



The team captains stand before the line-up. "I'll take Devante," says the first team captain to the tallest boy. "I'll take Gus," says the other captain picking the strongest and fastest. They continue back and forth until there's only a few left. You can imagine the gut-wrenching feeling of waiting to see who is last picked. It's the least wanted person in the group all on the basis of height, size, speed, personal friendships, or some other criteria. Maybe we might wonder at times how God goes about choosing who is on his team. Would he choose you? How can you be so sure? It's not as we might expect. Today we turn to 1 Samuel 16 to see how God chooses the least expected and turns everything around.

We must begin by talking about a practice in ancient Israel that might seem foreign and unfamiliar to us. But actually it shouldn't be that unfamiliar. It's a word that comes up over five-hundred times in your Bible. It is the word anoint. Anointings signified someone was chosen to fill a special role. Someone would take oil and pour it. When the oil was poured over someone's head they were officially designated and ordained for a new position. Most of those five hundred times it occurs in the Bible it refers to someone anointed by God. Priests like Moses' brother Aaron and those after him were anointed as they were ordained into the priestly office. Prophets like Elisha had oil poured over their head signifying they were called by God. And when Israel asked for a king God had the prophet Samuel pour oil over the head of Saul as he said, "Has not God chosen you as king over Israel?" To be anointed in such a way meant that God has chosen you.

There came a time when Saul, the first anointed king of Israel, had rejected the LORD. Samuel the prophet was grieved by this rejection and mourned for Saul. It was Samuel, after all, who had poured the oil and anointed Saul. But the LORD had plans for another. "Samuel, how long will you mourn for Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel." So God told his prophet, "Fill your horn with oil and go. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

Samuel was afraid at first. The road to Bethlehem would have taken him right past Saul's headquarter city. The last time he spoke to Saul was right after he told Saul that God had rejected him as king. It wouldn't have been beyond Saul to kill Samuel if he ever suspected that Samuel was going to anoint another king. Saul was such a ruthless and jealous king he had even once ordered his own son put to death. The LORD directed Samuel to go and show up at the town in order to present a sacrifice. So, Samuel set out to offer sacrifice to the LORD at Bethlehem. And without raising any suspicion from Saul he would at the same time anoint the next King.

Samuel arrived at Bethlehem. Since it was an uncertain time for Israel the people of Bethlehem were initially alarmed. Samuel assures them he has come in peace to offer sacrifice with Jesse's family. Jesse's sons consecrate themselves to celebrate the sacrifice. That practice usually involved washing and putting on clean clothes. The stage was now set for Jesse's family to receive the special surprise. Samuel asked Jesse to present his sons. He knew that the LORD was going to have him anoint one of them. When the first one comes before Samuel, the prophet thinks he has it all figured out. Eliab must have been impressive in appearance because when Samuel saw him, he thought, "Surely the LORD's chosen stands before me." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Sometimes we like to think we have God's working all figured out. Like Samuel we forget that we have very limited understanding. We might look at the outward appearances and make superficial, inaccurate judgments. People look at someone's attire, physical appearances, gender, age, financial status, charisma, and even race and often jump to wrong conclusions. We assume that if a person is a public speaker and persuasive with their words that they would make a good leader. We are often proven wrong. Many choose their governing leaders based on superficial factors such as height or appearance. As a result they only find out later they made a bad choice. Many choose their spiritual leaders based on superficial factors like age, style, or personality. Sadly they can suffer the spiritual consequences for such poor judgment. We've got blinders on when making so many choices. We can end up making really bad choices!

And don't we measure ourselves with blinders on? So many young women are tempted to buy into the marketing ploys which teach them they are only valuable if the people around them consider their bodies attractive. They chase after these things and value these things. They lose sight of what really makes us of great worth: our inner self. They grow up lamenting that they somehow are losing value as their outward beauty fades. Is this how we ought to measure worth? Is that what God uses to measure worth? Some young men believe that if they are the best at football or sports, they will be popular or more important. They grow up believing their worth is measured on their wealth or achievements. Is it?

God doesn't focus on any of this outward stuff. He sees the heart. That's why he writes wisdom in his Word reminding us "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." And, "Do you see the man who thinks he is wise *in his own eyes*? There is more hope for a fool than for him." God sees the character and attitude of the heart.

That's a problem, isn't it? Does your heart measure up? Would he choose you if he could see beyond the surface? It doesn't matter how clean you make yourself. It doesn't matter if you put on clean clothes. One by one Jesse's sons

appeared before Samuel. Each one impressive to Samuel and dressed in ceremonially clean clothes. But even after seven sons passed by Samuel was told that the LORD had not chosen them. He saw the heart.

