

1 Samuel 16:1-23 | “Looks Can Be Deceiving”  
*Preached on February 13, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 16 this morning.

It's great to be back in the Word, as we continue studying through the book of 1 Samuel. *[pause]*

They say that looks can be deceiving. *[pause]*

There's a weird-looking fish called, “the deep sea Anglerfish.”

And this fish has a piece of its body that hangs above its head like a fishing pole.

This built-in rod is actually luminous and what it does is it lures in unsuspecting prey and then snatches them up.

This is because in the deep sea darkness, the light makes it look like just a shiny light, but this shiny light ends up being a predator on the search for its next meal.

And so when you think about the anglerfish, the anglerfish is an example of how looks can be deceiving.<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

Now that's a situation where something looked good, but was not so good.

But there's also times where something looks not so good, and ends up being good. *[pause]*

I just found this out, but apparently, all over the world, African giant millipedes are kept as pets.

They look terrifying, but they say that they are surprisingly very docile and generally friendly.<sup>2</sup>

Truly, as the anglerfish and the African giant millipede demonstrate to us: looks can be deceiving. *[pause]*

But looks aren't only deceiving when it comes to animals and other creatures.

Looks can be deceiving when it comes to situations and people, too.

And the passage that we have in front of us today reminds us that often looks can be deceiving when it comes to situations and people that God uses.

Not everything is as it appears. *[pause]*

**LET'S READ THE STORY to see this reality come out. *[pause]***

In this story, we find the anointing of David, and the beginning of his service in Saul's court.

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<sup>1</sup> “Anglerfish: National Geographic.” <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/facts/anglerfish>.

<sup>2</sup> “8 Seemingly Terrifying Animals That Are Actually Friendly.” Business Insider Australia, 21 Mar. 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/scary-animals-that-are-friendly-2019-3>.

Samuel is still grieving over what happened with Saul, but God tells him that He has a mission for him: “an anointing mission”.

This mission is because the Lord “provided for himself” a king.

And this anointed king is not going to be a king that the people demand, but it’s a king of God’s special choosing and initiative. *[pauseeee]*

So there’s a mission for Samuel, but Samuel is slightly hesitant at first.

He’s scared, for he knows that if Saul hears about him anointing someone else, he will be killed.

So God tells him to take a heifer and say that he’s doing a sacrifice.

Through this plan, Samuel would go and actually do the sacrifice, *and* the anointing would be hidden from Saul, who would do evil, if he found out about it. *[pause]*

So he goes to Bethlehem, the elders of the town are kinda nervous as to why the prophet of God would come to their town, and he tells them about the sacrifice.

Then Jesse and his sons are invited to the sacrifice, and each son passes before Samuel. *[pause]*

Samuel thinks that the oldest son is the sure choice, but God makes it clear that He looks not on appearance, but on the heart.

Each son goes by, but the answer is consistently, “No.”

There’s no other sons in the room, and that’s when Samuel asks if there’s any more sons, and the youngest is mentioned, who is out keeping the sheep.

David is sent for, arrives, God makes it clear that he’s the one, and Samuel anoints him.

All of a sudden, the Spirit of God rushes upon him, yet notice the contrast in the following verse...the Spirit of God had departed from Saul.

God’s anointing, Spirit, and blessing had departed from Saul and was now on David. *[pauseeee]*

After this, another very interesting detail is given: Saul has a harmful spirit from the Lord tormenting him.

Other translations say an “evil spirit” because the word can be translated as either “evil” or “harmful” spirit. *[pause]*

Now we don’t need to get into a whole digression about this, but know that it could mean that this is a demonic being used by God or an angel of judgment sent by God.

Either way, we know that God is always righteous, so even if it is a demonic being, God is simply using it for his righteous and good purposes.

He did the same sort of thing when he used wicked nations like Babylon to bring judgment upon Israel for their rebellion.

Saul had rejected God, and had become an enemy of God, and so this tormenting was an act of judgment from God. *[pause]*

This then leads Saul's servants to suggest a musician to help refresh Saul and make him well.

One of his servants recommends David, and David is brought into Saul's court to be his personal musician.

David enters the service of Saul, Saul loves him, and even makes him his armor-bearer.

And we are told that whenever this harmful spirit would come upon Saul, that David's playing would cause Saul to be refreshed. *[pause]*

*That's the summary of this chapter, but now that we have gone through the story, I want to bring out a couple important truths that we can apply to our lives...First...*

### **I. What looks like a normal situation can be God at work behind-the-scenes.**

For Israel, they thought that everything was normal in their nation.

In their minds, Saul was their king and all their immediate future held was Saul.

They didn't think anything of importance was happening at this point in their history.

And they just went about their normal day, not even aware of the workings of God. *[pause]*

Saul and his servants thought that inviting David to be Saul's musician was just another person added to the court.

