

What Makes Space for Grace

When I was a boy, I remember the excitement when the teacher was looking for a volunteer to take a message to another teacher. After all, it was an excuse to be out of the classroom and delay for as long as possible in coming back. After a while, we noticed that certain children were always chosen, and certain were not. So as a child, you start to notice why some people get chosen. And then when we'd line up for the sports, you'd see who got chosen to be the captain of the team, and why those kids were always chosen first. As you get older you learn why girls choose certain guys, and why guys choose certain girls. When you're even older, as you start applying for jobs, you learn why companies choose certain people and not others. As you are saturated with media, you learn why magazines and TV shows choose certain faces and certain appearances and not others. While you're fairly young, you soon get a pretty good idea of what is chosen, and what is rejected, what is looked for, and what is not.

But at some point we should be confronted with a far more important question: what does God choose? What does God look for in His messengers, in his team members, in His workers? Because if there's ever an errand, a team, a job, a relationship you want to be picked for, it's God's service, God's people, God's kingdom, God's family. But when we look into Scripture, what we find is that God does not choose as we choose. One of the clearest incidents in the Bible that shows this difference between the way God chooses and the way the world does is in the anointing of David in 1 Samuel.

Why is this important? If we don't understand what God values, we might miss the message of the gospel itself. Inside the gospel is God's heart, what He selects and what He rejects. Further, as Christians, we might miss the deep principle of whom God uses and blesses. Why does God use some people more than others?

This story unfolds with an assignment given to Samuel, followed by a surprise of who is not anointed, followed by an even greater surprise as to who is anointed.

I. Samuel's Undesirable Assignment

34 Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. 35 And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Sam. 15:34-35)

Samuel had been 52 when he had anointed Saul, who was 30. That was 27 years before this day, and since then Saul had shown his lack of faith, and his lack of obedience to God. The final straw was when Saul was supposed to destroy the Amalekites, but instead kept plenty of the spoils, and spared Agag their king. Samuel told him his time as king was coming to an end. After that sad parting, Samuel never saw Saul's face again, for the rest of his reign. In fact, the last time Saul saw Samuel was when Samuel's spirit was called up from the dead by the witch at Endor.

But Samuel left Saul that day and returned to his home and his school of the prophets at Ramah, weeping for Saul. Here was Saul the king, who had replaced Samuel and his sons, and he was an utter failure. The one who was supposed to rescue Israel from its enemies and restore true worship and godliness to the land, had made it even worse. Samuel was mourning for Saul himself, mourning for Israel, mourning for God's reputation in Israel.

But God is never taken by surprise. He had a plan all along. There is a time to weep, but there is a

time to refrain from weeping.

1 Samuel 16:1 Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons." (1 Sam. 16:1)

It is time to stop weeping. It is likely the year 1025 BC. Samuel is 79 and is being sent to the well-known town of Bethlehem, where descendants of Boaz and Ruth live. There God has already provided for Himself a king.

Bethlehem is not that far from Ramah, about 16 kilometres south. Samuel could have made the journey in a day or so. The real problem was that the road from Ramah to Bethlehem took you straight through the town of Gibeah, where Saul's palace was. Since Samuel had basically broken off contact with Saul, it would draw some attention if he was walking right past Saul's palace.

So Samuel fears for his life, quite rightly. 2 And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears *it*, he will kill me." (1 Sam. 16:2)

In all his life, Samuel had never faced a jealous king. But now on two occasions, Samuel told Saul that someone else in Israel was going to replace him, and we soon find out that jealousy and paranoia come to dominate Saul's life. Saul may have had spies ready to report anything Samuel did. And if he is headed off with nothing except a horn of oil, Saul would undoubtedly murder Samuel to prevent that anointing from occurring. This is an undesirable assignment.

