

## “Upside Down and Backwards”

1 Samuel 16:1-13

*15:32 Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”<sup>33</sup> And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.<sup>34</sup> Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul.<sup>35</sup> And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.*

Today’s text, chapter 16 in the book of Samuel, marks the turning point in the book. I’ve told you over and over again what the purpose of the book of Samuel is. The purpose ultimately is to persuade Israel that they need a king, and not just any kind of king, but they need a king like David. So the first 12 chapters or so are all about this guy named Samuel, this prophet who was the last judge. Samuel was the one who petitioned God on behalf of Israel. They went to God and said that they wanted a king like the other nations. It wasn’t necessarily bad for them to ask for a king, but it was the kind of king they asked for was the problem. They wanted a king like the other nations, one who was physically impressive, was powerful, and frankly made them look good. God said, “You want a king like that? You got it.”

We saw that king’s name was Saul, and from his first day on the job he was a disaster. He was a nightmare. Chapters 13, 14, and 15 give us three different big events that show us why Saul should not be Israel’s king, why he wasn’t fit for it. In the big picture there are three things that define Saul that made him questionable. The first was that he was physically impressive. The second, he was a horrible shepherd. You may not remember, but he spent a whole chapter looking for two donkeys, which he couldn’t keep track of. The last thing, he was relatively speaking, spiritually dull. He didn’t seem to understand what we would call the Gospel and he didn’t really seem to know God.

As we transition into this new king that we’ll see today anointed, David, we see that David is exactly a photo negative of Saul. In other words, while Saul was defined as physically impressive, we’re going to find out today David is very physically unimpressive. While Saul was an incredibly poor shepherd, that’s David’s job. He’s defined by being a shepherd. He was a great shepherd. And finally, where Saul was spiritually dull and relatively faithless, David is extremely spiritually aware and extremely faithful.

Today I’m going to have two points for you. The two points we’re going to look at are basically Samuel’s wisdom, point number one. The second point is God’s madness. Samuel’s wisdom and God’s madness or folly.

In order to understand even before we jump into chapter 16, what I read to you this morning is the context for that. Last week was the final straw when we looked at Saul’s life. He didn’t obey God and he basically said, “Okay, you caught me. I sinned. Now will you go down the mountain with me so I can worship.” Samuel said, “No.” Saul tears the robe and he says, “Okay, you got me again. I sinned. Will you at least go down so I’ll look good in front of the elders?” And then Samuel went. A lot of people were puzzled by that. Why would he go? Different commentators come down on different sides of the issue. To be honest, I think they’re both wrong. One group of commentators would say that the second time Saul confessed, Samuel believed him and thought he’d give him the benefit of the doubt and go down the mountain with him. I don’t buy that because Saul’s second confession in chapter 15 is no different than his first one. So why would Samuel have a change of heart all of a sudden? Other commentators would say, “Well, the reason Samuel went down is because he didn’t want Israel to be too distressed. It would have been chaos if they’d found out his king had been rejected.” Both of those are kind of a stretch because the actual reason, I think, is right there in the text. You know what it is? It’s a cliché. The cliché is this. If you want something done right, do it yourself. Remember Saul’s task was to go and destroy the Amalekites, everything, everybody. But he spared Agag the king. When Samuel goes down the mountain with Saul, you notice he doesn’t talk to anybody. He doesn’t worship. He doesn’t do anything. But the first thing he does, is says, “Bring me Agag.” And they bring Agag the king, and Agag unwittingly, cheerfully says, “Oh, the bitterness of death is past.” Samuel said (let me translate into Tommy-ism), “You don’t know the half of it, my friend.” He said, “As you have made women childless, so your mother will be childless among women. He took his sword and hacked Agag to pieces. Period. It’s not written, but you almost get the idea that he took the sword and tossed it down and walked away because the next thing it says is, “He didn’t see Saul again until the day of his death and he was grieved.” In other words, it seems that he goes down the mountain and finishes the job that Saul should have done. It says implicitly, “Here’s what obedience looks like. Here’s what you were called to do.” It’s gruesome, but I think it’s gruesome to make a point, and he leaves, and he doesn’t see Saul again. That’s where we pick things up here. Now look at chapter 16 in verse 1.

