

The Hanging Serpent

The word of the LORD came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions” (1 Samuel 15:10-11).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15:1-11

Song: “True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted”

The story is told of a young boy who was playing under a tree in the Belgian Congo. His father, who was standing in the doorway of their home, ordered the boy to lie down on his stomach. The boy obeyed. The father then ordered the boy to creep away from the tree, which the boy did. The father was seeing what the boy did not: a serpent hanging from a branch above the child’s head.

For centuries the Amalekite people perpetrated evil against God’s people. The Lord intended for King Saul to be His instrument of vindication and gave Saul detailed instructions on how to carry out God’s judgment. But Saul compromised. He determined for himself to what extent he would obey the Lord. Saul’s partial obedience was disobedience, and God decided ultimately to remove the kingdom from him.

We do not always understand our Lord’s specific instructions to us. But our Father sees what we cannot. We can trust that His motive is our protection and His plan is perfect. Let us strive to be like the child who responded to his father’s instructions without question, without hesitation.

Father, thank You for Your constant watchfulness over Your children. We renew our commitment today to fully obey You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

October 24–30. **Sandra Vosburgh** lives in upstate South Carolina. She is a Bible teacher, director of women’s ministry, pastor’s wife, and grandmother.

Reconciled and Restored

If the casting away of [the Israelites] be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? (Romans 11:15, *KJV*).

Scripture: Romans 11:13-24

Song: “If My People Will Pray”

A fictional story is told of a lad in England who disgraced his royal family by his shameful behavior. The father sent him to a far country with a small stipend. After several years, the father longed to see his son and initiated a search. The young man was found, and his relationship to the father was restored—along with the riches that had long been withheld from him.

The Lord had said to the people of Israel, “I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God” (Exodus 6:7, *KJV*). Sadly, however, they often provoked God to anger by their continued rebellion and disobedience, and later they would reject their Messiah. In response, God sent His servants to preach to the Gentiles. Through Israel’s rejection of the Lord Jesus, salvation came to the Gentiles.

All have sinned (Romans 3:23), and apart from Christ all are estranged from God. Yet, the Lord continues to work, wanting to bring all people from all nations to salvation. When we receive His gift of reconciliation through Christ, our Father essentially says to us, His children, “I am yours, and you are mine” (see Galatians 4:6-7). There are no sweeter words than these.

Father, Your love and mercy reach to the far corners of the earth. Thank You for offering salvation to all who will respond in faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Zack's Folly

The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles" (Psalm 2:2-3).

Scripture: Psalm 2

Song: "He's Still the King of Kings"

Our tiny dog, a papillon, has a distorted understanding of his authority on our street. Zack weighs 12 pounds but feels certain he can take down the neighbor's Labrador retriever. When Zack sees the Lab, he grits his teeth, pulls on the leash, and leaps into the air with a puny growl in an attempt to send the Lab a clear message. The Lab's size makes Zack's bravado ludicrous, but Zack is operating on instinct.

Leaders of nations are powerless before God, yet their sinful nature compels them to rage against Him. To the ungodly, the commands of God are chains and fetters that must be broken and cast off. But all their attempts to exalt themselves and usurp God's authority are in vain. The one enthroned in the heavens scoffs at them. They may leap about and rage against God's anointed one, but God is all-powerful. This king will not be dethroned.

There seems no end to the evil imaginations of the ungodly, and many of God's children suffer at their hands. However, just as the Lab in our neighborhood stands unmoved by a little dog's antics, believers can stand confidently, knowing that the one who "holds the leash" is still in control.

Father, You have established Your kingdom and have exalted the one whose name is above every name. Blessed are all who put their trust in You! In Jesus' name, amen.

A Heart to Obey

“After removing Saul, [God] made David their king. God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do’” (Acts 13:22).

Scripture: Acts 13:21-31

Song: “Lord, Let Me Serve”

Maybe you’ve experienced something like the following, whether in the parent’s role or the child’s. A mother is leaving on errands and instructs her child to wash the dishes while she is away. When the mother arrives home, she sees the dirty dishes still piled in the sink. It likely isn’t the dirty dishes that most offend the mother, but the fact that the child dismissed the mother’s authority. Disobedience is more than the act of failing to obey; it is the disregard of authority.