And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' 3 "Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you." (1 Sam. 16:2-3)

God gives Samuel a legitimate reason to go to Bethlehem besides the anointing: go and offer a sacrifice at Bethlehem. In his office as judge and priest, Samuel could offer sacrifices. Samuel's family were Levites living in Ephraim, according to 1 Chronicles. So if Samuel went to a town, offered a special sacrifice, it wouldn't arouse suspicion.

God is not aiding Samuel to lie. He is providing Samuel with more than one reason to go, so that if asked, he can tell the truth. This shows us that we should always tell the truth. But it also shows us that evil men don't always need to know all the truths available. If you are entering a country hostile to Christianity to share the gospel, by coming in as a worker, that government doesn't need to know all the truths for why you are coming, just those truths that are prudent to share.

So Samuel heads off, driving a heifer, which is a young cow, and arrives at Bethlehem. This creates understandable concern and fear in the small town.

4 So Samuel did what the LORD said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" (1 Sam. 16:4)

The word for trembled is the word *charad*, which means to be terrified. Samuel had been a prophetic judge. When Saul hadn't done the job, he had hewed Agag in pieces. Samuel was a tough judge, and the people of Bethlehem didn't know why he had come. Perhaps there was some unknown sin in Bethlehem, and he had come to denounce it. Or perhaps the public split between Samuel and Saul was going to be a civil war between the former judge and the king, and Samuel was here to recruit followers, maybe declare war. Whatever it was, it was the kind of thing that makes farmers and shepherds tremble. They didn't want trouble.

But Samuel assures them he is not there to denounce anyone or bring judgement. He is simply going to do one of his sacrifices, and the people of Bethlehem are invited.

5 And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. (1 Sam. 16:5)

Just as an aside, we should ask, was Samuel allowed to sacrifice? After all, remember how all the later kings were marked down because they allowed the high places to continue, where people continued to sacrifice there instead of at the Temple. Well, it seems that during this time, when the Ark was still separated from the Tabernacle, and they were in separate places, it was still lawful for sacrifices to be offered by the judges. There were at least altars we know of at Ramah, Samuel's town, Bethel, Gilgal, and the two Levitical cities of Gibeon and Geba.

So Samuel proclaims a public sacrifice, while inviting Jesse and his family to a private sacrificial meal. He tells the people of Bethlehem to consecrate themselves, which meant that those attending should wash and change clothes. Samuel personally consecrated Jesse and his sons, perhaps with prayer, perhaps with some water.

Now the public sacrifice moves to the private feast, with Jesse and his family. All Samuel knows is that the future king is one of Jesse's sons. He doesn't know which one.

So once the public sacrifice is over, and the family of Jesse gathers in the house with Samuel, and before the meal begins Samuel now gets to survey the sons of Jesse.

At this point, we should ask, why did the Lord not reveal to Samuel who would be anointed? If God could give Samuel the name *Jesse* as the household to look for, then he could surely give Samuel the name *David* as the particular son to ask for. But God stops short of giving Samuel the name, because He wanted Samuel to learn a lesson too, a lesson by the process of elimination. This is the lesson in which we learn the heart of God.

II. The Brothers' Unusual Rejection

6 So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the LORD'S anointed *is* before Him." (1 Sam. 16:6)

Samuel was repeating the mistake made with Saul:

2 And he had a choice and handsome son whose name *was* Saul. *There was* not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward *he was* taller than any of the people. (1 Sam. 9:2)

You would think that Samuel would have learned, and would not be looking for Saul 2.0. If the last Saul bombed, why would you want a King Saul II? At this point, the Holy Spirit speaks into Samuel's soul, audibly enough for Samuel to hear and stop the way he was thinking.

1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For *the LORD does not see as man sees*; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7)

Here is Samuel's great lesson: the world judges value and importance by outward qualities, but God judges by inner spiritual qualities. Man is impressed by looks, wealth, strength, power, influence, fame. This is how we choose our celebrities, our political leaders, our fashion icons. But Jesus would one day say, **Joh 7:24** "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

God's standard.

