tells us the terrible, sad decline of his sinful and guilty life. This is what the Bible says. The rest is framework - our grid being possibly being impossibly pressed upon the narrative.

Three things are certain from the whole of the Bible:

1. Old Testament saints were regenerated by God's Spirit. The new birth is a fact of both the Old and New Covenants.
2. Old Testament saints were not indwelt by God's Spirit, at least in the same way as in the New Covenant. This is clearly a New Covenant privilege.
3. Old Testament saints could and did have the Spirit come upon them and depart from them.

With his Worldly Counselors

(v.15-16)

Everyone in this text recognizes that the troubling, tormenting spirit is sent by God. The narrator says so and so do royal advisors.

¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ 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."

But the solution proposed is not a spiritual one. His advisors do not call on Saul to repent, to seek forgiveness, to humble himself under God's mighty, Sovereign hand. No, they are prepared to use music therapy. You have to wonder why they thought this. Was this a common use of music? Did the afflicting Spirit cause wildness and anger in Saul that calming music would soften and settle? The confident advice of the counselors at the human level is startling. But, at the Divine level it is not surprising at all. God puts in their hearts advice that will lead to the bringing of David into the court.

This is the point. This is God's plan and purpose. It answers a huge question. How is David going to come into the court and to the throne? He is a young shepherd from a

small village and obscure family. It is God who will bring David here. God has given David a natural talent in music to play, sing and compose. God has sent an afflicting spirit on Saul. God puts in the advisors hearts to propose music therapy (*sic*). And God has placed a young man in Saul's court who knows of David, his skillful playing, courage, discretion and bearing.

By his Royal Recognition

(v.17-20)

Saul summons David to the court. He sends messengers with the call to Jesse, David's father. Jesse responds with sending his son and supplies. Whether these are gifts for Saul or the basic supplies for David is not clear. But it does show a thoughtful, submissive, generous man.

With a Surprising Love

(v.21-23)

So David wins Saul's heart. David enters the service of Saul with his father's permission. He becomes an attendant to Saul, serving his court and becoming an honorary armor bearer. He plays his lyre and sings his songs. And the afflicting spirit is withdrawn. Saul is comforted. David now eats, sleeps and serves in the shadow of the throne that will one day be his.

Reflect and Respond

God has provided the king. He is more than David or Solomon. He is the King from heaven, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was appointed, anointed and ascended as King in the resurrection. Will we then believe in and bow to the King God has provided?

God's King is unlike any human ruler. We too often demand a king who is on our own image, who is like us. But Jesus came as a different sort of king. His Kingdom was up-side-down. He was both more and less than expected. But He was and is and ever will be the King for us. Let us stop seeking our own Messiah's and delight in the One King, the true King after God's own heart.

God is working out His plan and purposes in history. The narratives of the Bible are ultimately stories about God, His working in history and with people. But there are special moments when this is what the story is about. Do you see how your story is wrapped up in God's story?

We may not be able to answer all our questions about Saul and the Holy Spirit. But we don't have to. What we are accountable for is our own relationship to the Spirit. Has He granted us saving life? Do we walk in the Spirit producing the fruit of the Spirit? Are we using the gifts and abilities the Spirit has given us to serve one another? Have we grieved the Spirit in our walk and talk? Answering these questions is oh so much more important.

How do you see?

Are you mainly looking at the outward appearance of things?

In your family?

At your church?

In the world?

At the Lord?

Are you learning to look through the eyes of faith and see the true heart of things?

⁶ I am indebted to John Woodhouse for his insight into the two ways of seeing motif in this text. (Woodhouse, pp. 281-282)