

I Am

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2 Samuel 8

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Something has occurred to me as I watched this video. As the young lady changes her clothing, it's obvious to me what type of person she is trying to look like. And we can just about tell even without the name badge. It's almost as if you can identify the person just based upon the way they look.

I don't want to get all hung up on a profiling kick here (where a person is labeled and judged based upon the way they look, act, and dress), but in all honesty, much CAN be said about a person based upon the way they talk, the things they do, and the way they live. If you talk with someone or watch them close enough, you'll begin to get an idea about their morals, their values, and even the culture in which they live.

Now, I don't want to argue whether that's right or wrong. It happens. It happens to all of us. You meet someone, talk with them for a while, hang out together, and sooner or later you gain a basic understanding of this person. Then you decide if this is someone with whom you want to build a friendship. These people become our friends. We like them. We feel connected to them in some way. We find joy in their friendship. But this friendship doesn't happen with everyone because there are just some people in this world whose way of life, whose background, and whose passions do not connect with yours.

You know what I'm talking about here, don't you? It's how we make friends. By spending time with them and getting to know who they are, we determine if we can connect or not. But as we grow older we somehow forget this. We have a tendency to look at the outward appearance, the dress, the speech, and figure we have nothing in common with that person. So we never even take the time to find out whom they really are. And as I watched the girl in that video, it began to dawn on me that I was falling into this same trap. And the other thing I realized is that people can tell much about us by the way we live, the way we dress, the way we talk, and the way we treat others. Oh, we may think we can keep these things hidden and secret, but most people can see right through our facade.

As I've been studying the life of King David, I really believe here was a guy with whom I could connect. I love his tender and creative side. I love the way he shows compassion and mercy. I love the way he was a maverick, doing things his own way instead of following the crowd. I love his relationship with God. When I read these things about David, there's this instant connection. But there are other parts of David that just seem to rub me the wrong way. There are some things he does that make me pause for just a moment. I read about these things and I think, "Wow, David, I can believe what you did". And what is recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 8 is one of these times when David's actions cause me to pause.

(Read 2 Samuel 8)

I have to be honest with you. I like the King David who passes out food to the people (2 Samuel 6:19). I like the King David who rejoiced before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:19). I like the David who spares the life of King Saul even when everyone else said to kill him (1 Samuel 24:7). But the David who kills two thirds of the Moabite army and the David who hamstringing the horses is a David I have a hard time accepting. Making people line up and basically count off by three's reminds me of the Nazi death camps. And this really confuses me. I thought about this for several days last week, not sure how to deal with this side of David I was seeing. But then it occurred to me. I was seeing not David, but the culture in which he lived.

The reason I have a hard time accepting what I read here is because if it were to happen today, we would be appalled. But not back then. The culture in which David lived was far more brutal and violent than most of us realize. In David's time there was no United Nations. There were no rules of war. It was either kill or be killed. What I'm beginning to see here is that I started to judge the culture in which he lived, not the man David.

In this chapter we read that David defended his nation to the north, the south, the east, and the west. In reality, he was merely claiming the land that God had given the nation to begin with. And no one before King David had fully obeyed God's command to drive out those nations. Although in today's culture it is not acceptable to have more than one wife at a time, back then it wasn't a big deal. But also during this time a person could establish themselves as King by getting enough

people on their side and having the current king murdered. We don't see David doing this. Back then it was acceptable to sacrifice your child to the god Molech, but we don't see David doing this either.

The point I'm trying to make is that this is a view of David living within the culture of that time. And if we look at the man in light of the culture around him, his deeds actually do stand out as unusual and commendable. And it's important for us to do this as we look at any character that lived during biblical times.

Okay. There are two lessons I want us to learn from this. First, we must be careful to look at people's actions in light of their environment. We have tendency to forget that the person who may be acting, talking, or living in a particular way is doing so because of the environment in which they live. A child may respond with anger toward their teacher because their home is constantly filled with anger. A person may not show grace toward others because they themselves grew up in a graceless home. We look at this person (their hair, their clothes, their speech) and decide we could never become friends. But upon what are we basing this? How have we reached this decision? I suspect it's based upon the label and not the person. As we look at a person, most of us end up seeing only their environment, not the real person. And we place a label or pass judgment without ever taking the time to know the real person.

Secondly, we need to be asking ourselves the question, "What do my deeds and actions tell others about me?" You see, the only reason I was able to work past this troubling side of King David was because of what I had seen from him in other circumstances. We can't always take ourselves outside of our environment. We can't always remove ourselves from the culture around us. But we can choose to live, talk, dress, and act in ways that rise above our culture. We must choose to live in such a way that those around us can tell that in spite of our environment, in spite of the culture all around us, that God has an influence upon our lives. Our deeds must give this watching world a glimpse into whose we are. We are God's people. We are followers of Christ. We live in this world, but what we do must not be a part of this world.

I wonder. Would people be able to tell this by watching you?