

“Tired of Keeping Up Appearances?”

I Samuel 16:1-13

Series: The Story Chapter 11: From Shepherd to King

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It’s dangerous to judge by appearances. In an Ameriquest commercial a man comes home to prepare a romantic dinner for his wife. With tomato sauce simmering on the stove, he chops vegetables with a large knife. Suddenly his cat knocks the pan of sauce onto the floor and then falls into the mess. Just as the man picks up his tomato-splattered cat, his wife opens the door. She sees him holding a cat dripping red in one hand and a large knife in the other. The commercial ends: “Don’t judge by appearances.”

Appearances mean everything. Increasing numbers of Americans go to any length to improve their image. Last year this time The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) reported there were 11 million cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures in the United States in 2013 - a 12% overall increase. The total cost was more than 12 billion dollars. Many have multiple procedures. The Advanced Aesthetics Institute is a one-stop beauty shop where you can select from a menu of services. Regret that tattoo from your Jamaica fling? Let them rub it out. Worried about wrinkles? Come in for Botox Tuesdays – only \$10 a shot. Call it the Burger King of Beauty where you get to “Have it Your Way.” Yet the president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons warns: “It gives people the false perception that they can be anybody they want to be.”¹

Why do we want to be someone else? There are multiple reasons:

- To attract someone of the opposite sex.
- To impress and compete with our peers.
- To fight the natural process of aging.
- To make us feel good about ourselves.

These days it’s easy to change the outside. Dove soap recently put out a commercial called “Evolution.” A woman wearing no makeup sits down in a chair. Through time-lapse photography we see make-up artists, hair stylists and computer designers transform her into a billboard model for beauty products. At the end, these words silently appear on the screen: “No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted.”

The real distortion is the belief that changing the outside will change the inside. We are hungry for attention, attraction, affirmation and affection. In short, we are hungry for love. And being beautiful on the outside, we are told, is the best way to feel loved and valuable on the inside. But it’s a lie. When Academy Award winning actress Halle Barry was named one of People magazine’s 50 Most Beautiful People she said this about physical beauty:

¹ Michael Hastings, “Makeovers: Can I Get a Little Rhinoplasty With That?” Newsweek (12-22-03).

Beauty? Let me tell you something, being thought of as "a beautiful woman" has spared me nothing in life, no heartache, no trouble. Love has been difficult. Beauty is essentially meaningless, and it is always transitory. I can't believe what people do to themselves [to make themselves look beautiful], the excess, and then they end up distorted. Worse, they still have that hole in their soul that led them to change themselves to begin with.²

A hole in the soul. Beneath the outer shell of beauty, there is a great emptiness, like a golden Oscar statue that's hollow inside. Do you see the vicious cycle? A lack of love and worth within drives us to make the outside looking more appealing. But that does not fill the void with the love or self worth we seek. We still feel empty. Surface beauty does not guarantee love, worth or happiness. We need to stop keeping up appearances and start uncovering what's below the surface.

Samuel feels depressed. Last week in the Story we watched him anoint and crown Saul to be the first king of Israel. Saul is a handsome figure – a head taller than other Israelites. He immediately proves to be a capable leader. When the Philistines attack a city, Saul rallies the entire nation to come to their rescue and drive out the enemy (I Samuel 11). At last old, weary Samuel can turn the burden of leadership over to Saul. But then the darker side of Saul's empty soul begins to show through his heroic image. He proves to be stubborn, impatient, deceptive, given to fits of rage and melancholy, easily swayed by his soldiers and disobedient to the Lord. What starts out so promising turns sour. Samuel and Saul eventually part ways.

Once more Samuel is called to lead Israel through a crisis. He still loves Saul and grieves for him. But the future of the nation will now rest in someone else's hands.

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on our way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (I Samuel 16:1).

It's a dangerous job to select a new king while the current one is still alive and clutching the throne. "How can I go?" Samuel asks the Lord, "Saul will hear about it and kill me" (v. 2). The Lord tells him to go to Bethlehem, hold a worship service and invite Jesse's family to attend. "You are to anoint for me the one I indicate," says the Lord (v. 3). When Samuel arrives in Bethlehem he says to the town elders, "Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me" (v. 5). Now, each member of the community parades past the old prophet. Finally, the family of Jesse approaches.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." 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

² "Beauty's Beast," www.NewYorkPost.com (accessed 8-2-04).

things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (I Samuel 16: 6-7).

The next oldest, Abinadab is also passed over by the Lord as is Shammah. In fact, seven sons walk by and the Lord turns them all down. Samuel is confused. Jesse has run out of sons. The beauty pageant parade is over and no one is crowned. “Are these all the sons you have?” Samuel asks their father. “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answers. “But he is tending the sheep.” They think so little of the boy he doesn’t even rate an invitation to the sacrifice. “Send for him,” Samuel cries, “we will not sit down (to worship and eat) until he arrives” (v. 11).

Now the whole town waits while they search for the boy. Finally, in the same town square where Boaz proposed to Ruth, there appears a dirty, disheveled shepherd boy. His cheeks are flush from running in from the pasture. All eyes are on him.

