

## “What God Looks At”

A story found in 1 Samuel, chapter 16, describes a pivotal time of transition in the history of Israel. King Saul’s disastrous reign is ending. God tells the prophet Samuel to go to Bethlehem and be prepared to anoint someone to be the new king over Israel. He is to go to a man named Jesse. God is going to choose one of Jesse’s sons as king.

When Samuel arrives and begins to look at Jesse’s sons standing before him, his attention is drawn to one of the sons named Eliab. What a specimen he is! What a hunk! Tall. Handsome. Surely this is the one God’s singled out to be next king! But no! "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 people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Then Jesse calls a son named Abinadab, and he walks past Samuel. Perhaps Jesse showed his disappointment as Samuel says, “No, not him either.” The proud father, Jesse, selects one son after another to parade before Samuel, but each time the father is dismayed as Samuel says, “Nope, not him.” Finally, Samuel says, “Are these all the sons you have?” (verse 11). “Well, no...”, the dejected father mumbles, “There’s my youngest...he’s out tending the sheep” (he hadn’t even been invited to this important ceremony). “Go get him,” Samuel says. “We’re not going to begin any feasting or celebrating until he gets here.”

This 8<sup>th</sup> son is David. He sent and brought him in. "He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features" (1 Samuel 16:12a). And then the Lord says to Samuel, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one" (verse 12b). Look at the next verse: "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David (1 Samuel 16:13). This one, *whom God chose*, would become the greatest king of Israel – an ancestor of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth

*What a great story!* I particularly like the one phrase: "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

*The Bible says God looks at the heart.* When the Bible says “heart” it almost never means the muscle that’s part of our physical body. In Hebrew thinking, the “heart” meant the center of one’s inner life and personality, the seat of the emotions and feelings, the center of the intellect and will. In other words, it is the inward character that defines us. So when God looks at the “heart”, it means God sees our true inner self, the inward depths of who we are and what we are. That’s what God is interested in!

*But often that’s not where our focus is, is it? Don’t we humans tend to judge on first impressions or outward appearance?* As Scripture says, “People look at the outward appearance” (1 Samuel 16:7). What are some of the things we can get hung up on? Some of us can’t stand it if a man wears an earring. That instantly colors our estimate of a guy. I’ve often thought, what if I went out and bought an earring and wore it. Some would think, “What a disgrace for a pastor!” “Harry’s too old for that.” Yet, I’d be no different on the inside as I was before I stuck the

ring in my ear. By the way, did you see that Mets player Javy Baez lost a diamond earring when he slid into home and scored the winning run in a walkoff win against the Marlins? As far as I know they still haven't found it.

How about ladies dyeing hair a wild color – orange, green, purple. Many people immediately pass judgment on a person when they see them with a wild hair color.

Parents sometimes fight with their kids over this kind of thing. Parents who get bent out of shape because their son wants to let his hair grow real long, or their daughter wants to get a tattoo. Occasionally, I've had parents come to me for help: "I can't stand my child's long hair! How can I get him to get it cut?" My response is usually: How important is this, really? There's something much more important than this kind of surface stuff! Like developing your son or daughter's character. Like having open communication and a healthy relationship with your son or daughter.

By the way, it's not just parents, not just adults, who tend to get hung up on how a person looks on the outside. Kids at school can make fun of other students who may wear clothes that aren't stylish, or classmates who are overweight or not good looking.

We sometimes focus too much on externals when it comes to how people dress when they come to church. My generation grew up thinking you need to "dress up" for church. That's how you show respect for God and the church. But then Gen-Xers and Millennials come along, and couldn't care less about "dressing up" for church, or wearing "dress up" clothes *anywhere!* As we sit here in church and God looks at us, how much do you think God is paying attention to what we're wearing? Or is God looking at what's inside of us?

"People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

*We also see things differently than God when it comes to how we define "beauty". How important is physical attractiveness in our culture? It's a big deal, isn't it! Check out a night at the Oscars or Emmy Awards, as actors and actresses parade their beautiful faces and gorgeous bodies before an adoring audience! How can we stack up against them? But we try!*

Americans spent \$49.2 billion on cosmetics and beauty aids in 2019. One study indicated that the average woman spends \$313 a month on beauty aids (\$3756 a year). Men spend an average of \$244 a month! A chemistry teacher asked her class, "What is the most outstanding product that chemistry has given the world?" One young man replied, "Blondes". A woman was in a congregation where she heard a sermon on pride. Afterwards she went to the pastor and said she wanted to confess her sin of pride, that she had spent an hour the other day just looking in the mirror at how beautiful she was. The pastor replied, "Lady, that's not a sin of pride. That's a sin of imagination!"

Let's look at some words found in the New Testament, in 1 Peter 3:3-4: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or

fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." Peter is writing instructions for *wives/women* who are believers in Christ...but these can be words of wisdom for *everyone*.

He says there is an outward beauty which is partly determined by clothes, jewelry, by how you fix your hair – and believers are not to be unduly focused on these. Rather, concentrate on a different kind of beauty – *inward beauty*. He says that our beauty ought to be that of our “inner self” (verse 4). I like *The Living Bible* paraphrase of this, “Be beautiful inside, in your hearts, with the lasting charm of a gentle and quiet spirit which is so precious to God” (1 Peter 3:4)

Now, there's nothing wrong with trying to look nice on the outside. There's something to be said for a woman with just the right touch of makeup and a pleasant hairstyle, or a man who is neat and well-groomed. But the Scriptures remind us not to be too preoccupied on *outward beauty*, and to forget that the most important beauty is the inward beauty of *character and spirit*.

Illust. Every once in a while, a popular magazine or tabloid newspaper will run an article on “The Ten Most Beautiful Women in the World” or the “Ten Greatest Looking Guys in the World”. Usually they will identify some movie star or soap opera star. But they've got it all wrong! Because some of these “beautiful people” are not very beautiful on the inside! Real beauty, as God sees it, is a beauty of spirit, beauty of the heart.

I saw this news program where the producers staged a scene where a lady's car had broken down. They wanted to see how many people would stop to help her. They used 2 different women. One was a very attractive young lady. Then the same scene played out with a very plain looking woman, deliberately dressed in very plain clothes. Which woman do you think received the most help? You guessed it: the young, attractive woman!

*That's the way of the world!* “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

***Jesus emphasized the importance of the heart, or what's inside, in our inner self.*** Jesus didn't pay much attention to a person's physical appearance, or social status, or level of sophistication. He looked at people's *inner motives and desires*. He said it is the *pure in heart* who will see God: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). He chided religious leaders who looked good on the outside, but inwardly were anything but good: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Matthew 23:27-28). Jesus also looked beyond peoples' sometimes crusty exterior to see the goodness and potential that was hidden in their heart.

What's in our hearts this morning? Are our hearts clean and pure? Do we have a heart that's seeking God? Are we on the inside what we appear to be on the outside? Or are we a fake, a phony? God sees if we're faking it, but He also sees when maybe our outward efforts don't quite have the results we hope for – but where our hearts are in the right place!

***We all need hearts that are changed by the love and power of Christ!*** The Bible says that the human heart is wicked and deceitful, and in need of redeeming. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jesus said all the evil behaviors stem from what's inside us – the sin in our hearts.

But God can cleanse our heart and renew our heart – change us from the inside-out! The prophet Ezekiel wrote: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you...” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ came! He can give us a new heart!

When we come to Christ, Jesus begins to do a major cleanup job deep within us! He wants to empower us to be more clean and beautiful on the inside.

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.  
Community United Methodist Church  
September 12, 2021*