<sup>1</sup> *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.” (ESV)*

As we look at Samuel's wisdom you immediately begin to see God behaving in a way that for all intents and purposes is "outside the box." If you notice the title of the sermon is "Upside down and Backwards." For one thing, Samuel is still grieving over Saul, and we don't know if he's grieving because he cares about Saul personally, or because he feels some sense of remorse at having anointed Saul. We don't know any of that. But God basically comes to him and says, "How long are you going to grieve? I'm over it." So God basically says, "I've chosen another king." If you read closely, the king he has chosen here is drastically different than the king that they chose in Saul. The king that Saul became was a result of Israel going to God and saying, "We want this kind of king. One like the other nations: God relented and gave them a king like the other nations. But notice what this king will be. God says, "I have chosen a king for myself." If you're familiar with any language almost, besides English, it's a reflexive here. He says, "I'm choosing this one for me. This is the one I want because the one I want is the one they need." He's not choosing for them a king that they've asked for, he's choosing a king that they need. Here's where things get dicey and upside down and backwards for someone like Samuel. Did you see where he said from where he has chosen this king? He says, "Fill your horn with oil and go to Jesse in Bethlehem." Samuel was horrified. You see, the whole nation of Israel was basically divided into two big parts and then subdivided. The two big parts were Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Samuel's circuit, if you will, the churches he preached at, was all in Israel, they were all in the north. Samuel knows that if he breaks and changes his pattern and goes down into Judah, Saul's going to ask questions. "Why are you going someplace other than your regular spot?" Samuel asked God in verse 2,

<sup>2</sup> *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.'* <sup>3</sup> *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."* <sup>4</sup> *Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. . . (ESV)*

So Samuel immediately asks this question, "How can I do it, because if Saul hears he'll kill me." So Samuel is actually wise. It's hard to break this into two points because what you get is wisdom-madness-wisdom-madness-wisdom-madness. The wisdom is Samuel and the madness is God. In other words the common sense thing to ask, the wise thing to say is, "People are going to notice, don't you think? Wouldn't it be easier to pick someone from the north? Why do I have to break my pattern and go down there? How am I going to do it? Otherwise Saul will kill me." God said, "Take a heifer and tell them you are going to sacrifice, and when you sacrifice invite Jesse and his sons, and then I will show you what to do." In spite of his fears, Samuel goes anyway. What's interesting about this part of the book of Samuel is that up to this point, Samuel the prophet has basically appeared to us to be perfect. He doesn't make mistakes; he always does the right thing. This is the first time he actually has some apprehension. He's apprehensive about going, yet he does go. His apprehension becomes other people's apprehension because notice what happens when he shows up in Bethlehem. In verse 4 it says,

<sup>4</sup> *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?" (ESV)*

Now, why would the elders tremble when Samuel arrived? Name your reason. It reminds me of when you're in the Army or the military and your battalion commander shows up on a Saturday afternoon to the barracks, then you know it's not good. It never is good. It's either going to be bad or it's going to be a big inconvenience, but there's nothing positive about it. So here comes Samuel, the prophet, who just shows up. So for all they know, he's coming to at least inconvenience them, but at most he's coming with some smiting in his train. Why would they fear that? You remember earlier on in the book, who went to Samuel and said, "You go petition God and tell him we want this kind of king." It was the elders in Israel. So, for all they knew, Samuel was going from village to village and taking care of business the same way he just took care of business with Agag. Right? So you can imagine them having a little fear. They said, "Do you come peaceably?" And he said, "Peaceably I have come. I've come to sacrifice. Consecrate yourselves." And then it says he consecrated Jesse and his sons. It's interesting, that the elders don't open their mouths. Once they heard him say he came peaceably, they actually obeyed the P.O.W. principle. Saul always violated it. He said more than he needed to. He asked more questions than he needed to. As soon as they know they're not in trouble, the elders kept their mouths shut and do what they're told, and you don't hear from them again. Then, the very next thing you see is Samuel sort of making a mistake, or not. It depends on how you view things, which eyes you're using when you look. Notice what happens with verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> *When they (his sons) came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." (ESV)*

Now, on one hand you could say, "Come on, Samuel. You're slicker than that. You're more spiritually aware than that. Why would you choose Eliab?" Samuel chose Eliab because it was the smart thing. It was the wise thing. It was the common sense thing. In other words, in the ancient Near East, the firstborn son got all the privileges, 100% of them. So Eliab was the firstborn, and on top of that he's pretty tall. Everyone likes a tall king. What does God say? Even Samuel says, "This is the common sense thing to do. Here he is." No work. God intervenes and gives him a reproof, if you will. It's not necessarily a rebuke, but listen to what God says in verse 7,

