

May 5, 2019
Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall
1 Samuel 16:1-13

Who are you most afraid of? For me, sometimes the most terrifying person is myself. I am most frightening first thing in the morning when I see myself in the mirror. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall" ... I'm certainly not the fairest of them all. Ugh. The hair – gone from being all over the place to GONE. The wrinkles. The bags under the eyes. I could go on and on. It's pretty hard to have a good day when it begins with that sight. We slog through the day feeling guilty about our shape, our hair, and worried whether our socks match our pants. We're quite sure everyone is looking at us and thinking: "*You poor, wretched person.*"

They're all judging us, right? No. Of course not. Why? Because they're not looking at us at all. They're worried about *their* hair, *their* clothes, and *their* appearance. They think we're thinking about **them**, "*You poor, wretched person.*" We're not thinking that though, are we? Of course not. And neither are they. It's really quite an hilarious, vicious circle.

When God sees us, what does He see? When other people see us, what do they see? When you see other people, what do you see? Those are some of the questions we'll think about as we begin to look at life of David. David is a fascinating person who had amazing gifts but struggled with his self-image. He treated some people well, and others terribly. He was a roller-coaster of conflicting emotions. He is very, very human, just like us.

When God sees us, what does He see?

In 1 Samuel 16:1-13, God, through Samuel the prophet, is choosing the next king of Israel. Samuel has been commanded by God to choose one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem (16:1). When Samuel meets Jesse's eldest son, Eliab – a tall, handsome man (16:7) – the prophet is sure this is the Lord's choice. But the Lord says to Samuel, "*Do not look at 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*" (16:7). Seven of Jesse's sons passed by Samuel until David, the youngest arrived.

David was chosen. God's greatest concern is not what we look like. God chose David because of his heart. David is a man after God's my own heart (Acts 13:22).

When God sees you, He sees someone with whom He wants a closer personal relationship. He is willing to forgive whatever sins are in the past. But He is not willing to leave us where we are in the present. He wants to help us become even better in the future. All of us have incredible potential to love God and, to love others. When God sees us, He sees that potential. And His desire is to help us achieve it.

When God looks at us He sees our hearts. Paul gives us some insights into what God loves – and doesn't love – to see in our hearts in Colossians 3:5-17: "*Put to death, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed,*

which is idolatry ... You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other ...

"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, foreigner, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... And be thankful.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Of course, our hearts are not perfect. God knows that. But His encouragement is that, as we pray with thanksgiving, our hearts are pleasing to God (Colossians 3:15). As we read Scripture and consciously *"let the word of God dwell in [us] richly"* we have hearts that please God (3:16a). As we learn from one another, our hearts please God (3:16b). As we worship God, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – whether at church, at work, at home, in the shower, or in the car, our hearts please God (3:16c). As we try to live each moment of every day for Jesus, our hearts please God (3:17).

Do we live like that? The truest test of what is in our heart is how we react when we're under stress. Do we react to stressful circumstances with faith in God? With a sense of peace? Thanksgiving? With David we see some of his reactions in the psalms. Sometimes he responds to stress with faith ... and sometimes he struggles.

One of the biggest stresses we face in life is change ... how do we react to change? With trust in God? With a sense of compassion? Kindness? Humility? Gentleness? Patience?

In David's case, *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power"* (1 Samuel 16:13). God was not prepared to leave David where he was – the Spirit would challenge and change him.

We have all been given this same Spirit (John 14:15-16:15). God will challenge and change us, too, if we allow Him to. He is constantly prodding us to continue praying, studying, learning, and worshipping so we keep on growing closer to Him and closer to our potential.

When other people see us, what do they see?

When other people see you, yes, they do see your physical appearance. Other people are a bit more superficial and not as gracious as God is. But I want to assure you that even other people do not really rate appearance as highly as we might think they do. I find that when I meet people, I do notice what they look like and how they are dressed. But the instant we actually meet appearance becomes less important. Other things make lasting impressions.

