UBF Sunday Message 10/18/2020

Not Height But Heart

1 Samuel 16:1-23

Key verse 7

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 things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

One church wanted to recruit a missionary for a remote place. It was a cold winter. The church announced that there would be an exam at 3am. Many candidates arrived at the church at 3am. Then the church announced that they changed the time from 3am to 8am, saying that they had to wait until 8am. They also announced the exam question. The question was “What is 2 x 2 =?” Why do you think the church executed the exam in such a weird way? The reason is that the church wanted to see how the candidates behaved in this situation, whether they complained or got angry or became sarcastic about the foolish question or remained patient. In short, the church wanted to test their hearts, their inner character. They wanted to choose the person with the best inner character as a missionary. To choose a missionary there are many qualifications. How about choosing a leader, a king? There are many qualifications for being a leader or king. But the number one qualification among all is heart, inner character, that is, humility, because God cannot use a proud person no matter how smart or competent or able they are.

1 Samuel has 31 chapters. Today we will study chapter 16 which is the exact middle of 1 Samuel. Chapter 16 is pivotal in that it signals the ending of Saul’s reign and the beginning of David’s reign. 1 Samuel 1-15 talks about the rise of Samuel and Saul. 1 Samuel 16-31 talks about the fall of Saul and the rise of David. Chapter 16’s first half (1-13) describes David’s anointing as ruler of Israel to replace Saul and his receiving of the Spirit of the LORD. The chapter’s second half (14-23) begins with Saul’s loss of the Spirit and David’s arrival in the king’s court, indicating the transfer of the divine blessing and empowerment from Saul to David. Thus, chapter 16 serves as the historical and theological crux of 1 Samuel.

In today’s passage, Samuel visited Jesse’s household to anoint the next king of Israel. Samuel looked at the height, but God looked at the heart. The LORD told Samuel that the criteria for kingship is heart, not height: inner character not outer appearance. The king is God’s servant. Therefore, the king must obey God in his service. Obedience comes from humility. The LORD anointed David as king because of his humility and stayed with him to the end. But the LORD rejected Saul as king because of his pride and departed from him. The secret of David’s humility is his repentance. His repentance led him reposition himself from pride to humility. In this passage, we will think about differences between David and Saul and the importance of repentance.

1. The LORD anointed David (1-13)

In this part, we see David’s first half of life. David was anointed by Samuel to be a king over Israel because Saul rejected God. In the previous chapter Saul did not fully obey God in killing the Amalekites. Saul had repeatedly disobeyed God by rejecting His Word. So, the LORD rejected him as king. Samuel mourned for Saul, because he loved him. But he mourned too long. So, the LORD said to Samuel in verse 1, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.’” The LORD gave Samuel a new mission to anoint a new king.

But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me” (2). In order to go to Bethlehem, Samuel who was in Ramah had to go through the land of Gibeah where king Saul stayed. The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate” (3) Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, Samuel told the elders and Jesse’s family that they had to consecrate themselves and come to the sacrifice with him.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab, the oldest, and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.” (6) Samuel was impressed with Eliab’s outward appearance. 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 things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (7) People look at the height, but the LORD looks at the heart. There are many qualifications for being a leader or a king, such as ability, competence, achievement, degrees, etc. But the number one qualification is the condition of heart, inner character, that is, humility. The heart is the core, the inner essence of who we are. People tend to judge a person’s worth by looking at the outward appearance. But God judges a person’s worth by looking at the heart, because God values humility as the most important character. God cannot use the proud but the humble.

All the sons of Jesse, except the youngest, were not chosen. The youngest, David, was tending his father’s sheep. He was sent for and brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said to Samuel, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one. 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 powerfully upon David (12b-13a).

Here we find some similarities between Saul and David. When Samuel met Saul, Saul was looking for his father’s donkey. When Samuel met David, David was tending his father’s sheep. When Samuel wanted to anoint Saul, Saul was not found; he was behind the baggage. When Samuel wanted to anoint David, David was not found, either; he was with the sheep. Just as the Spirit of the LORD came upon Saul, the Spirit of the LORD came upon David. They did great things for God when the Spirit of the LORD came upon them. Just as Saul was humble in the beginning, David was also humble. But they were also both sinners. Just as Saul committed the sin of pride at the peak of his reign, David committed the sins of adultery and murder at the peak of his reign.

How about the differences? What are the differences? Humanly speaking, Saul seemed to be less sinful than David, because Saul had a pride issue while David committed adultery and murder. David’s sin seems to be more terrible than that of Saul. But the Spirit of the LORD remained in David to the end. On the other hand, the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul. Why? I think that the reason is the heart’s condition. They were both humble in the beginning. But as Saul gained more power and fame as a king, he became proud. Pride is to put one’s own idea above God’s idea, that is, the Word of God. As we learned from chapter 15 through Msn. Joseph Han last week, Saul was told by Samuel to destroy all the Amalekites, including King Agag and the good animals. However, Saul thought that it would be better to spare the good animals and to offer them to God. So he did not kill the animals nor King Agag. He did not fully obey the LORD. Saul lightly treated the Word of God. As a result, he put his own idea above God’s Word. In the end, he rejected the Word of God. Samuel said to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:26, “But Samuel said to him, ‘I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD rejected you as king over Israel.’” Although Saul humbly began his kingship, he stopped following God in the middle when he became powerful and popular. So, Saul lost his first love to God.

