

“JEHOVAH SEETH NOT AS MAN SEETH”

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on April 19, 1959 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

In the long ago when God allowed his people to have a king, it was not long until king Saul had so behaved that God removed him from being king of his people. In this sequence of events it was necessary to choose a second king for God's people, so God called his prophet Samuel and set him to the task of finding a new king. We read part of the story in I Samuel 16. “And Jehovah said unto Samuel ... I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons ... And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely Jehovah's anointed is before him. But Jehovah said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or upon the height of his stature, because I have rejected him: for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh upon the outward appearance; but Jehovah looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath Jehovah chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath Jehovah chosen this. And Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Jehovah hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he is keeping the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down til he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withall of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon. And Jehovah said, Arise, anoint him; for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon David from that day forward.” (I Sam. 16:1, 6-13). This is a thrilling story, is it not? In the middle of the story is the sentence that has lived on through the ages, “Jehovah seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on tile heart.”

Mere Externals

In our day and age men often look on externals, on unimportant surface matters rather than upon the internal, important matters of the soul and heart. Think of man's great concern for physical excellence. There are men whose chief virtue is that they have quicker reflexes and sharper eyes than most other men. They are lionized as great leaders in sports and paid ten or twenty times as much as other men who are not as effective in hitting a ball over a fence. Think of the movie colony in Hollywood and their fabulous salaries, paid ordinarily because these people look good on the outside. Generally speaking, they are not particularly good actors. They have been constantly under criticism by legitimate actors on the eastern stage, but they look good, and therefore they have become idols of American youth. They are lionized and paid fabulously.

We also have a tendency to honor those who dress in an unusually fine manner. The person who wears the latest style, especially if the clothing is expensive, is impressive. We are reminded of what the apostle Paul wrote concerning clothing. It is in the first letter that he wrote to Timothy, “I desire therefore ... in like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works.” (I Tim. 2:6-10). God does not concern himself with clothes, but with the good works that grow out of the good attitudes of our lives.

In our world financial status is a very important thing. The man who is unusually successful in the business world has the weight of ten or perhaps even a hundred other men. He is impressive in the cars that he drives, the house that he lives in, and the clothes that he wears. The manner of his life and the manner of his speech reflect his power in writing a check. Centuries ago James, the younger brother of our Lords, wrote, “My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold rings in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing; and ye have regard to him that wareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool; do ye not make distinction among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? ... If ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors.” (James 2:1-6, 9).

Think of our concern for social position along with these other externals that we have been speaking of. There are many parents who want their children to associate only with the elite, and some of them spend fabulously to send them to schools where it is a social distinction to be enrolled. Even in Christian families there is often more concern about social status, about climbing the social ladder and marrying someone from a family that is socially prominent than there is about the basic things of learning God's will, and marrying a Christian. In this whole realm of externals these things are so much a part of our civilization that they rub off on Christians. Men are a little more susceptible to the temptation of honoring the man who makes money. Christian women are a little more likely to fall into the pit of wanting their children to marry well so that they may have social prominence. Sometimes it is a matter of educational background that we honor unduly. A man who has gone to school a long time and has earned higher degrees is given special deference and is considered important. This, too, may be a surface consideration.

As I think of all these things I cannot help but think of the Pharisees in the long ago. They wore the right robes; they had been trained in the best educational institutions of the land; many of them were wealthy. But when the Lord got ready to pick a little handful of men to launch the new way of life that would save the souls of millions of men he passed the elite of Jerusalem by. The wealthy, the sophisticated, and the socially prominent were rejected for a little band of uneducated men who were genuine in heart. It is in the fourth chapter of Acts that we read that the Sanhedrin, with the high priest and his cohorts, looked down on them and called them "unlearned and ignorant men." In God's sight many an unlearned and ignorant man is better than a learned and educated man, better than a socially prominent man, better than a wealthy man, and better than a handsome man. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.

Sometimes it is a matter of family, or of nations, or of race. These, again, are externals. Nearly everybody is proud of his own family and thinks it is a better family than any other family. Who would doubt that we have the finest nation in the world? Have we not said it often enough? While it is the most powerful nation, while it is the best fed, the best clothed, and the best housed nation, and while it is in so many other ways a tremendously great nation, these things do not give us a right to look down on all the other nations of the earth in un-Christian pride. I suppose there is no race on earth that does not basically dislike most of the other races on earth. The Chinese have no love for the Japanese, and it is mutual. The Koreans, situated in between, hate both of them. The Jews have never been popular, and it is mutual, for they do not like the rest and do not allow themselves to marry among them. In all of these surface things it is so easy for us to feel better than other men and to judge them in ways that our God has not.

Let me read to you the words of Jesus in John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever (that word is as broad as the human race) believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." In Romans 10:13 Paul wrote, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." When Peter arose at the household of that foreigner, Cornelius, he began his sermon as recorded in Acts 10:34-35, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteous is acceptable to him."

When Paul wrote to the Galatians he put it this way, "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:26-28). He said it again when he wrote to the Ephesians.. "He is our peace, who made both one, (he is talking of Jews and Gentiles) and brake down the middle wall of petition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross ..." (Eph. 2:14-16). Man looks on the outward appearance and man often is wrong.

#### Guard Thy Heart

The other half of that great text in I Sam. 16:7 is, "Jehovah looketh upon the heart." Think of the way that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He spoke of those who will be saved, "For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that he might bring to naught the things that are: and that no flesh should glory before God." (I Cor. 1:26-29). Then, I remember that among Jesus' opening words in the sermon on the mount are these, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Most of the great people of our world will not see God in heaven. Even though they are prominent people today, they will be lost throughout eternity, but the pure in heart shall see God.

This means that you and I must carefully prepare our hearts. The most important part of a man's body is his heart. We do not mean, of course, the muscle that pumps his blood, but man's mind with which he thinks. There is a passage in Proverbs 23:7 which says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." There is a passage in Matt. 12:24 which says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The heart is mighty important. Solomon also said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence." (Prov. 3:7). This is what we need to do.

I remember a little paperweight on my desk years ago which showed three little monkeys--see no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil. If the heart is properly guarded, we cannot speak evil. No encomium is ever pronounced in the Bible on the man who has been everywhere, seen everything, and done everything, but there are praises pronounced upon the man who has kept his heart pure. There are magazines that you and I do not need to read; there are entertainments that we do not need to partake of; there are associations that we ought to have no part in. We must guard our hearts, for that is where God looks when he evaluates a man. In the Philippian letter there are some wonderful words about guarding the heart. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8). The right kind of reading, the right kind of association, the right kind of education, the right kind of whatever it is that determine our thinking is of supreme importance.

The sentence that I would like to leave in our minds is, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Out of those pure hearts there will come loving obedience and service to God. Someday when the pure in heart stand before him they will be the ones who have kept themselves from evil; they will be the ones who have kept themselves for good. They are the Christians.

It is a great passage that we have studied. Man looks on the outside; God looks on the heart. So we guard our hearts and keep them pure. If you are already a Christian, you will need simply to renew your devotion to the Lord. If you are not a Christian this is a wonderful opportunity and time for you to come. Come confess your love of Christ and dedicate yourself to him. Then, follow him wherever he leads, and with that great army of the pure in heart someday you will enter heaven.