I remember being introduced to another pastor at a conference. He was neatly dressed. No problem there. But as soon as I reached out to shake his hand, he was looking over my shoulder for someone more important with whom to talk. His body language made it very clear he really didn't care about me at all. How did that make me feel? But what this person thought of me really wasn't important; what God thinks of me is what matters.

The best way to make a great first impression is to be genuinely with the person you're talking to. Enjoy it. Let them occupy 100% of your attention. People notice that and really appreciate it – because it happens so rarely. It makes us feel so special.

It's hard to do. Our natural tendency is to want to talk about *us*. It's difficult to ask the other person questions about themselves. What their interests are. And talk about those. Try talking more about the other person than yourself. A woman once dined with two great British statesmen, William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli, on consecutive evenings. When she was asked about her impressions she said, *"When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England. But after sitting next to Mr. Disraeli, I thought I was the cleverest woman in England."*

When people see you as someone who genuinely cares about them, what they see is your heart. They don't see your appearance. They see you as someone who genuinely likes *them*. And everyone enjoys being with someone who genuinely likes *them*.

People also enjoy people who enjoy life. How would you describe the people you like spending time with? Grumpy? Bitter? Depressed? Of course not. People enjoy people who are celebrators, not complainers. How can you laugh a little more and grump a little less?

When you see other people, what do you see?

Most of the time we don't judge people by their appearances ... most of the time. But sometimes we do. Sometimes we look at someone who may not appear well groomed or well dressed, and we act in a way that is different from how we would respond to someone dressed as we are. Subtly we can be snobs. We see someone from a different ethnic background or with an accent and we treat them differently than we would someone like us. We can crack an ethnic joke or comment on their clothing. Subtly we can be racist. Or class-ist. Or ability-ist. Or sexist.

When I was in university I worked for the Vancouver School Board during the summers. For three summers I was a "Drainsman's Helper" which meant we cleaned out leaves, twigs, gravel and garbage with a long "spoon" from catch basins on school grounds. Some students would look at my partner and I and say (loud enough so we were sure to hear), "Gross. I'd never do that." And they gave us terribly condescending looks. I could only imagine what they thought of me. I felt like shouting, "I'm not who you think I am. I'm an honours student at university. I'm actually quite intelligent – this job pays very well."

Do we do the same? Do we look at someone who is well dressed and act in a way that's different? It is a proven fact that a tall, fit, white male interview candidates will do much better than another person. But we all know a person can put on a fine appearance at an interview and really have no substance at all. Jesus blasts the "religious" people of His day, the Pharisees, for being all flamboyance and no substance: "*You hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside, but which inside are filled with dead men's bones ...*" (Matthew 23:27, see also John 7:24).

Our challenge is to see others as God does. Not to judge them by appearances. Nor their wardrobe. Nor by their ethnicity (Jesus was not a blond, blue-eyed European; he was Middle Eastern and Jewish). To see beyond the superficial. To see the heart. To see every person we meet – no matter what they look like – as precious to God, as people He loves.

In Romans, Paul writes, "*Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them ... Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other*" (12:9-10).

What does God see when He see us? He sees a person whom He loves. A person whom Jesus died to save. A person He longs to have a personal relationship with. He sees our heart. A person who is beautiful within ... yet has the potential to be even more beautiful. His invitation is that if you will love Him as your Saviour, His Spirit will come into your heart and begin to change it. To help you become all that He created you to be. To become a beautiful person, from the inside out. That's great news.

So when your emotions (or people you meet) tell you otherwise, remind yourself of who you are, in Christ. You are God's beloved child.

What do you see when you see other people? Our challenge is to see people as God sees them. To see beyond their physical appearance, to see the beauty within. More than that, to see their *potential* beauty within.

As we seek to "love our neighbour" we love the *potential* neighbour ... the neighbour that person could be through the power of God's Spirit. When you feel "turned off" by someone, remember who they are, "in Christ."

Don't judge them. Find ways, positively, to honour them as God's beloved.

God help us see clearly, to see the inner beauty of those around us. To see the glorious potential that God sees. And thus to "*not just pretend that (we) love others. Really love them.*" (Romans 12:9).

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