<sup>7</sup>*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.” (ESV)*

So, how does God respond to Samuel’s thinking? He says, “Don’t look at his appearance or his height.” You can almost read between the lines, “That got you in trouble last time. Don’t worry about his stature.” Then it’s almost like an editorial comment. It’s important to notice that this verse, although it’s very famous, doesn’t need to be in here. Have you ever thought about that? It doesn’t need to be in here. The story doesn’t need it unless God wants to teach us something else. We could have just seen the sons parading and hear God say, “Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, yes.” Story over. Yet this verse is here because God is actually trying to teach us something bigger than that. He says, “God doesn’t see things the way man sees things.” He doesn’t look at things the way you do. Samuel, you look at things with common sense. Firstborn, big, warrior. But I don’t look at things the same way you do. Man judges by outward appearance, and the Hebrew there is latterly “the eyes.” In other words, man looks at things with his eyes but the Lord looks at the heart. The question is, does that mean we just look at the outside since we can’t see inside? Does God look at some people and say, “That’s a good person and that’s a bad person?” It can’t be that. Because we know from all the rest of the Bible that when God looks deep inside a person’s soul, all he sees is bad. He sees His own image, but He sees sin there, so there can’t be anything good about the person. In fact, we notice that as the text goes on it can’t be that. So, what’s the point here? I think the point is simply God reminding Samuel that, “The way I do things is almost always upside down and backwards from the way you do things.” (Or the way that common sense would do things, or the way that the world would view things.)

If you think through the Bible, even up to this point, you see that over and over and over again. The firstborn son is supposed to have the privileges and the firstborn son is supposed to be in charge, and yet when you go through the Bible, what do you see? Aaron is the oldest, Moses is younger. Who’s in charge? Moses. Jacob and Esau: Esau is the older brother but who is the one that God chooses? Jacob. Isaac and Ishmael: Ishmael is the older brother. Who is the one God chooses to work through? Isaac. So when thinking about it, maybe Samuel would have thought, “Okay, that isn’t so crazy after all given what I know.” In the rest of the story, basically, God shows us, as he picks David, the outworking of the way He works versus the way we work. Notice what happens. Look at verse 8 after He rejects Eliab.

<sup>8</sup>*Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”* <sup>9</sup>*Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”* <sup>10</sup>*And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.”* <sup>11</sup>*Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” . . . (ESV)*

If you were reading this about 1500 years ago, and you read this, you’d be going, “Oh, I can’t believe that. That’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard about in my life.” What am I talking about? Did you notice how many sons there were so far? Three of them were mentioned by name, then four more, and God said, “None of these.” Seven sons so far. When you look through the Bible there’s something important to Israel about the number seven, generally, but specifically with sons. When someone is described as being blessed, there’s no higher blessing in the Old Testament than for it to be said, “They have seven sons.” Not just sons, but seven sons. Remember when Hannah had Samuel at the beginning of this book and she sang this great prayer, and she says, “The barren woman has become the mother of seven sons.” In other words, Samuel was such a blessing he was worth seven sons.” And in Job chapter 1 verse 2, is the story about a guy who has a picture perfect life and then everything crumbles. God sees if he really has faith or not. In the second verse of that whole book we know that Job is blessed, that he’s textbook blessed because he is said to have how many sons? Seven sons. I could go on and on. David’s great-grandmother Ruth, when she’s widowed and discouraged, her mother-in-law encourages her by saying, “Honey, you know what? You’re better to me than . . .” What? Seven sons. So here we have Jesse, with seven sons who have passed before Samuel. Anything after seven doesn’t matter. I can’t say that strongly enough. Anything after seven is just extra. They’re just extra mouths to feed. It doesn’t matter, but they’re certainly not a blessing. So after all seven have passed by, Samuel looks at Jesse and says, “Is that all you got?” Jesse is sort of shocked as well. You have all these seven sons and then he says, “Well, yeah – David.” Number eight. I mean he’s nothing. We look back at history and at the Bible and we think of David. He was the great and glorious king and Jesus is the son of David. But when you look back and see where this whole thing started, David was the ultimate outsider. He was the ultimate marginal figure. He was the last person in the world that you would have expected anything from. You ask David, “Do you have any brothers?” “Yeah.” “How many?” “Seven.” “What number are you?” “Eight.” It would have been an embarrassment to him, it would have been an embarrassment to the family, and yet God says, “Here’s what I care about. I care about the one on the outside. That’s how I look at things. What’s important to Me is not religious insiders, it’s the ones on the outside. So bring Me son number eight.” Did you notice how Jesse describes him? Samuel asks, “You have one?” Jesse says, “Yeah, yeah, there remains yet the youngest, but behold he’s keeping the sheep.” So David is the youngest. Notice who God rejected first. Eliab, the oldest. David is the youngest. But there’s also something else here that’s easy to miss. Some translations have it, some don’t. The word “youngest” could just as easily have been translated as “the smallest.” God told Samuel, “Don’t look at height. Don’t look at stature. I’ve rejected him.” And then Samuel asks, “Do you have anyone else?” Jesse says, “Yeah, number eight, the