David understood the authority of God’s Word. He had a heart for God, His Word, and His will. He did not always do what was right, but he always acknowledged his sin and sought forgiveness. His desire was to walk in intimate fellowship with God. David’s heart was not sinless, but his heart was “perfect” before God because he remained tenderhearted in his desire to honor God.

Our Lord has given us instruction in His Word, and one day He will return. Perhaps soon. May we be busy about His business! Let’s not disregard or dismiss His authority in our lives but, rather, seek to have Him say about us, “They have a heart to do everything I want them to do.”

Father, keep us tenderhearted, mindful of Your authority. May we serve You acceptably, happily, thankfully, and with reverence. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Riding on the Clouds

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life (Revelation 22:17).

Scripture: Revelation 22:12-17

Song: “Come, Lord Jesus”

In a city near Edinburgh, Scotland, a large fishing fleet goes yearly on a long expedition to the banks of Newfoundland. When it's time for the fleet's return, the villagers wait on the dock, watching the horizon for the boats carrying their loved ones home again. One year a fisherman, not finding his wife among the crowd, hurried home with concern. When he entered the house, his wife looked up from her chair and said, “I've been waiting for you.”

Not understanding her absence from the dock, he replied, “But the others were *watching*.”

Through the apostle John, the Lord Jesus announced His imminent return. Second Peter 3:9 reminds us that the Lord has not forgotten His promise. He will come again. But “he is patient . . . , not wanting anyone to perish” but wanting all “to come to repentance” and be saved.

As ones who belong to Christ, we long to see His face. But while we watch and wait, let us say to those who are thirsty, “Come to the one who offers the water of life freely.”

Father, we live in the light of Your Son's imminent return, waiting and also watching. It's our privilege today to invite others to come to You as we live in a way that reflects our blessed hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

Confident Expectation

“I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered” (Psalm 89:34).

Scripture: Psalm 89:20-29, 34-37

Song: “God Is Faithful, Ever Faithful”

False teachers, deceptive salesmen, breaches of contract, broken relationships . . . Such things abound. My pastor once said, “Looking at people will ruin your life.” Indeed, if we were to focus on people who do not walk in truth and do not speak truth, we would soon lose heart. At times we may even find *ourselves* failing to speak truthfully.

Today’s passage declares that there is one who always speaks truth. God cannot lie. His Word is true. His promises are sure. What comes from His lips will not be altered. God made a covenant with King David that from among David’s descendants a king would rise and rule the earth in righteousness. That king’s throne would be exalted. He would reign with the fullness of divine power. God swore by His holiness that He would keep His covenant with David.

God is faithful. Every promise in His Word is great, precious, and certain to come to pass. While we are right to be skeptical about hucksters and their gimmicks, there is no reason for us to doubt God’s Word, no reason to lose heart. Let’s exult in Jesus Christ, the King of all kings, and rest joyfully in His promises with confident expectation.

Father, thank You for delivering us from the father of lies and translating us into the kingdom of Your dear Son (Colossians 1:13), who said, “I am . . . the truth” (John 14:6). In Jesus’ name, amen.

Looks Are Often Deceiving

The LORD said to Samuel, . . . “The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Song: “Search My Heart, O God”

The audience groaned when the contestant at the talent show stepped onto the stage. Her appearance created an immediate negative stir. Music idols, according to marketing principles, must be beautiful—not dowdy and overweight. When she began to sing, however, the audience changed its disposition. The power and beauty of her voice filled the auditorium. What came from within now seemed all that mattered.

God commissioned the prophet Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and anoint a new king, the man that God himself would choose. Looking at Jesse’s six sons, Samuel would have chosen any one of them. But God rejected them all. A seventh son, David, had a heart for God. When David stood before Samuel, God said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one” (1 Samuel 16:12). Samuel looked at the outward appearance, but God looked on the heart.

Like the audience at the talent show, we tend to prejudge people according to what we see—before we listen, before we know them. If we are to become more like our Lord, we must hold back our superficial judgments. God sees the heart. He uses and chooses according to His righteous judgment. Let us wait to hear from Him.

Father, forgive my prejudices, my prejudgments. Grant me discernment so I will not be deceived by outward appearances. In Jesus’ name, amen.