

The Weight of the Crown

The Lord Looks on the Heart

1 Samuel 16-17

Mark Vroegop

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." 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.' 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." 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?" 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. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." 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." Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." 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." 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." 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 (1 Sam. 16:1-13, ESV).

Last Sunday we concluded our service with this hopeful benediction from 1 Thessalonians 5.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

I loved the thought expressed in verse 24: "he will surely do it." It summarizes a central concept woven through the Bible: Our hope in life is God working in, through, and on behalf of us. It's how we are saved: Jesus's death is applied to your account. It's how we are sanctified: The life of Jesus being lived out in you. It's how we are glorified: There's a coming day when Christians will be miraculously made completely new. And all of this happens because of God.

No one will say in the new heavens and new earth, “Look what I did!” The focus will be on the amazing greatness and goodness of God. The Bible tells the story of a big God who’s at work in the world in ways that we sometimes forget. The Bible gives us a written portal to be “awed” by God and what he does.

When was the last time you felt “awe”? I felt it in surprising ways during the recent total eclipse. Candidly, I was a bit skeptical about all the hubbub around it. But when totality passed over our city, I was stunned. The darkness, the planets, the drop in temperature, the 360-degree sunrise, and the cheering from fellow eclipse watchers were incredible. And no one was saying, “We’re awesome!” On the contrary, I felt amazed. And small. The eclipse pointed me to a big God.

That’s the goal of 1 & 2 Samuel. And today we are introduced to David, but he’s not the central figure in the story. There’s a story behind the story. It’s about God’s glory and how his power is essential and remarkable in the world. Remember that the theme verse for 1 Samuel is 2:4.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength (1 Sam. 2:4).

Who breaks the bows? Who gives strength to the feeble? God does! In fact, 1 Samuel 2:10 puts it this way:

... The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Sam. 2:10).

So, as we look at these chapters, resist the urge to only see the story of David and Saul. Look deeper at the story about God and how he empowers his people. This text shows us that **spiritual empowerment is remarkable and essential**. And as you do, I want to invite you to respond in two ways:

1. Celebrate it
2. Seek it

I want you to say “Wow” and “More.” Allow me to highlight three scenes with three critical verses:

“And the Spirit rushed upon David from that day forward” (16:13)

We begin with the anointing of David as the new king. In verse 1, Samuel is given a slight rebuke for grieving too long over what happened with Saul. He’s told to prepare to anoint someone else. The wording in verse 1 is important: “for I have provided for myself a king.”

Samuel is told by the Lord to invite a man named Jesse to the sacrifice: “I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him who I declare to you” (v. 5). Now, there’s a lot of tension in the air. Samuel is nervous about Saul discovering what is happening (vv. 2-3). The people of Bethlehem are concerned when Samuel arrives that judgment is coming (vv. 4-5).

As Jesse’s family arrives for the sacrifice, we get a window into Samuel’s thoughts, and it creates an important contrast meant to tell us something about God. In verses 6-10, we learn that Samuel sees the oldest three sons and thinks that they must be king material. Verse 7 is telling:

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” (1 Sam. 16:7).

There’s a lot we could talk about here. Is Samuel part of the problem? Is there a deficiency in the sons? We’re left to wonder. But we don’t have to wonder about the main point. It’s clear that God and humans evaluate strength potential very differently. What God sees and what we see are not often the same thing. What we think is powerful, safe, and sure are not very accurate. The way the world works and the way God works are often very different.

When the seven sons have passed by with no affirmation, Samuel asks if all the sons are present. Jesse responds with “There remains yet the youngest . . .” (v. 11). The word not only means young in age, but it can also mean small, unimportant, and without authority. That makes sense because the youngest isn’t even invited to the sacrifice. When David arrives, the text indicates that he was a handsome young man. That’s a curious statement. It’s probably here to remove the appearance issue since David is just as outwardly appealing as his brothers. However, he’s the youngest and passed over.

Samuel is instructed to anoint him, and he did so “in the midst of his brothers.” Imagine seven brothers ages 29, 27, 25, 23, 21, 19, and 17 all standing around as the oil is poured over the head of their little brother in shepherding clothes. And then we come to the most important statement: “And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward” (v. 13b).

“The bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength.” What do you need to celebrate and seek when it comes to spiritual empowerment?

“Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul” (16:14)

The second scene is linked to the previous one. While the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David, it departed from Saul. We find here an example of how necessary divine empowerment truly is. We learned last week about Saul’s rejection. But here we see the practical ramifications and effects. It’s a concerning portrayal.