But God, whose work is often hidden to human perception, was truly at work.

Behind-the-scenes God was working to anoint and prepare David, the better king than Saul. *[pause]*

Just as God had providentially worked in the anointing of Saul,<sup>3</sup> so now He was providentially working in the anointing of David.

And thankfully, this time it's a much better king than what the people wanted! *[pauseeee]*

Many times we don't think about this: that God is continually working, even when the day seems so ordinary. *[pauseeee]*

One day, back in late 2010, I woke up, got ready, and went to church.

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<sup>3</sup> See 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16.

In my mind, it was just another Sunday.

I went to Sunday School as normal, and started walking towards the sanctuary to get ready for the morning service to start.

But all of a sudden, I looked up, saw a young college-aged girl and my life was never the same.  
[pause]

If you didn't pick up on it, that was the first day that I ever saw Kate, who would of course become my wife.

It seemed like just another normal Sunday at church for me, and it seemed like a normal first day at a church for her, but God was at work bringing our paths to cross.

That's how God often works: He works behind-the-scenes in seemingly normal situations.  
[pauseeeee]

Do you ever consider this?

Do you ever think about what God may be doing on your ordinary days and in your ordinary situations?

Maybe that ordinary conversation about Christ with a co-worker is what God is using to start a revival.

Maybe that normal Sunday at church is God working to stir someone to go and bring the Gospel to an unreached people group. [pause]

Even if we can't *perceive* what He is doing, we can *praise* who He is - He is the Lord, who is continually at work. [pauseeeee]

Not only is God working behind-the-scenes on seemingly normal days, but he is working behind-the-scenes through seemingly normal details. [pause]

God determined to bring David close to Saul, and God brought him so close to Saul that he became Saul's armor bearer and musician.

Through this closeness, Saul was able to get to know David enough so that he is given a chance to fight Goliath later on.

And through this closeness, David was able to be more prepared for his future kingship, as he was able to make some relationships in the government and learn how the court was run.  
[pauseeee]

But how did David get to be so close to Saul? Through seemingly everyday details. [pauseeee]

Saul is tormented by a harmful spirit, and it “just so happens” that one of Saul’s servants is so familiar with David that he recommends him.

It’s through that recommendation that David becomes the musician for Saul. *[pauseeee]*

You might be saying, “OK, that’s neat, but what should I do with this information?”

Well think about it: what are we supposed to do with the knowledge that God is working in the everyday details of life?

Do we just hear it and say, “That’s interesting,” and move on with our lives?

Do we just sit back because God will do what He wants anyway?

Are we supposed to try to decipher every little last detail, wondering, “What do I do? What if God is doing something now in this detail. What about this detail?”

No, like Samuel and David, even though God was at work in the details, this didn’t cause them to become idle.

It didn’t cause them to become stuck in perpetual curiosity, but they simply served God faithfully wherever God had them. *[pause]*

Samuel simply followed God’s directions, and left the details and results up to God.

David simply served God faithfully, whether he was a shepherd in the family field, or whether he was called to serve as a musician in the court.

He didn’t push his way into the kingship when he knew he was anointed, nor did he vie for more when he was a royal musician.

He simply served God wherever God had him.

With the sheep? He’s going to just serve God to the best of his ability.

Playing music for a king? David will do it.

Carrying the armor for the king? David is up to the task.

Instead of getting caught up in the details, instead of becoming idle - David was faithful.

And this is a challenge for each of us. *[pause]*

Knowing that God is sovereign and providentially working in the details shouldn’t make us idle people...

...It should make us faithful people, who are confident that God is at work in the details, and though we often can't see what He is doing, we know that being faithful to Him is right where we belong. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that God frequently surprises us in the ways that He works.

Here was David, the anointed king, and here was Saul, the reigning king, and Saul unsuspectingly chooses his successor to be close by his side!

Saul thought that he was just getting a good musician, but little did he know, he was bringing his replacement into the very inner workings of the kingdom. *[pause]*

Saul asked for a man to be provided, and God certainly provided in a surprising way!

That's God, isn't it? Often working in unexpected ways to do His will. *[pauseeee]*

Don't ever count God out, even in situations that seem like they would be the opposite of how God would work.

Who knows what God will do in any type of situation?

The God, who surprisingly used the death of His Son to give life to sinners, is the same God who reigns today.

He turns what looks like shame into victory, He turns what looks bleak into the breaking of the dawn. *[pauseeee]*

God may be at work in that diagnosis, He may be doing great things through that interaction with your child or your co-worker...

...He may be doing something in the seemingly mundane, something in the seemingly tiny detail, and something in the seemingly unimpressive moments of life. *[pauseeee]*

So what should be our response to this truth? Encouragement, hope, and worship! *[pauseeee]*

Some people get caught up in a never-ending inquiry and disconcertment concerning God's sovereignty and providence.