smallest, not the biggest, and on top of that he's out keeping sheep." Keeping the sheep was not a job for a son. Keeping the sheep was a job of a servant. Keeping the sheep was a job for a slave. Keeping the sheep was a job for the outsiders if you didn't make it into the top seven. If you didn't make it into the top seven you might as well have been a slave or a servant because you were stuck out with the nastiest job there was, and it was taking care of the sheep. You almost get this feeling [about Jesse saying], "Yeah, but you know, he's the youngest and on top of all that he's like [whispering] a shepherd." He's a shepherd. Samuel says, "Well, go get him. We'll wait."

There's great irony even to that because here you have all the elders in the city of Bethlehem, you have Jesse and all of his warrior sons standing around waiting for their little brother to be brought in from taking care of those few sheep in order for this prophet to talk to him. David is the ultimate outsider. When you think about David being the ultimate outsider and you begin to move forward in the Gospel, does it surprise you at all that Jesus was an outsider? The difference between David and Jesus is that Jesus was the ultimate insider. You don't get much more inside than being part of the Trinity. In fact, you're so inside you're just one. Yet, Jesus the Son, the ultimate insider became of His own will, the ultimate outsider. Why did He become the ultimate outsider? So that all the rest of us, the rest of us who are outsiders as well, could be brought in. Not into the religious establishment but into a relationship with God. That's God's craziness. God's madness is just that. That when everyone was looking for a great and powerful king, all of a sudden this guy Jesus was born in a barn to a poor couple. What did he do for a living? Carpenter. Where is he from? Nazareth. Can anything good come from there? Everything about Jesus was upside down and backwards. And yet, Jesus came all the way to the outside to bring you and me all the way to the inside. That's the king like David that we ultimately need. If you're not a Christian, and even if you are a Christian, how often to you feel like you're just on the outside, that you don't get it. "I go to church and I just don't understand. Everyone's on the inside and I'm sitting on the outside." The message of the Gospel is that Jesus goes to the outside and brings those in. Have you trusted him? The glory of the Gospel, especially for someone like David, especially for someone completely outside, completely marginal, completely unimportant, is what you see at the very end of this: the difference between the way God interacts with David and the way God interacts with Saul. I'll finish with this.

In verse 12 it says,

*<sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> 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. (ESV)*

They bring him in. It's interesting to consider the word "ruddy;" it means red. The only other place it's used in the Bible, at least that I could find, was to describe Esau, a villain. So here comes David who looks like Esau on one hand. On the other hand, he's not an ugly kid. In other words, God's for the marginal on one hand. On the other hand ugliness is not necessarily a virtue, unfortunately for some of us. David is a good-looking kid. He's handsome. Samuel anoints him, and then the big difference, the thing you've got to catch here. Notice when Saul confessed, he said, "I've sinned." Period. Something similar is going on here. It says, "The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David." It also said that about Saul, "The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon Saul." But in the case of Saul it said, "The spirit rushed upon Saul." Period. Whereas with David it said, "It rushed upon David from that day forward." In other words you get the sense that with Saul God's Spirit was intermittent. He comes and goes, and He sort of empowers him, then not. But with David it's with him all the time, forever. Which hints forward to where God will make this covenant with David that says, "One from your house will rule forever." In the person of Jesus we see that very thing happen. We see His Spirit empowering Jesus, His Spirit coming to us.

I couldn't help but think of Cinderella. Did you ever wonder why is it on one hand that you and I are so quick to judge people by external appearances, and we're so quick to sort of categorize people and say, "That person's in . . . That person's out . . . That person's spiritual . . . That person's not . . . That person's clean . . . That person's unclean . . ." on one hand? On the other hand we love stories like Cinderella. Don't you love this story where you see the mean step-sisters get it and Cinderella who is completely on the outside and without hope rescued by the prince? Why do you love that story? Why do you love stories like that? The reason is that those stories are pointing toward the big story. Those stories are pointing to this thing called the Gospel where Jesus your king does come in and rescues you, Cinderella the outsider, and brings you in. Think about that.