One thing to clarify before we look at this passage. The writer of 1 Samuel is probably not recording this story in chronological order. In other words, the setting of this is probably after the events of chapter 17. The writer seems to be setting up a contrast between the empowerment of David and the torment of Saul.

Verse 14 starts with a “head-snapper.” The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. God had removed his hand from Saul. He was under divine judgment. And whether the harmful spirit was because of the command of God (“go torment him”) or if the writer is merely saying that Saul is emotionally imploding due to the judgment of God, we know that Saul is feeling the effects of divine rejection. That’s a big deal.

Those who served Saul recognized his turmoil, and they suggested that it would be helpful to have someone serve the king with soothing music (vv. 15-16). When Saul agrees to the idea (v. 17), they suggest a qualified candidate:

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." (1 Sam. 16:18).

After Saul summons David, he officially brings him into the palace. Saul grew fond of David, and he became his armor-bearer (v. 21). David remained inside Saul's court:

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. (1 Sam. 16:23).

Here is the future king of Israel—the anointed one—serving in the court of Saul. He's full of the Spirit of the Lord. While Saul has been rejected and is tormented.

"The bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength." What do you need to celebrate and seek when it comes to spiritual empowerment?

"I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts" (17:45)

Our third section of Scripture is probably one of the more familiar stories in the Old Testament. It's the account of David and Goliath. But it's really a story about God and his people. And it relates to the problematic Philistines again.

Once again, the Philistine army encroaches on Israelite land. This time the forces of Israel and the forces of the Philistines are gathered on either side the Valley of Elah (v. 1-3). The Philistines choose a "champion," a professional fighter, as a means of intimidation and psychological warfare.

His appearance is frightening. He's described in a way that appears almost super-human:

- 9 feet 9 inches tall
- Bronze helmet, which was not normal for Philistines
- Coat of mail weighing 126 pounds
- Javelin sword strapped to his shoulders
- Iron-tipped spear weighing 15 pounds
- A shield-carrying assistant ran before him

Besides his physical appearance and armor, Goliath verbally harasses the Israelite troops:

"Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together" (1 Samuel 17:8b-10).

It worked. Saul and all the people were dismayed and greatly afraid. They were downhearted, shattered, ashamed, and filled with fear. This went on for 40 days, in the morning and the evening (v. 16).

Meanwhile, David went back and forth from the Israelite camp, bringing provisions to his brothers (vv. 12-23). He heard Goliath's taunt and threats. David asks:

And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26).

After David's oldest brother rebukes him (vv. 28-30), he's given an audience with King Saul. David offers to fight Goliath, but Saul initially demurs (vv. 32-33). However, David responds with this faith-filled statement:

"Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!" (1 Sam. 17:36-37).

After declining Saul's own armor (vv. 38-39), David took up five stones, along with his sling and a staff. Upon seeing David, Goliath continues his verbal assault:

And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field" (1 Sam. 17:43-44).

David's response is the main point of this story:

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand" (1 Sam. 17:45-47).

There's so much here! Try to look beyond David for a minute and realize that this is a battle between the people of God and their archenemy. David is the speaker and the one taking action, but he correctly sees himself involved in a bigger battle. Notice these God-centered statements:

- I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts
- The Lord will deliver you into my hand
- That all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel
- That this assembly (Israel) will know that Lord saves not by sword or spear

- The battle is the Lord's; he will give you into our hand

And with that, the battle begins. As you know, it ends quickly. As Goliath moves toward David, he's met with a stone from David's sling. After it knocks him to the ground, David takes Goliath's sword and cuts off his head. "So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone" (v. 50).

The defeat of Goliath caused the Philistines to flee and led to a great victory for Israel. Our text concludes with David being brought before Saul with the head of Goliath in his hand.

And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (1 Sam. 17:58).

"The bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength." What do you need to celebrate and seek when it comes to spiritual empowerment?

I wonder if you see these stories differently now. It makes a big difference when we put God in the center—as he should be. The Spirit of God rushes on a passed-over, weaker younger brother. The king has a throne and a kingdom, but he's miserable. Goliath has all kinds of perceived strength, and it would seem that David is taking a huge risk.

Spiritual empowerment is remarkable and essential.

And if you are not yet a Christian, I hope you'll explore what it means to turn to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. His death and resurrection can be applied to you. He can cleanse you, forgive you, and make you new. He can do what you can't do: save you.

If you are a Christian, can I remind you that the Spirit of the living God lives in you right now? God has provided his presence and his power, not only to help you with the spiritual battles you face. But he does this so that you'll know that you didn't do it on your own. No matter what you are facing today, let this text remind you that "if God is for you, who can be against you?" (Rom. 8:31)

"The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength." (1 Sam. 2:4)

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