What about you? Is there within any secret sins of the heart that hide under the surface? You can't hide it from God. He sees every time we have rejected him. God sees when we selfishly put him aside for something else. God sees the times when we've said to ourselves "I must have this," even though it meant rejecting our God. Were we to be in a line up for God to select his team, wouldn't he see all those faults of the heart, shake his head and reject each one of us? Why should God choose us to be on his team? What we deserve is to remain on the devil's side, rejected by God as unfit for his kingdom. From God's perspective the Bible says he sees, "No one who does good. Not even one." (Isaiah 59)

But today we see how God operates. He chooses the least expected to serve as his anointed one. There was yet another son in Jesse's family. He was so disregarded that he hadn't even been invited to the event. I'm sure his Father loved him, but he didn't expect God's prophet would take any interest in the youngest. Jesse doesn't even mention him by name. He is just referred to as the littlest, the one watching the sheep. I like to imagine Samuel thinking, "How fitting! The littlest and least who serves by watching over a flock will be the next King over Israel." Samuel insists on seeing him. When he does the LORD tells Samuel, "Rise and anoint him." And no doubt to the confusion of Jesse's entire family the prophet pours oil over David's head, anointing him. Only later would they realize this anointing meant God has already chosen him to be king. David was filled with power from the Holy Spirit. God had chosen him, and God was going to give him every gift he needed to serve. And David was chosen in grace. Despite the sins which would later come from his heart.

That's how our God operates. He chooses the unexpected to serve him. We saw that earlier this morning when we read about the time when he anointed Jesus. There was nothing that the man Jesus has done which made him stand out. He had done no preaching, no miracles, and nothing too unusual. On the other hand when people heard John the Baptist preaching, they thought to themselves, "Surely this must be God's anointed one." They were wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the chosen one. John made it clear that he was not the chosen one. The chosen one came walking down by the Jordan to be baptized by John. Jesus of Nazareth had nothing in his appearance that said, "I am a King." But he truly from the heart was a king.

At Jesus' baptism God the Father made clear he had chosen him. "As he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" This was Jesus' anointing. Peter preached about it, "...beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power." (Acts 10:37-38) At Jesus' baptism God poured out the Holy Spirit to strengthen him according to his human nature and declared, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." God saw the heart. God chose him from eternity to be our king. And God made that clear at his baptism. He was anointed when the Spirit descended on him and the voice spoke from heaven. Who would have expected this man from Bethlehem, a carpenter born in a manger, would be anointed in such a way?

But this is who Jesus is. Christ is the Greek word for Messiah, which is Hebrew for "Anointed one." We call Jesus Christ, the anointed one. He alone deserved to be picked for God's service as the perfect prophet, priest, and king. He alone is good, and pure from the heart. As our anointed prophet Jesus began to preach, "The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news." (Luke 4:18) As the very Son of God Jesus was chosen to do what no other king could ever do. He came to serve his people by rescuing them as their king. And as perfect priest he offered the once-for-all sacrifice by taking the world's guilt upon himself. To fight our battle and to protect his people he was rejected in our place. The king hung in agony as the Father turned his face away. He was despised and rejected in our place. Yet God doesn't abandon his anointed one to the grave. He is the living Christ. He serves as our anointed Savior forever.

How does God go about choosing the rest of his people to serve him? He chooses the least expected. You and I are chosen by him in grace. We are chosen and dearly loved -not on the basis of what we have done or what we will ever do, but like David purely by grace. That's why the apostle John can write, "*you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.*" (1 Jn 2:20) And when speaking about our baptism the apostle Paul describes how God in grace anointed us to be his own. "*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*" (2 Co 1:21-22)

We have an anointing from the Holy One! He has made us his own holy servants! Would God choose you? You can be sure of it! If not, then stop looking at the outward appearances and see what God sees. If not then, "you are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do." 2 Co 10:7. God sees more than the outward appearances. What does he see? "...all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:27) He sees his Son's holiness in the heart of all who believe. "All who believe and are baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16).

Who could have ever expected to be called on by God to serve him in holiness? Sinners are! We are! You and I are anointed by God. We have received his Holy Spirit. It took place in our baptisms. And it means he has in grace chosen us to wear Christ's righteousness. He has chosen us to be his own, to serve him. The LORD chooses the least expected.