

Least Likely

When I was in high school, more specifically, when I was a senior in high school, there were the senior superlatives. For those who do not know, these are the seniors who are voted by their fellow classmates as: the class clown, most likely to move away, most likely to have a large family, or most likely to succeed. You may remember these from your high school days. Some of these actually may align with the predictions while others miss by a mile.

The senior superlatives reflect a popularity contest. People judge others by their appearance and their antics or behavior. This is often repeated into adulthood. We tend to elect people based on their appearance or mannerisms. We choose our friends based on similar criteria. Unattractive people and people perceived as having little or no charisma are likely not initially chosen for our circle of friends. We tend to judge a person by the outward signs that we observe.

Perhaps it is good that God uses a different standard than we use when He judges us. In First Samuel, we meet two men who had the title of King of Israel. The first was Saul. After the people approached Samuel asking for a king, Samuel told them of the problems they would face with taxation, conscription of both their sons and daughters. They persisted so Samuel set about finding a king. The 9th chapter of 1 Samuel gives us a description of Saul.

Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valor (Or *wealth or influence*.) He had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people. (1 Samuel 9:1-2 NASB)

From this description, we can easily see a regal presence. Saul looked like a king. We are not told much about Saul other than his appearance. We are told that his father, Kish, was **a mighty man of valor**. Some commentaries suggest that the phrase man of valor carries a military connotation for a brave man. Others suggest that Kish was a man of wealth and influence. Either may be appropriate. However, we notice that Saul is only described by his physical attributes and not his bravery, his military prowess, or his influence.

Nonetheless, Saul was to become the king of Israel. In 1 Samuel 10:1, Samuel anoints Saul as king. Saul was 30 years old when he became king and his reign lasted 42 years (1 Samuel 13:1).

Samuel tells Saul that that part of being king over Israel involves obedience to God. This is a transitional period as Israel moves from being a Theocracy (ruled by God) to a monarchy. At the beginning of the 15th chapter, Samuel reminds Saul of his duty to listen obediently to God.

Then Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will punish Amalek *for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.*’” (1 Samuel 15:1-3 NASB)

These are harsh words. The utter destruction of these people. First off, none of us are in a position to understand God's rationale. God is using Saul to bring about His plan. God is removing a future problem by eliminating this group of people. We could speculate all day and it will not change the direct order from God to Saul. (Remember God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?)

Well, Saul failed.

Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD.” But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.” (1 Samuel 15:13-15 NASB) Saul, like many of us, started to make excuses for why he failed to do exactly as God had commanded. Saul would see the next king and watch as his popularity waned before he died. Yet, from this point forward, God had rejected him as king and that brings us to our scripture for today.

Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Samuel 15:34-35 NASB) Samuel dies approximately 4 years before Saul. So, Samuel did not see Saul again until his death. Notice that Samuel was sorrowful over Saul’s failure to fully obey God. There is no celebration over Saul’s failure.

16 Now 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 selected a king for Myself among his sons.” (1 Samuel 16:1 NASB) God is ready to move on with another king. God does not terminate Saul. In fact, there is an overlap of 15 years when Saul is alive and still king and the new king is anointed. Samuel knows that Saul would not allow Samuel to openly go and anoint another king so God gives specific instructions.

But Samuel said, “How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you.”

So, Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, “Do you come in peace?” He said, “In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. (1 Samuel 16:2-5 NASB)

A prophet of God has come to the town and the elders of the town are afraid (trembling) so they ask if he comes in peace. Once he assures them that he has come in peace he tells them to purify themselves to sacrifice to God. Jesse and his sons are invited to be there for the sacrifice. As is customary, Jesse presents his sons in order starting with the eldest. Samuel is looking for a kingly appearance as he looks at the sons of Jesse.

When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” Thus, Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Are these all the children?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the

sheep.” Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”

So, he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. 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 came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. (1 Samuel 16: 6-13 NASB)

So, at the age of 15 years old boy who has been tending sheep is anointed as king. As he is anointed **the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.**

When we look at those whom we believe will be the most successful, when we look at the superlatives, we are measuring success through the eyes of this world. This is not the standard God uses. We tend to look at the features we can see- their physical beauty, their charisma, or their circle of friends. However, just as Samuel was reminded, **God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**

Let’s take a few moments to sprint through just some of the least likely people God chose to use to bring about His will.

The father of faith Abraham was a liar. His grandson Jacob was a scheming conniver. Moses was a murderer and to be a leader of the great company of God’s people Moses was slow of speech (which seems to indicate he had a speech impediment). Rahab was a harlot who helped the spies of Israel escape and later is found in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Isaiah the great prophet of God had unclean lips. Jesus picked uneducated mostly fishermen to witness His ministry and to spread the good news of salvation. Paul was a great persecutor of the church and he became the apostle to the Gentiles.

Do you see the pattern? God has always picked the least likely and always succeeded in His plan. As we read in 1st Corinthians the 1st chapter, Paul tells us the rational behind God’s using those least likely.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NASB)

As we are here this morning, we need to allow God to use us for His will. Our excuses that we are not worthy will not work. God has always used the least likely to do great things.