And there's a place for questions and thinking through those things, but at some point, we need to rest and be encouraged that our God is in control.

We need to be OK with the fact that we may not fully understand it, but we can rejoice in our complex God, whose ways are higher than our own.<sup>4</sup>

We can be encouraged and we can have great hope in our Sovereign Lord. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>4</sup> An allusion to Isaiah 55:9.

Just think about the amazingness of God's control.

Samuel is sent on a mission, and he knew his only confidence could be in the sovereign control of his God.

He's led step-by-step to do exactly as God intended, and he knows that the best place to be is to let God lead, and not to go outside of what God wants.

So he goes to Bethlehem as commanded, he has the sons of Jesse each pass before him, and even if he thinks that the eldest son is the one, he let's God choose.

He was simply faithful and obedient, depending on God's sovereign working. *[pause]*

This is encouraging to us because it reminds us that we just need to be faithful, and to trust and know that He is God, who is in control of all things. *[pauseeee]*

So often we like to take control, don't we?

But God says, "Just be faithful to what I told you, and I'll handle the rest."

And we need to actually trust Him that He will take care of it. *[pauseeee]*

You know what? I'm thankful that I don't have to control everything.

I'm thankful that it doesn't all rest on my shoulders.

I'm thankful that it's not dependent on me alone.

If Samuel chose the next king, it would have been "Saul 2.0" also known as Eliab, but because Samuel was faithful and left it in God's hands, Israel got David. *[pauseeee]*

God's providence causes us to be encouraged, but also to hope.

Why? Because God is at work even in the darkest of times.

Remember verse 1?

Samuel was still grieving over Saul probably because all he can think about is the failure of Saul and the bleak-looking future of Israel.

But even in the bleakness of failure, God was at work preparing Israel for the brightness of their future.

The redemptive purposes of God move on, even when all seems hopeless. *[pauseeeee]*

This is the hope-giving power of God's providence: even when things seem dark, God is at work!

And sometimes we need God to snap us out of our hopelessness and despair, like He did with Samuel.

Sometimes we need to hear God's Word say to us, "How long will you grieve over this, since I am still in control?"

"How long will you grieve, since I have promised great things to you?" *[pause]*

There's certainly an acceptable process of grief, but our grief cannot remain indefinitely as hopeless grief.

Our grief can and should find relief in the promises of God. *[pause]*

What does Paul say about grief? He says, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope."

And then he bases this on the sure-fire promise of God that Christ will come again and the dead in Christ will rise.<sup>5</sup> *[pause]*

Look at many of the Psalms - there is anguish, grief, and struggle - but where do they usually end up? Resting in the power, presence, and promises of God!

That's the power of hope in the Lord! *[pause]*

Samuel didn't need to keep grieving over Saul because God had someone better in store for Israel.

When we rest in God's providence and promises, we can look to the future with great and confident hope because we know He will do what He said He would do. *[pauseeeee]*

God often uses situations that look normal to us to providentially accomplish His purposes. *[pause]*

*There's something else that comes forth out of this passage, and it's this...*

## **II. What looks like someone God won't use can be someone who God uses mightily.**

Looks can be deceiving when it comes to situations, but they can also be deceiving when it comes to people.

In this story, we find David, who was the least likely in his family, chosen to be the next king. *[pause]*

We see this when Samuel goes to Bethlehem and the sons of Jesse are there.

As Samuel looks upon the firstborn, Eliab, he thinks that he is surely the Lord's anointed.

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<sup>5</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.



But did you notice what God says? “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature.” *[pause]*

You see, Samuel was looking and thinking that God would anoint the one who *looked* most like the next king.

Typically the eldest son would be the most qualified, and apparently Eliab was tall and looked like “king material”.

Basically, he looked like another Saul, who was also tall.<sup>6</sup>

But God reminds Samuel that He doesn’t see as man sees. *[pause]*

We often look at the outward appearance of people and judge them based on that, but God looks on the heart.

So Samuel is pushed to no longer be concerned with appearances, but with what God cares about. *[pauseeee]*

We look at external things - how people look and if their appearance matches what we think they are qualified to do.

Instead, to the best of our ability, we should care about what God cares about. *[pauseeee]*

If you think about it, this is why the qualifications for elders are so focused on character, and not appearance.<sup>7</sup>

We don’t consider pastors and elders based on their appearance and if they “look the part”.

We consider elders if they meet the qualifications given by God, which are focused mainly on character. *[pauseeee]*

We regularly “look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

As Psalm 147 says, “His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”<sup>8</sup> *[pauseeee]*

Don’t despise someone who doesn’t “look the part,” for that may be the very person that God will use!

