

IN THE MESS

WHAT DOES GOD SEE?

If you've ever been visited by the Jehovah's Witnesses you will know they always start their conversation with a question: "Are you happy with the way the world is?" How would you answer that? My best guess – very few of you, if any, would say, "Yes!"

There may well be things about the world that we are very happy about:

- The recent birth of a child – a first child, a grandchild.....
- A school report of one of our children
- The lovely spring weather we've recently enjoyed
- A recent holiday
- A successful project at work
- The vegetables in the allotment coming up nicely.

But that's not the same as being happy with the way the world is. Perhaps there are too many things wrong in the world for us to be happy about the way it is.

- The number of children who die every day from HIV aids, malaria and other preventable diseases.
- The lack of distribution of the world's food that means some have more than they can eat while others starve.
- The corruption of power that leads to war, conflict, separation and displacement.
- The plight of the worlds poorest for who every day is a battle for life.
- The cruelty of despotic rulers and some religious governments.
- The depths some people are forced to plunge to simply survive another day.
- The disgrace that is third world debt.

Tragically the list seems endless. Are you happy with the way the world is? We can look closer to home and ask the same question, can't we? Are you happy with the way this country is? I'm guessing we'd say no to that one too!

- Bankers bonuses
- National Insurance rises
- Increase in taxes
- Standards in education
- Health care
- Child care
- Social services
- Public services
- The state of our roads
- The state of our politics
- The state of our national debt
- The tragic number of knife crimes
- Gun crimes
- Any crime.

The politicians are, of course, promising us a brighter future as long as we vote for them! They are promising us that they have the answers to the problems of the way this country is. Labour, of course, are telling us they are the ones best placed to get us out of the mess we're in. They alone have the knowledge, the expertise and the determination needed at this hour. They are the ones who know how best to improve the economy.

The Conservatives are telling us its time for change: we can't go on like this can we – not more of the same. After all the people who got us into this mess are surely incapable of getting us out of it. What we need is change and they are the only ones who can deliver it.

Unless, of course, you are a Liberal Democrat! They want to persuade us that they are a real alternative, and that the only way to see any difference in this country is to vote for them. They are not just a little party – they are a real force and what this country needs is a new direction – no more of this two party

nonsense. We need to reform and they are the ones to bring it!! There's a whole host of other voices shouting at us to vote for them because they have a better answer still! What a mess!!

Ever wonder what on earth God is doing? The nation of Israel was in a mess. Saul is King and he has demonstrated that in truth he is unfit to rule. The tragedy is, Israel pleaded with God to give them a King. God in his wisdom told them exactly what would happen if he gave them one (1 Sam 8). The people refused to listen, God gave them a King, and now they are in a mess. Friends, the truth is no political party has the answer to the mess we're in. Israel was never meant to be ruled by an earthly king. God was their king, and his kingdom was of a completely different nature and they were meant to live in a completely different way to those nations around them. Friends, you have a responsibility to vote, but you are called as citizens of the kingdom of God, to live differently.

Saul was chosen by the people because he looked like he'd be a good King, but he had made it clear he had no heart for God. Now the people lived in terror of what an unstable King Saul might do. Neither were the people of Israel close to God. They had shown their desire to be like other nations and they had elevated worldly standards above those of the kingdom of God. They were in a mess. Samuel had been there when the people had chosen Saul as King and now Samuel realises Saul is unfit to be king any longer. God told Samuel he was grieved he'd ever made Saul king and Samuel is greatly troubled at the state of the nation and the lack of a king. But God speaks to Samuel and tells him not to mourn over Saul, but to go and anoint the man God chose to replace him.

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 your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." But Samuel said, "How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me." 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." Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in

peace?” Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. (1 Samuel 16 v 1-5)

God is at work in the mess! Friends, that is good news – very good news. What Samuel hadn’t figured out was that God was at work behind the scenes while all he could see was a mess. God was sorry that he had made Saul king. Saul had not done well, he had not walked in God’s way – he had not been faithful and it was all a mess. How true is that today friends?

There is much mess because we do not live well following God’s ways and we get ourselves into a mess! But...but...but.... God is always at work behind the scenes – God is always at work in the mess. God is never at a loss to know what He’s going to do in any situation. He knows perfectly well what is best for us – our world, our nation, in this church, in our own lives. The problem is not that God doesn’t know what’s best – it is that we often don’t know what’s best! Have you ever prayed something like this prayer: “Lord if you would just tell me then everything will be fine. Just reveal it to me. Explain what’s going to happen and I’ll do it and I’ll trust you!” Trouble with that kind of prayer is that it contains no faith whatsoever! Because faith is counting and trusting in God even when we don’t know and can’t see what’s in front of us or a way out of the mess!

Samuel is worried about going to Jesse because he thinks Saul will find out and kill him. But he doesn’t know and can’t see what God is doing. Aren’t you glad that he did what God asked him? Samuel was scared and sometimes so too are we when we have to follow God in the mess, but God knows exactly what he’s doing.

“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 things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass in front of Samuel.

But Samuel said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." Jesse then made Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy with a fine appearance and handsome feature. 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. Samuel then went to Ramah." (1 Samuel 16 v 6-13)

We probably know this part of the story well, don't we? And it's a real challenge to human wisdom isn't it? "The Lord does not look at the things people look at, human beings look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Sam 16v7) How's your heart? God is not fooled friends. We have to be very careful with how things appear – things are not always what they seem! God hadn't chosen the oldest, the cleverest, the most important or the most obvious. God chose the most ordinary!

David is still out in the fields looking after the sheep, they have to go and get him to bring him before Samuel and yet this is the one God has chosen because God has seen his heart! I find it extraordinary to think that David is at this moment blissfully unaware of what is happening. David has been out of the picture, behind the scenes faithfully doing what has been asked of him. For David this was just another day – a day like every other. It was another ordinary day! God was at work in the mess.

On an ordinary day, he took an ordinary young man and showed he had been at work behind the scenes. Because this ordinary young man was going to become an extraordinary king and save a nation in a mess. I wonder how different the world could be if God could take and use ordinary people today. Friends, God is looking today for ordinary people, living ordinary lives whose hearts are tuned

towards him. God could use David because his heart was turned to God – what mattered to God mattered to David. God could use David because David’s heart was sensitive to the things of God. God could use David because David’s motives were pure. How about you? What does God see in you? God could use David because David has the right character traits; he was honest and authentic and humble. How about you? What does God see in you? God could use David because David had integrity. Integrity is what you are when no-one is looking. How about you? Who does God see when no-one else is looking?

Much about our world today is a mess. Much in our own lives today is a mess, and we can easily get depressed when we look at the mess. But, friends, God is always at work behind the scenes and he is never at a loss to know what he is going to do. He is looking for people whose hearts are turned to his. Ordinary people just like you and me. I wonder what we might see God do if we lived lives of integrity and faithfulness in our work places; in our home; in front of our families; at school or college; in this church; when we are in town; when we are with friends; when we are going through good times; when we are going through very tough times; when exciting things are happening and when life is full of monotony; when everything is going as I want or when nothing is going as I want.

Friends, God is always at work in the mess. He did it in Israel through the life of an ordinary shepherd boy called David, and today he wants to do it through the lives of ordinary people like you and me. So when God looks at you, what does he see?

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church by Rev. Ian Phillips on Sunday 2nd May 2010