

## THE LORD LOOKETH ON THE HEART

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“Fair is foul, and foul is fair.” So say three witches in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, thus revealing the theme of the play: appearances can be deceiving. Things are not always as they seem. People deceive each other. People even deceive themselves. God, however, is good and true, and it is impossible for Him to lie. (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2) Moreover, He cannot be deceived. He knows what is in men’s hearts, and He judges them accordingly. The kings David and Saul make for instructive examples of two contrasting hearts.

In the days of Samuel, the prophet, the children of Israel demanded a king to judge them like the nations. (1 Samuel 8:4, 5) Monarchy is not a sinful form of civil government. However, the children of Israel, in demanding a human king, rejected God as their king. As God said to Samuel, “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” (1 Samuel 8:7) The children of Israel wished to live by sight, and not by faith. They were not content to have God direct them through the prophet; they wished rather to entrust their fortunes to a man of flesh and blood, whom they could see and hear, and whom they could worship as a hero. He told Samuel to warn them that a king would not rule them with justice and wisdom and grace as He ruled them. A king would rather oppress them. The children of Israel took no heed of the prophet’s warning, and said, “Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battle.” (1 Samuel 8:19, 20) So, God gave the rebellious children of Israel that for which they wished. He gave them a king.

God chose as king over Israel a remarkable man: Saul, son of Kish. The Scriptures say he was “a choice young man, and a goodly: and *there was* not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward *he was* higher than any of the people.” (1 Samuel 9:2) Saul was the tallest and most handsome man in the land, and he was sure to inspire the people. When Samuel first met Saul, he said that he would tell him all that was in his heart. That is to say, all that was in Saul’s heart the prophet would tell him. What was in Saul’s heart? It would seem that it was in his heart to rule over the children of Israel, and to lead them against their enemies. It was not in his heart, however, to do the will of God. Saul would do things his way, and not God’s way. When it came time for Samuel to present the new king to the people, Saul’s humility led him to hide himself. When the people fetched him, and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above them all. Samuel said to them, “See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that *there is* none like him among all the people?” The people, struck by his great stature, shouted, “God save the King.” (1 Samuel 10:24) Some, however, did not receive him. In his first military campaign, he defeated the Ammonites, and thus proved himself to all, and so all Israel came to receive Saul as their king, even those who at first rejected him. But pride began to take root in the heart of Saul.

After King Saul defeated the Ammonites, he set out to destroy the Philistines. As Saul awaited the arrival of Samuel to offer sacrifice, and to seek the counsel the Lord, Saul’s soldiers, when they saw the formidable army of the Philistines, began deserting him. Saul, worried that his army would become too small to win the battle, did not wait for the prophet, but himself offered sacrifice in defiance of the commandment of God. When the prophet finally arrived, and learned of the king’s presumption, he rebuked him for it. He told him that the kingdom might have been his forever, but that he had forfeited it. God would seek a man after his own heart to rule over the children of Israel. Samuel said to Saul, “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart.” (1 Samuel 13:14) Saul, like the people of Israel, did not rely upon the wisdom and power of God, but upon his own. He was arrogant, and walked by sight, and not by faith. Nevertheless, God gave Saul victory over the Philistines, and over all his enemies. Finally, God commanded Saul to wage war against the Amalekites. He told the king to annihilate them, leaving none alive, not even their livestock. The king, however, had his own mind on the matter, and he followed it. He destroyed the Amalekites except for Agag, their king, and their best livestock. When Samuel confronted Saul about his disobedience, the king said that the people had preserved the livestock to sacrifice to the Lord. Of course, the Lord was angry with Saul for his rebellion, and rejected him as king. Samuel said to Saul:

Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king. (1 Samuel 15:22, 23)

For Saul, it had been better to ask for forgiveness, than for permission. He confessed his sin, and asked Samuel to pardon it, but it was too late. Samuel said, “The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, *that is* better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he *is* not a man, that he should repent.” (1 Samuel 15:28, 29) Saul would be deposed and replaced by a better man. Saul confessed his sin, but his was not a true repentance. He asked Samuel, not God, to pardon him. He cared more about maintaining his position of power, and about the approval of the people, than He cared about God. He said to Samuel, “I have sinned: *yet* honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God.” (1 Samuel 15:30) For his part, Samuel fulfilled the commission God had given to Saul, which Saul failed to fulfill: the prophet hacked the Ammonite king to pieces. Saul was taller and more handsome than any other in Israel, and a mighty warrior. By all appearances he was a great man. Appearances, however, are deceiving. Saul, in his heart, was far from God, and so he was one of the smallest men in Israel.

Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel. And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear *it*, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me *him* whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed *is* before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD 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 keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he *was* ruddy, *and* withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD 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 the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. (1 Samuel 15:34-16:13)

Saul was such a great man, from a worldly point of view, that even the prophet Samuel mourned the loss of him. It seems Samuel not only mourned the Lord's rejection of Saul, but he hoped and prayed for Saul's restoration. He was disappointed, however, as the Lord told him that He would not change His mind. He sent the prophet to Jesse the Bethlehemite, and told him that among that man's sons he would find the man that the

Lord had chosen to replace Saul as king. Samuel knew Saul's disposition, that he was headstrong and self-willed, and that he would allow no man to depose him. Samuel feared for his life should he dare to anoint another man king over Israel, and Saul hear of it. So, the Lord told Samuel to take a heifer to Bethlehem, and there, accompanied by Jesse, offer the creature as a sacrifice. When Samuel arrived at the city, the elders were afraid of what his visit might mean. They worried that the mighty prophet had come upon them the divine judgment. They asked him if he came in peace, and he answered that he did. He told them that he had come to offer sacrifice, and he invited them to join him. He sanctified Jesses and his sons, and brought them to sacrifice with him. Then Samuel looked upon Jesse's son, Eliab, and saw that he was tall and handsome, as Saul was, and he was sure that this was the man that the Lord had chosen to be king. He was mistaken, however. The Lord said to him, "Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) So, Jesse brought before Samuel his son, Abinadab, but the prophet said that the Lord had not chosen him. Jesse then brought his son, Shammah, but neither had the Lord chosen him. Jesse brought before Samuel seven of his sons, but the Lord had chosen none of them. Samuel guessed that there must be another son, and, indeed, there was. That son, however, Jesse believed to be too young to consider. So, Jesse called for David. When he arrived, the Lord told Samuel to anoint him. David was the man he had chosen to be king. David was young and handsome, but God did not choose him for his appearance. God chose him for his heart.

David was no perfect man. He sinned, and he sinned greatly. He took the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a good man, and then he made certain that that good man would die in battle against the Ammonites. When the prophet Nathan confronted King David with his sin, David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Samuel 12:13) In his contrition, he wrote the Fifty-first Psalm, a psalm of heartfelt repentance. In that Psalm he asked God to create in him a clean heart, and he acknowledged, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:16, 17) Sacrifice mean nothing, if it is offered contrary to the commandment of God. However, even the sacrifice God has commanded means nothing, if the one offering the sacrifice is not penitent, if he is not broken-hearted over his sin. God did forgive David, and He did not demand his life. Neither did He take the kingdom from him as he did from Saul.

Jesus has succeeded King David. He is the ultimate king over Israel, indeed over the entire world. In appearance, Jesus was no one remarkable. There was nothing in His stature nor in His outward appearance that would commend Him to anyone. Isaiah the prophet prophesied of Him, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:2, 3) He did not seek His own. He did not seek to rule over people by earthly power. He did not seek earthly pleasure. He sought only to please God, and to serve man. In the beginning of His earthly ministry, many believed in Him because of the miracles He did, but He did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew what was in men's hearts. (John 2:23, 24) He did, however entrust Himself to God, for God alone is perfectly trustworthy. (Isaiah 53:7; 1 Peter 2:21-23) Because of Jesus' great humility, God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name that is above every name, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 3:10, 11)

It is in the sinful nature of man to walk by sight, and not by faith. It is in the sinful nature of man to judge according to appearances. But matters are not always as they seem. When Jesus healed the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, the Jews sought to kill Jesus because He had done the work on the Sabbath. (John 5:1-15) Sometime later, Jesus went up to the temple for the feast of tabernacles, and there he condemned the Jews for seeking to kill Him in violation of the Law. He pointed out their hypocrisy. They would circumcise a man on the Sabbath Day, but they condemned Jesus for making an entire man whole on the Sabbath. Their judgment was wrong. So, He said to them, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." (John 7:1-24)

Jesus taught that what goes into a man's mouth does not defile him, but what comes out, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." (Matthew 15:19) Only God knows a man's heart, and yet, Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." (1 Kings 8:39; 2 Chronicles 6:30)

Let us not judge by appearances, but with a right judgment. Let us not judge by outward appearance, but inward piety. Let us not judge a man by what goes into his mouth, but by what comes out.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*