

1 Samuel 15:35; 16

Aim of lesson

To show that God knows our hearts and does not judge by outward appearance.

Background study

Genesis 49:8-10; 1 Samuel 13:8-14; 15:1-28. Look into the method and significance of anointing.

Suggested outline of lesson

Ask the children what would happen in their school if the school captain, a team captain or a class representative were found not to be doing the job properly - perhaps they were unreliable or disobedient. How would the school or class choose a new leader? When teams are being picked for games, what qualities are looked for? Then discuss why Saul had failed as king of Israel. Although he had looked so tall and impressive, he had proved to be an inadequate leader because he had relied on his own strength and reasoning and not obeyed God. He had let the people down, angered Samuel, and had aroused God's displeasure. Because of his faithlessness and disobedience, God decided not to allow Saul's son to inherit the throne.

To Bethlehem

Instead, he sent Samuel to Bethlehem, with his anointing oil, to choose a king from among the eight sons of a man named Jesse. Talk to the class about the significance of Bethlehem in Judah; perhaps they will be able to call to mind other times when Bethlehem is mentioned in the Bible. God told Samuel that he would indicate to him which of these young men was to be the next king of Israel.

The children might like to consider whether Saul was likely to hear of Samuel's journey and its purpose, and why Samuel took a young calf with him for sacrifice. The chief men of Bethlehem were also fearful, wondering why the prophet was visiting their small town.

Man looks on the outward appearance

Try to imagine how surprised Jesse would be when asked to parade his sons before Samuel, and to accompany the great man to the sacrifice. When Eliab, the eldest, came before Samuel he looked such a tall, good-looking, intelligent man that Samuel thought he must be the one, but he knew that he must listen for God's guidance. Quote from chapter 16, verse 7. If you have enough children in the class, let them line up to re-enact this part of the story. We can then imagine how puzzled Samuel must have been when none of these men was God's choice. What should he do now? Jesse had clearly discounted the possibility of his youngest son being considered.

The LORD looks on the heart

Having been asked if there were more sons, Jesse sent for David. While Samuel waited for David, everyone stood around expectantly, anxious to see what Samuel would do. The young shepherd arrived, strikingly handsome and tanned, and Samuel was left in no doubt that this was the chosen one.

At this point it will be necessary to concentrate the children's attention on David's reaction to the situation. Without warning, he had been brought home from the hillside, and had to make hasty preparation to meet the aged and revered prophet. He then found himself the centre of attention in the family circle, with all eyes focused upon him. Ask the children to imagine how overwhelmed David would have felt upon realizing that he had been chosen by God to be the future king of Israel. Samuel confirmed this by anointing him with the oil, and we read that from that time God's spirit was with David. Make it clear that this did not mean that he was immediately crowned king. There was to follow a long period of preparation before this could happen.

To the royal court

This preparation began by means of David's musical talent. He was so skilled on the lyre that his ability was reported at the palace. When the king was bad-tempered or depressed, it was suggested that he might be soothed by David's music. The king agreed and sent for David. Thus David had his first experience of the royal court.

It is well to be aware of a seeming contradiction between these events and those that follow. At the end of chapter 16 Saul loves David greatly, takes him into his service, and David has become his armour-bearer. In chapter 17 Saul does not know who David is, and describes him as a stripling (v56, RSV). The explanation, no doubt, is that chapter 16 is looking ahead to events which were to happen after chapter 17.

Worksheets

The message of the faces is 'For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please teach us to ask for your help when we need to choose a new leader, so that we may find the best person. Help us to realize that goodness is more important than good looks. Amen.

Relevance to the children's lives

How would you wish to choose a new leader or captain (at school or CYC)? Would you choose the tallest, best-looking, jolliest person, or the one who would be most helpful to everyone. Do you think it would be right to ask God in prayer for help in choosing? Does what people look like really matter? What is most important?

Memory verse

“The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).