

“He Had Beautiful Eyes”
a sermon by Kyndall Rae Rothaus,
concerning 1 Samuel 16:1-13
for Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco,
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“He had beautiful eyes,” the Scriptures tell us about young David. He had beautiful eyes, was ruddy and handsome, and I wonder why the writer tells us that at all, given that the Lord just finished saying to Samuel, “Do not look at outward appearance. That type of seeing is for mere mortals, but I look at the heart.”

In other words, “My type of seeing is for the gods. Here. Wear my glasses. *Then* look for a king.” See, Samuel was having trouble finding what he was looking for. The Lord had sent him out to Jesse’s place with a horn full of anointing oil and a very clear mission—to find a replacement for the current king, Saul.

If you’ve ever been a nation in want of a new leader to replace the old one, then you can imagine Samuel’s urgency and his desire to get it right. There was no democratic process. It was up to Samuel as God’s spokesperson to make the correct appointment. His chance was one in eight of selecting the right man from among Jesse’s sons.

The eligible sons gathered before Samuel like a scene from “The Bachelor.” Immediately Eliab stood out from the crowd in a kingly way, and Samuel’s heart leapt in his chest and his hand moved towards his anointing oil, but God said, “Wait,” and though it must have taken years of practice, Samuel was able to hear that still small voice speaking beneath the rumble of his own eagerness to act. From the time he was a boy Samuel had listened to that voice, and this was no time to abandon the voice now—not with so much on the line.

Samuel moved past Eliab confidently and without hesitation. The next son was Abinidab—which would have made an excellent name for a king—at least, that’s what Abinidab thought as Samuel closed his eyes and looked the son over. But the Lord had not chosen Abinidab either.

On and on this went, eligible son after eligible son and not a one passed the test. Jesse almost wondered if the old prophet was quite right in the head, the way he kept closing his eyes and conversing with the silence. Samuel himself was perplexed, said to Jesse, “Is this *all* your sons?”

“Well . . .” said Jesse slowly with a frown, “there’s my youngest . . . but he’s busy with the sheep.”

Samuel insisted, “Bring him here.”

He was brought, and he was beautiful.

Maybe it was the sort of beauty you can only see if you’re looking for what is unexpected. Maybe it was the sort of beauty mortals may be blind to, the sort you *can* see though, if you’re wearing God’s glasses. Maybe it was beauty in spite of being too young and too short and too

unlikely. Maybe the beauty came from the way the heart radiated out from the eyes. Maybe it was the eyes and the way they would see possibilities that were invisible to everyone else.

What we know is that he had beautiful eyes, and God chose him. Not for his appearance, but for his heart. You may be aware that later in his life King David will do some terrible things. Like so many before and after him the power will corrupt him and he will lose his way. But this young David had not yet been tainted. He was full of heart, and you could see it in his eyes.

I wonder about the later King David, whether his eyes began to lose their luster? Whether, if you looked into his face, you would see beauty or regret?

You may remember Israel's first king, King Saul, who was known for being so very tall—they say he was a whole head taller than all the other men who were much smaller. But he was not nearly as large on the inside as he was on the outside. Example: when he was first appointed king, he tried to hide among the supplies, which maybe should have been a red flag. I don't know much about kings, but I think you want one with courage. However, in those days the people were so desperate to become a great nation they demanded a king and asked nothing about the condition of his heart. Hard to imagine, I know.

Samuel even tried to warn them, saying, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and make them horsemen to drive his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands . . . some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, some to make his implements of war. He will take your daughters. He will take, he will take, he will take." Six times in one short speech Samuel says, "He will take." He warns them that a king will be greedy, that the king will not have their best interest at heart. He concludes with this: "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

"But the people refused to listen to Samuel. They said, 'No! We are determined to have a king over us so that we also may be like other nations and our king may govern us and fight our battles.'"

There is some human stubbornness God will not resist, which is how the people ended up with King Saul. They insisted a greedy king was better than no king at all, so God sighed and said, "Have it your way," and the Israelite monarchy was born. But even God has limits, and Saul wasn't a king for long before God decided to find a new one. Interestingly, God chose David long before the succession would occur, but it seemed Saul could sense it, that God's favor had left him. Just as soon as David was secretly anointed by Samuel, King Saul found himself in spiritual torment and desperate for relief. "Let us find someone to play the lyre for you, and the music will soothe your soul," his servants suggested. Saul replied, "Yes, please," and who was called on to play the lyre, but little David?

Can you imagine how his father Jesse's heart must have stopped when he got word that the king wanted to see David? The boy had only just been anointed. "He knows!" Jesse must have thought, and so he loaded David with gifts for the king, probably in hopes of buttering him up. But King Saul knew nothing about future King David. He only knew that his spirit was in

torment and that David's spirit was in God, and when David played, the stars aligned and Saul could breathe.

One story later, 1 Samuel 17, and David shows up unexpectedly yet again, this time when the men are at war against the Philistines. You may have heard about the one named Goliath. Upon arrival, David asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Eliab overheard David and was not amused. Remember Eliab? Kingly-looking eldest brother whom Samuel passed over in favor of the runt? When Eliab approached David at the battle scene, he sounded just like an eldest sibling. I know this, because I am an eldest. He said to David, "Why have you come down? With whom have you left the sheep? I know how conceited you are; you only came down to watch the battle." To which David replied, sounding just like a younger sibling, "What have I done now? It was only a question."

You know the rest of the story. Young little David challenged Goliath and toppled the giant with a single stone from his sling. Three Bible stories in a row, and the little guy David shows up unexpectedly and unforeseen as the hero. Do you see a pattern emerging? It's like the whole world is going to ruin—what, with the people's rejection of God in favor of a king and with the king's mental and spiritual breakdown, not to mention war with the Philistines and their literal giant. Yet despite this man-made mess, God did not abandon the people. Despite Samuel's warning that God would not hear their protests against their self-selected king, God indeed sent help, and every time help came from an unexpected place in an unexpected form.

You have to wonder, are these stories really about the kings? Or about Something Higher, beyond the kings? Take any unanticipated miracle in life and name it David—the point is, God is still showing up in this world and God's got beautiful eyes.

Beautiful, not as much for how they look, but for the way they see. God can see what is invisible to you and to me. God doesn't just see the outward appearance of things, but the inner reality and the unrealized potential. Where we see only ash, God sees beauty. Where we see trash, God sees family. Where we see despair and decay, God sees a flowerbed waiting to be planted. God, what beautiful eyes!

If you could borrow God's eyes for a minute, for a day, what do you think you might see? Would it be beautiful? Would it be unexpected?

Would it have the power to change your life? Would it have the power to change your imagination—make it bigger, make it stronger?

What if you used God's eyes to see yourself? Would your heart skip a beat, would you reach for the anointing oil? Would it be unexpected to hear that you are chosen, that you are covered in love, that you are beautiful? Would you go and try to hide your height, your newfound inner largeness? Or would you boldly make music before kings, knowing that as surely as the oil of anointing dripped its way slowly down your forehead, you are still dripping with God's favor?

There is a fragrance about you that smells like God at work, and everywhere you look, God shows you at least one thing that is unpredictably beautiful.

Anointed of God, may we have the courage to see beauty in places and in people where we hadn't seen it before—whether that beauty is across the globe, across town, or in the mirror. May we release our demands on God, knowing that trying to control God only makes us blind. Instead may we be open to the vision only God can give, open to the beauty our Creator can show us. Amen.