But David was different. When all the success and fame started coming David’s way, his number one desire was still to love and please the LORD. In the midst of being king over a nation, living in a palace, and having people idolizing him for all his great feats, King David wrote in Psalm 27:4,

“One thing I ask from the Lord,  
    this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
    all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord  
    and to seek him in his temple.”

David did not lose his first love. He loved God first from beginning to end. We can see his love for God in the Psalms. David wrote a lot of psalms for God, repenting and confessing his love for Him while Saul wrote none. How could not David lose his first love?

Here comes the biggest difference between Saul and David, that is, repentance. When Saul committed the sin of pride in chapter 15, he did not really repent of his sin. Rather, he thought about his honor in front of the people. He said to Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:30a, “Saul replied, ‘I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel.’” Saul did not truly repent of his sin before God. That is why the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul. But David was different. Although he committed the terrible sins of adultery and murder, David repented of his sin with tears. David said in Psalm 51:1-2, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” David always turned back to God even in his terrible sin, restoring his first love to God through his repentance while Saul would not. David reminds us of Revelation 2:4-5 (NIV 1984), which says, “But I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.” The LORD removed Saul’s kingship because he did not repent. But the LORD kept David’s kingship to the end because he repented. Repentance was the way of David’s life.

1. The LORD departed from Saul (14-23)

In this part, we see Saul’s second half of life. Saul began his first half of life in humility. But as he gained more power and fame, he lost his first love for God. He lost humility. He became proud. He lightly treated the Word of God Samuel gave him. He put his own idea above the Word of God. In the end, he rejected the Word of God. As a result, God rejected him as king. The Spirit of the LORD departed from him. Verse 14 reads, “Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.” His second half of life was miserable. He was tormented by an evil spirit and was constantly distressed and troubled. The text does not tell us what kind of mental torment Saul had. All we know is that he was tormented by an evil spirit. Here the Spirit *of* the LORD is different from the spirit *from* the LORD. The Spirit *of* the LORD is the Spirit that the LORD is. However, the spirit *from* the LORD is the spirit that the LORD is not, rather it is the spirit whom the LORD controls. This indicates that the evil spirits are subject to God’s control and operate only within divinely determined boundaries. It seems that God allowed the evil spirit to torment Saul as punishment because Saul rejected God. Rejecting God has a horrible consequence.

Saul’s mental and spiritual trouble was so obvious that his attendants were able to recognize it. So they said in verse 15-16, “See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the lyre. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better.” So one of the servants introduced David, and David entered Saul’s service. Once God anoints someone, He opens a door; He provides an opportunity to serve God with his anointing. David entered Saul’s service and learned about life in the king’s court to prepare for his future kingship.

David became a music therapist as well as an armor-bearer for Saul. Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him. We know that good music is good to human body and soul. So, people listen to music. The study on “effect of music on Neurotransmitters, hormone and immune system” in 2014 shows that music decreases stress by lowering heart rate, blood pressure, stress hormone called cortisol. Music, especially 528 Hz frequency sound waves, reduces brain cell death as well as inflammation by lowering inflammatory marker. Music itself has such a therapeutic effect on human body. So when David, the anointed person, played lyre, it must have had double effects: mentally and spiritually. The music sound waves that were produced by David’s lyre not only soothed Saul’s mind but also dispelled an evil spirit. David helped Saul with his music. Saul loved David.

In conclusion, God rejected Saul because of his pride and departed from him because of his lack of repentance. On the other hand, God accepted David because of his humility and remained in him to the end because of his repentance. James 4:6 (in NIV 1984 version) says, “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” God opposes the proud because pride goes against God’s nature. There is no place that the proud can stand in God’s presence. On the other hand, God gives grace—empowerment—to the humble because humility goes with God’s nature. David and Saul were both proud in nature. But Saul did not repent while David did. Repentance allows us to reposition ourselves from pride to humility. So, the secret of successful life is repentance. Repentance should be the way of life. Saul’s second half of life was very miserable because he did not repent. He was tormented by an evil spirit and lived in great pain. But David remained humble to the end because he continually repented of sins whenever he committed sin against God.

Who do you relate to more? David or Saul? I can relate to Saul more, because I am proud, and I am living in the second half of my life. When I look at Saul’s life, I see myself in Saul, because I am proud. When I see his second half of life, I am afraid of living in pride like Saul, because I do not want to be tormented by an evil spirit. What I learned is that I would like to repent of my pride right away so that I may go back to God, restoring my fist love and living in humility. There have been so many incidents that I spoke words and acted out of my own pride. In the past during the time of sharing testimony either during retreat or Friday meeting, many times I shared how great I was out of my own pride: I spoke words of self-boasting. During those times, God helped me to repent of my sin of self-boasting and led me be in a humble position. Without God’s mercy and grace, I cannot be where I am. By God’s grace, I am where I am now. I pray that I may learn to repent so that God’s Spirit may not depart from me.

This coming week, I challenge you to ask yourselves, “Who do I relate to more? David or Saul? Do I truly repent of my sin? Or not? Do I habitually repent? I pray that God may help us to be more like David so that the Spirit of the LORD may not depart from us but remain us to the end.