Psa 147:10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might, Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches; (Jer. 9:23)

1Co 1:19-21 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

So the parade of sons begins:

8 So 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 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." (1 Sam. 16:8-10)

Now it is not clear if Jesse or the sons know what Samuel means by God's choosing or by the anointing. But at this point, Jesse has exhausted all the sons he thought would be considered for some kind of important selection.

Samuel is confused. He was sent to Jesse's household. He has seen Jesse's sons, and God has refused all of them. Finally, Samuel asks the only other thing possible.

11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Then he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here." (1 Sam. 16:11)

The youngest was not even invited. This was big people's business, nothing that would concern a fifteen year-old. It was fine for him to be taking care of the animals. But surprisingly, Samuel says, he needs to be here for this meal too.

We wonder what David thought when some breathless messenger caught up with him and told him that the great Prophet-judge was in town, had called the family to the sacrificial meal, and wouldn't begin without David. I picture David leaving the sheep with someone else and running till he arrived, nearly breathless to the sneering expressions of some of his brothers.

III. David's Unexpected Selection

12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this *is* the one!" (1 Sam. 16:12)

In comes David, son number eight. Eight is often the number of new beginnings in Scripture – the eighth day is the day of resurrection, it's beginning of a new week, it's the day of a Hebrew's boy's initiation into the covenant by circumcision. David is the new beginning for Israel.

Now perhaps if this story had been made up by man, we would have turned it into some beauty and the beast kind of story: beautiful Saul and Eliab, rejected, and poor David with a face only a mother could love, accepted. But the Bible isn't clichéd. No, we find out that David was good looking. We also never hear that he was short; we only think of David as short next to Goliath. But anyone was short next to Goliath. In a family of tall brothers, David was probably above average height (although the average male height in 1000 BC was around 5'3" or 163cm).

He was said to be ruddy, which could mean his hair was reddish or auburn which was more unusual

in that time (although the Philistines were ginger and red-headed). It can also simply mean his skin was fair.

He apparently had beautiful eyes, and the overall effect was that he was good-looking. Good looks are a gift, particularly for leading, and God had sovereignly given as much to David.

Now the Lord speaks to Samuel: this is the one: anoint him!

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah. (1 Sam. 16:13)

Samuel pours the oil on David's head. What would the average Hebrew have understood by this action?

Priests were consecrated by being anointed with oil. Prophets were also anointed by oil, as were kings. Saul, the first, was also anointed in this way. Even the tabernacle, its furniture, and its vessels were anointed (Ex 30:26–28). Anointing separated the thing or person unto God for special service, thus becoming sacred and untouchable (Ex. 30:29; 1st Sam 24:6; 26:9).

So what did Jesse and David's brothers understand that Samuel was doing? We can't be sure. We know that a little while later, Eliab treats David with real contempt on the battlefield, which seems strange if Eliab knew that his little brother was now the king. Jesse probably wouldn't have used David as a messenger boy to send sandwiches to his brothers on the battlefield, if he had understood that David was to be king. Samuel makes no announcement. The Jewish writer Josephus imagines that Samuel whispered into David's ear that he was to be the king. Perhaps they thought that David was being chosen as a prophet in Samuel's school. Perhaps they thought that David had some special assignment from Samuel. Perhaps in light of the fact that David ended up playing music in Saul's court not long afterwards, they thought he was being set aside for that.

But likely Samuel only told David, a truth that would have given him hope and help in the difficult years to come.

Why David? As we saw last week, he was already a man after God's own heart: a man of spirituality, humility, and integrity. Instead of what the world seeks, God looks for different qualities:

Psa 147:11 The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.

Pro 31:30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

"But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word. (Isa. 66:2)

Why does God look for these things? Think of it this way: whatever gives most space to grace, is what He loves. Whatever occupies a place which really belongs to God, and gives itself credit, God does not fill. But where someone, either by nature or by choice is lowly, small in his own eyes, willing to be forgotten, despised, ignored by the world, for the sake of God's glory, that man has left much space for grace.