Then, the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; he is the one.” 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 upon David in power (v. 12-13).

God doesn’t look at the outside. He looks into the heart. He does not choose the next king because of his size, strength, age, wisdom, education, battle experience or resume. He sees a beauty underneath all the appearances we put up. What does that mean for us?

The Lord doesn’t judge by appearances. Neither should we. When we look at the outsides of others, we are often tempted to compete with them. We subtly compare ourselves to those around us. We evaluate a hundred features of their appearance and personality: height, weight, intelligence, strength, achievements, age and so on. Then we determine if we are superior or inferior to them.

Saul and his army are terrorized by a nine-foot giant Philistine named Goliath. To all appearances he is a formidable foe. Every Israelite soldier is shaking in his sandals. Yet when the boy David shows up in camp with a bag lunch for his brothers he displays an entirely different attitude.

David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” But David said to Saul, “The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.” (I Samuel 17:32-33, 37)

Malcolm Gladwell did a TED talk about this story. His point is our giants are not as scary as they seem. Through a careful study of the story, Gladwell says perhaps Goliath is a giant because he suffers from a disease called acromegaly. It not only makes him tall but also gives him double vision, profound near-sightedness and some physical weakness. Goliath is dangerous in hand-to-hand battle but he can’t see or deal with stones hurled at

ninety miles an hour from a distance. Saul and his brave soldiers are defeated by appearances. David sees Goliath's weakness and, with the power of God, topples him.

Our minds magnify people and problems into giants. It doesn't just happen on the battlefield. Conflict and competition ruin relationships and cause us to feel dissatisfied with ourselves. Jill Briscoe speaks at Christian women's conferences. She recalls,

One day I had a speaking engagement in Florida and I shared a table with three elegant young women. I felt fat, forty, and somewhat futile. Suddenly and unexpectedly God inquired of me, "Why do you think everyone is so tense?" "Competition," I replied with sudden understanding. I distinctly heard his next words: "Jill, you don't need to compete." For the first time I thanked God for my ordinary looks. I could be a big sister to women, a friendly mother, an aunt. I could relax, knowing I would never threaten anyone. God had made me just right for my ministry of teaching women, and that was all that mattered.³

We don't need to fear others. We don't need to compete. God sees a beauty in us that is more than skin deep.

The Lord Sees into My Heart. Now that sounds comforting until I stop and think about what's in my heart. Jesus said,

What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' (Mark 7:20-23).

I can't fool God. He sees right past the carefully fashioned outer image I show to the world. He knows all the thoughts and desires which race and rage within. That's a frightening thought. And yet it's healing as well. For when I stop trying to cover up all my sins and defects with a good looking exterior, when I stop denying my problems and get honest about them, when I ask God to help me clean out my heart, then a new life can begin. I no longer need to please others in order to feel good about myself. God's Spirit comes upon me and lives in me just as it did in David. And that leads to the third truth.

The Lord Sees What My Heart Can Become in His Hands. What did the Lord see in David's heart that was not in his brothers or in Saul: a willingness to surrender his heart to the Lord. David places his life in God's hands. Listen to David's prayers:

- My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Psalm 42:2
- Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

³ Jill Briscoe, The Greatest Lesson I've Ever Learned. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart."

- May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

David knows he cannot fill the emptiness in his heart by pleasing people. Only God can fill him with love and make him whole. And in God's hands, that little disheveled shepherd boy becomes the greatest king of Israel and the ancestor of Jesus, the Savior and King of the world.

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the crowd cries out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:9) "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" (Mark 11:10) They assume Jesus will be a king like David. He will wage war, conquer lands, kill their foes and purge evil. And they are right – Jesus does come to rule and reign as our King. They are right when they shout, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" They are right when they cry Hosanna because Hosanna means "save us." But they are also wrong and so are we.

They are wrong about the location of the battlefield. It's not on the outside but on the inside. The fight is not in the valleys around Jerusalem but in the valley of the shadow of death that lies inside my soul. The war is not against legions of soldiers but against the dark forces whose name is Legion. The enemy is not those other people over there, but the sin in here. And the evil can never be purged from our land until Someone comes and purges it from our hearts. That's why David prays "Create in me a pure heart, O God." David knows where the real war is won or lost – in the hollows of my heart.

That's what Jesus, our King, comes to do. Hosanna: He comes to save us...from us. That's where the whole STORY is leading. The battle is fought on a dark hill called Golgotha and in every human heart. It does not matter what you look like, where you've been, or what you've done. Jesus looks into your heart. He longs to clean out whatever sin is buried there and fill you with a love that never lets go.

The only question that stands before you is: who is your King? Will you follow the kingdom of outward appearances? Will you follow the kingdom of shallow fads and temporary trends? Will you follow the kingdom of ego and pride? Will you follow the kingdom of lust and excess? Will you follow the kingdom of envy and greed? Will you follow the kingdom of injustice, racism and prejudice?

Or will you surrender and follow King Jesus?

Will you place your heart in His hands?

At the end of your days – will your heart look like His heart?