



## Keeping up Appearances

1 Sam 16:1-13

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression" You'll probably remember that head and shoulders advert for the TV. It's founded upon a simple fact: people judge by the evidence of their eyes first and it's often that first impression that sticks.

We live in a society where appearance is important. Expensive clothes, expensive cars and the like are a "fashion statement". But if we stay on the TV theme, do you remember Mrs Hyacinth Bucket from "Keeping up Appearances". To her, how she looked and what she did belied the fact that she was of humble origins. She tried to keep her sister and husband away from the house because they were poor and common. The problems, for all her "airs and graces" the stories about her were designed to uncover how ordinary Hyacinth really was and how stupid snobbery is.

It's also true at a national level too. Many people like to take pride in the nation and get upset when hooligans or lager louts let the country down - or the football team for that matter.

That's the 21st century. But it was true millennia ago too. We heard this morning of how the nation enjoyed many years of peace under Samuel. You would have thought that was good and everyone was happy. But it wasn't, Samuel's sons were taking advantage of their elderly father and using the position he had given them to act corruptly.

The solution previously would have been to ask God to raise up a new leader but Israel wanted a king like every other nation - someone young, dynamic and strong who would give their nation pride by destroying their enemies and extending their lands. Samuel had never been that anyway - he was a religious man not a military one. A king wasn't God's way but God gave them the sort of king they wanted - to be just like the other pagan nations around them. With all the consequences that brought. He was Saul. A man head and shoulders above them all, a real leader of men, a fine warrior - just the sort of charismatic leader *they* required.

At the start of the year I give this challenge - do we seek after what God wants - or do we do what we think are good ideas. At that start of year 201 and in a climate of national spiritual decline, what are we seeking for His church? If we do it our way, we'll get a Saul solution but not God's solution. It may even work for a while but it is doomed to failure.

And we find out quickly in 1 Samuel that Saul was very weak in the wisdom and spirituality department as indeed were the people! They got the man they wanted - the one they asked for - but they didn't get one that was after God's own heart. Saul failed and failed miserably. Last year I preached from 1 Samuel 15 where Saul was supposed to destroy Amalek but he just used the occasion to fill up his pockets, fill up other people's pockets and improve his kudos. All the success went to his head, he took liberties and frankly was as daft as a brush. And like every "good" politician who gets caught; when exposed he lied and tried to wriggle his way out of it. He might have been a king, but he still was wholly responsible still to the God of Israel who put him there.

This must have been a big come-down for the ageing Samuel too. Samuel had faithfully judged Israel for years, particularly as the nation was picking itself up from one of the lowest parts of its history after the Ark of the Covenant was returned after the disgrace of losing it to the Philistines. We heard this morning that he was responsible for bringing back pride but he had to wait 20 years for that because it took that long for Israel to repent! (7:2-5).

He must have been depressed that his sons were a flop (8:1-3) and then he ends up anointing Saul who turned out to be another flop: history was repeating itself - another failure! What a disaster - but God had other plans and as we read, Samuel was sent to Jesse's house in Bethlehem.

Tonight I want to try and focus on Samuel rather than Jesse or David. The reason why is that he came across to me in this passage as a man who may have been sure of his ground in the past but was now showing the same weaknesses as the rest. What would make me think that?

◆ Because God said so!

*16 1 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you go on grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel."*

God says in effect – you're hurting about Saul but it's My problem not yours because it's Me who's rejected Him not any other way around. It doesn't get any better when God commands him to go to Bethlehem and anoint His replacement.

◆ He started to fear Saul

But Samuel said, *"How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me."*

Just a moment. This is Samuel, for many years a judge and prophet in Israel; a man who had walked close to God. He was the prophet that had only just fearlessly confronted Saul. And now he fears what Saul might do to him? Oh dear! He was Samuel the prophet; but where was his own self-esteem now? He even needed God to give him his cover story so lame he'd become.

The people had no problem with who Samuel was and his authority. Look at the reception he got at Bethlehem. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. This is quite amusing. Why would anyone want a visit from a judge? It reminded me of a visit Rhiannon and I made at my request to a couple in Tottenham. The husband had an interesting healing ministry and we wanted the opportunity to get to know then both better. But when we arrived they were stiff and formal with me and Rhiannon. Eventually the ice broke when the husband said "come on then, tell me what we have done wrong!" Tin many of the churches they had been part of in the pastor, they only got a visit from the pastor when they had done something wrong! Thankfully, with the ice broken we had a great afternoon with them.

The Bethlehemites asked, *4 Samuel did what the Lord told him to do and went to Bethlehem, where the city leaders came trembling to meet him and asked, "Is this a peaceful visit, seer?"*

Phew! What a relief – he's not come to tell them off! I wonder what they had to hide!

The question was what was wrong with Samuel. He was still the prophet, but was living his life in self doubt although but to be fair, he obeyed what he was asked by God to do.

Crises of confidence are something that get to us all however long we have been believers. We lose our way at some point and struggle with ourselves and our faith. You all know what I mean. If we're honest, we've been there. And maybe some of you are there tonight. In our heads we know who we are; the people of God. We stand on God's promises, we know them, we rehearse them but our hearts are low and telling us a different tale.

That is also reflective of the crisis of confidence of the church in this country today. It's a crisis of confidence in what God can do now. We see what God can do in scripture, we see what God has made us in Christ, we see how God is working in other parts of the world and we see what God is doing even in other parts of Britain. So why isn't He doing it here? What's the reason?