It seems, and it is later confirmed in the incident with Goliath, that at least some of David's brothers were full of themselves, but not full of zeal for God.

27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:27-29)

One of the proofs that God had truly found a man after his own heart, a man of humility, spirituality and integrity was what David did after being anointed. What did he do? Well, as Chuck Swindoll points out, gladly, “he did not go down to the nearest department store and try on crowns. He didn’t order a new set of business cards, telling the printer, “Change it from shepherd to king-elect.” No, David went back to shepherding.

19 Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David, who *is* with the sheep." (1 Sam. 16:19)

15 But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. (1 Sam. 17:15)

While the outward action was the pouring of oil, that oil did nothing by itself. God Himself did that actual activity of consecrating the person for Himself. The primary way this was done in the Old Testament was through the Holy Spirit coming upon that person.

Now remember that there were thousands, if not millions in Israel, and many of them were true believers, truly regenerate. But the Holy Spirit did not indwell them as happened at Pentecost, and ever after. So this coming of the Holy Spirit is something different. It is the theocratic anointing. In this theocracy, where God rules, He rules through mediators: prophets, priests, and kings. And when He selects someone to be his mediator, the Spirit would anoint that person, come upon them.

Here David is receiving that anointing as the heir apparent to the throne, and as the next verse tells you, the anointing was removed from Saul at the same moment. You can't have two kings of the same kingdom.

But there is not only the principle of God's choosing seen in David's anointing. If we look carefully, we can also see a Person pictured in the anointing.

The Hebrew word for anoint, used here, is *mashach*. That of course, is the same root word as *Mashiach*, Messiah. Messiah, or the Greek word for Messiah – Christ – just means anointed one. The God-Man is the ultimate anointed one, the true prophet, priest and king. This is also significant because we know that the Evil One, Satan was the anointed cherub (Ezek. 28:14a), consecrated for serving God. But when he became proud, and sin entered him, his anointing was revoked, and he was cast out.

In contrast to Satan's pride, the Son of God came forth leaving behind His glory, the one born in humble circumstances, disbelieved in by his brothers and sisters, obscure, anonymous. Though He was in the form of God, he thought it not robbery, He did not consider that title a thing to be grasped onto. He could empty Himself, be an ignored shepherd gathering His flock out of Israel. This forgotten Son of Man, overlooked by the high and mighty in Israel, despised by the spiritual principalities and powers, is the true anointed.

David also pictures the threefold anointing of Messiah. David was actually anointed three times. The first was here, where the Spirit came upon him. The second was many years later when his own tribe, the tribe of Judah, accepted him as their king, but the other tribes did not yet do so. The third was a little while later, as king over all Israel. That foreshadows the Lord Jesus. He was anointed the first time at His baptism, when the Spirit came upon Him. He was anointed king the second time at His ascension, when He was exalted king over all those who willingly take Him as Lord and Saviour. His third anointing will be king over the whole Earth at His Second Coming.

But here is where we draw together the lesson of whom God chooses and uses.

Twice the Bible puts it this way: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. His sheep hear His voice. Humble hearts are drawn to a humble shepherd. A humble king attracts humble subjects.

If you choose the glories of this world and the kingdoms thereof, you will miss the Son of David. You will be looking for the Eliabs and the Sauls: the powerful, admired, celebrated, wealthy, impressive, beautiful of this world. You will want to be counted among them, and not among those thought weak, foolish, ignoble. And when Messiah comes in, ruddy, chief among ten thousand, you won't hear the Spirit's voice saying: Arise, this is the One: accept Him. God calls the humble, God uses the humble, and the humble are attracted to their humble king.

This is why Jesus made one of His clearest invitations this way, contrasting pride and humility, and pointing out that the humble should come to Him, the humble king:

25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

26 "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.... 28 "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:25-26,28-30)

Let not conscience make you linger,
nor of fitness fondly dream;
all the fitness he requireth
is to feel your need of him.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
lost and ruined by the fall;
if you tarry till you're better,
you will never come at all.