Here was the youngest son in the family, David, who in that culture was seen as the lowest in ranking - and he’s chosen.

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<sup>6</sup> See 1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 147:10-11.

He wasn't even there originally, but he was out keeping the sheep. *[pauseeee]*

God often providentially chooses the least likely in the world to accomplish His purposes.  
*[pauseeee]*

When you look around you at church, do you ever judge people based on whether they look like they have it together?

Do you ever judge people based on whether they look like a “church-goer” or not? Whether they look like a godly person or not?

The very person who appears the least like a church-goer in this room right now could be the very one that God uses the most mightily.

The very person who appears like they don't have it together right now could be someone who God uses for great things. *[pause]*

Even Paul brings this out in 1 Corinthians 1...

He says, “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;”<sup>9</sup> *[pause]*

According to the world, many of us are not wise, powerful, or high up in society, yet God chose us and uses us. *[pauseeeee]*

We live in a culture that is all about appearances.

Image is everything in our culture.

This is seen especially on social media platforms like Instagram or magazines that highlight celebrities.

Often the most popular people are the ones who appear to have it all together.

They are the ones with the most picturesque life: with the best clothes, the best house, the best food, and the best physique.

And we can fall prey to valuing appearance above all, as we look at these people, and think, “Look at them, I want that.”

But like God said to Samuel, so he says to us, “Do not look on their appearance.”

Care about what God cares about!

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26-27.

Don't be deceived by the flashy and the good looking, but value what God values, and this value should be seen in how we view people, and what we think is most important. *[pauseeee]*

Has not God chosen the poor, the foolish, the ones who don't seem to have it together, the ones who don't have picturesque lives?

Has not He chosen those who the world rejects as not impressive to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?<sup>10</sup>

Then why would we value the opposite of what God values? *[pauseeee]*

God chose someone, who looked like they wouldn't be used by God, to use mightily for His purposes, and that was David.

But he didn't just choose David, and leave him on his own, for he providentially worked in his life and empowered him for service. *[pause]*

The Spirit of God was given to David as it rushed upon him, equipping him for service.

And God providentially worked so that David was close to Saul. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't it great that God empowers us with His Spirit?

We need His Spirit to do what He calls us to do in this world.

And He is working in our lives to get us to the very places that He wants to use us. *[pause]*

It was because of this empowerment and providence that David was in the spot where he could learn about the kingship, as well as bless others.

He played music for Saul, helping him when he was tormented by the harmful spirit. *[pause]*

That's what God wants to do through our lives: make an impact on the world by blessing others.

And this is only possible because He empowers us by His Spirit and works in situations to put us where He wants us. *[pauseeee]*

Praise be to God that He even uses people like us...

People undeserving, unimpressive, and unqualified before he qualifies us and equips us for His purposes.

He uses the least likely so that no one would boast, but so that He would receive all the glory, for the great things that He has done.<sup>11</sup> *[pauseeee]*

*This story reminds us that....*

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<sup>10</sup> These two sentences were used and adapted from the way that James talks in James 2:5.

<sup>11</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:28-29.

## **God providentially works great things in sometimes surprising ways!**

God loves to flip the script, He loves to astonish, astound, and amaze.

*This is because He gets the glory for doing what no one else could do.*

He destroys the wisdom of the wise, and thwarts the discernment of the discerning.<sup>12</sup>

*And He does so through providentially working great things in sometimes surprising ways.*

*[pause]*

The greatest display of this was the Cross.

*He providentially worked all the details for Christ to go and die on the Cross.*

And like He did with David, God anointed a King who came out of Bethlehem, who didn't seem to have the appearance of a king.

*Like David, Jesus also had the Spirit upon him, and he drove out evil spirits to bring relief to those in His presence. [pauseeee]*

Christ was a man from a small, insignificant town.<sup>13</sup>

*He was a man whose upbringing and reputation before he started his ministry wasn't that impressive to those in his own hometown.<sup>14</sup>*

He was a man despised, rejected, and held in low esteem by others.<sup>15</sup>

*And he was a man who hung on a cross of wood, and was derided by those nearby, who said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself."<sup>16</sup>*

Yet God, who providentially does great things in surprising ways, has brought salvation to us through that very man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, slain for the sins of the world.

*And he rose from the dead, showing the power of God over sin and death. [pause]*

That's our God, that's our all-powerful Master, that's our all-loving Lord, who extends grace to undeserving sinners like us, who simply place their faith in Christ alone.

*He has determined to providentially and astonishingly bless and work through simple people like us.*

Let's walk encouraged by this, let's stand in confident hope, and let's sit at His feet and worship.

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<sup>12</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:19.

<sup>13</sup> See John 1:46.

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 13:54-58.

<sup>15</sup> See Isaiah 53:3.

<sup>16</sup> See Matthew 27:39-44.