None - except that we are Samuels. We've seen the glory in the past. Many of you like me lived through more exciting times when churches were full and Christians were common. I lived through the Sixties and Seventies with fuller churches, Billy Graham and vibrant church life. But we've seen the decline and lived through it. Just as he had problems with his sons we've seen that the legacy of this generation - our generation. It's a generation that has turned it's back on God and the churches have emptied as the river of new converts has started to dry up.

And here we are, like Samuel, right in the middle of something we would prefer wasn't happening. Like Samuel, we have seen our own sons and daughters not desiring to follow our ways. We've

sought God's will in the past and we've seen good things come from it, but so often our great hopes have been Sauls. And when that happens, it affects us in other ways ourselves.

◆ He started to take the values of the world

What may help us explain Samuel's behaviour is what then happens when he is presented to Jesse's sons:

*6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." 7 But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart." 8 Then Jesse called his son Abinadab and brought him to Samuel. But Samuel said, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either." 9 Jesse then brought Shammah. "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either," Samuel said. 10 In this way Jesse brought seven of his sons to Samuel. And Samuel said to him, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen any of these."*

It's often been commented by people who have got to know me that I don't look much like a Minister. The reply they always get is: "what's a minister supposed to look like?" What does a king look like? Saul was big, muscular and a good fighter. As Samuel comes to Eliab he seems to have been looking at another Saul - big and handsome. We get these famous words The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart I was going to follow the pack and preach on this verse tonight but then I saw Samuel's behaviour and realised that God wanted us to look at Samuel rather than David.

Samuel was being just as bad as everyone else as he looked at Eliab. His values were the same as the people who looked for a big muscular leader like Saul. A king has to be dignified, commanding, strong doesn't he? No, God looked at the heart and what values the man held were more important than what he could do. What was remarkable that after Saul, that one hadn't registered with Samuel because Saul's disobedience was of the heart.

We live in a society that forces us into its mould so much so that we slip easily into its values. And it happens without us being conscious and aware it's happening. And what is the world based on - outward appearance. We are a generation of people who are self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-confident. We don't need the crutch of religion because we are prosperous and self-confident and don't need that stuff. And we've seen a whole generation of children and now our grandchildren slipping into that mire. And people who are different? They don't fit.

One of the biggest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is connecting with our generation – not to copy them or mimic their thinking, but realising that God wants to do something different and dynamic in their lives – and to do the same thing to us too. But to do that we need to listen to the voice of God and see what God wants to do – and that isn't in looking at what we want to see or the world conditions us to see – but to see what and whom God has put under our noses which isn't important now but is the real life changer. Eliab looked like the great hope – but it was little David, the baby of the family that was the one who would make the difference.

BUT

◆ Samuel obeyed.

Despite his misgivings, Samuel obeyed God, went to Bethlehem and when he got there, still listened to the voice of God. And what sort of man did he anoint? Well, it was someone who you wouldn't automatically think of as king material. He was the youngest son. He was the one that got the lousy job of looking after the sheep - the most menial task in the family. He was a handsome chap though and later in the chapter we read that he was handy with a weapon. But he played the harp and composed songs. Mmm. Not typical king stuff. But God knew his heart.

Because of Samuel's obedience, a new king was anointed and the rest the say is history. From this point we see a turn around in the history of Israel as David grows and eventually becomes king and by the time of Solomon, the kingdom had risen to its peak.

Why? It all started with Samuel, the prophet who obeyed even though he was in fear of men and lost his perspective. But to move where God wants us to go, we need to obey the voice of God.

**We need to be a people who obey the voice of God and do His will. Israel did not instantly become a better place because David was anointed. There was a long road for David to travel. He needed to discover God in both hard times. But in discovering God, he discovered His power and changed people's lives and changed the nation.**

**So at the beginning of 2009, the challenge I bring us as a church is to listen to the voice of God, to see what He's doing and to be prepared to obey Him even though it isn't quite what we've done before, or if it embraces ideas that we haven't come across before, or ways of ministering to our community that we haven't tried before, or even if it means doing things in ways we haven't done before.**

*Preached by Mark Reid  
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## 1 Sam 16:1-13

1 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you go on grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. But now get some olive oil and go to Bethlehem, to a man named Jesse, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

2 "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "If Saul hears about it, he will kill me!" The Lord answered, "Take a calf with you and say that you are there to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will tell you what to do. You will anoint as king the man I tell you to."

4 Samuel did what the Lord told him to do and went to Bethlehem, where the city leaders came trembling to meet him and asked, "Is this a peaceful visit, seer?"

5 "Yes," he answered. "I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me." He also told Jesse and his sons to purify themselves, and he invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." 7 But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."

8 Then Jesse called his son Abinadab and brought him to Samuel. But Samuel said, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either." 9 Jesse then brought Shammah. "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either," Samuel said. 10 In this way Jesse brought seven of his sons to Samuel. And Samuel said to him, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen any of these." 11 Then he asked him, "Have you any more sons?"

Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep."

"Tell him to come here," Samuel said. "We won't offer the sacrifice until he comes." 12 So Jesse sent for him. He was a handsome, healthy young man, and his eyes sparkled. The Lord said to Samuel, "This is the one — anoint him!" 13 Samuel took the olive oil and anointed David in front of his brothers. Immediately the spirit of the Lord took control of David and was with him from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.