**Solomon: Extreme Folly**

Well, last week we watched the Extreme Wisdom game show and we learned about the extreme wisdom of Solomon, who became King over Israel after his father David. And we learned that Solomon was a young man when he became King and God appeared to him in a dream and told Solomon that He would give him anything that he wanted. Now, Solomon asked for wisdom because he was only a ‘child’ and he knew that he would need wisdom in order to be able to be a good and wise King for God’s people. Well, God liked his request and He not only gave Solomon wisdom, but also wealth and honor. And the kingdom of Israel grew to its greatest extent under King Solomon’s reign. There was great wealth, peace, and the temple in Jerusalem was built. These were the glory years for Israel and for Solomon, but it didn’t stay that way. Here’s the wisest man in the world and in the end he was living like a fool, doing stupid and wicked things far from God.

And if you would have asked anyone living in the early days of Solomon’s rule, ‘Do you think Solomon is going to end up living like a foolish man?’ They probably would have laughed at you and said, ‘He’s the last guy in the world that would do that.’ But it happened. And today we are going to look at this downward spiral in the life of Solomon and the steps he took along the way. And the question for you this morning is ‘Do I see myself on this same path as Solomon or am I on the right path?’, ‘Am I taking any of the same steps away from wisdom and towards folly as Solomon did?’

So, how does someone go from being up here in there faith to down here? How do you go from being the wisest man in the world to one of the biggest fools? Well, in this session, we are going to study 4 steps that Solomon took on his downward spiral.

But first, to give you a feel for just how low he had sunk, let’s take a look at a few of these verses that Noreen just read. **<ENTER>**

*As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.*

Now, maybe that doesn’t sound too bad. But Ashtoreth was a Canaanite fertility goddess and she was connected to the cultic temple prostitution that degraded people and greatly offended God. I mean people, I guess mainly men, came to worship God by having sex. And Solomon followed this goddess the text tells us.

But it gets worse; we also read that Solomon followed Molech the god of the Ammonites. And the writer adds a little side note here, the detestable God of the Ammonites. Now, you may remember that we had heard about Molech before and there was a particularly hideous aspect to worshiping this false god. The Ammonites and others who followed this god were expected to sacrifice their own infants on his fiery altar to him. Just think about that for a second. Especially you parents. It’s almost too painful to imagine.

These were the main reasons why God commanded Israel to totally wipe out the nations who lived in Canaan and who worshiped these false gods. And here’s Solomon, the king of Israel and he’s following these same gods.

**<ENTER>** Well, let’s take a look at the first step in Solomon’s downward spiral. That is to begin making small compromises. Let’s take a look at 1 Kings 3:3. **<ENTER>**

*Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.*

Now the key word in this verse is “Except.” When we read this word we know Solomon is in trouble. It really doesn’t matter what comes next, we know it isn’t a good thing. For example, if I come home one night and say to Kathy, “You know Honey, I love you and I promise to be faithful to you except . . .” It really doesn’t matter what I say after that, I’m going to be in big trouble with my lovely wife and rightly so. So, we know that Solomon has made some small compromise in his devotion to God. He will love God and be devoted, except for a few small areas.

Now, the deal with these high places is that they were almost always associated with pagan worship. And God told Israel very clearly that they were to demolish all the high places because He wanted to make sure they avoided any of the practices of these false gods that were so horrible. But Solomon had good intentions to worship the true God. He meant well. And, in fact, God did meet Solomon after he sacrificed at one of these high places.

But good intentions are never a substitute for obedience. The people were not really separating themselves totally from this pagan worship and it started in these high places that they were commanded to destroy and they didn’t. They made a small compromise and it cost them dearly. When we leave the door open a little in regards to obedience, it always gets blown open by the wind and it ends up in much bigger forms of disobedience as we have seen in Solomon’s life. It all started with a small compromise. He followed what God commanded, except . . . . He had good intentions, except . . . .

You know, there is no such thing as partial commitment. Some things are meant to be 100%. For example, if you go to a hospital for major surgery, would you rather they use partially sterile equipment or 100% sterile equipment? I know what I’d choose. You see, there’s no such thing as a partially sterile scalpel. It’s either sterile or it’s not. If there’s 1 germ left alive, then it is contaminated.

And similarly, with our faith, there is no such thing as partial commitment. 95% devotion to God is 5% short. God calls us to a complete surrender to his leading in our lives. Now that’s a hard statement and we tend to dislike absolutes like that. But you have to understand, God doesn’t do this to take away our fun or to limit our freedom. He calls us to complete devotion because He knows that we will find fullness of joy and true freedom when we are 100% devoted to Him.

There’s an old hymn you might have sung before called “I surrender all.” And the chorus goes like this: *I surrender all, I surrender all. All to Thee, my blessed savior, I surrender all.* Do you get the message? It’s clear isn’t it? This is a declaration of absolute, complete, uncompromising devotion.

Now, can you imagine a congregation of Christians singing this song, but lowering the bar a little? What would they sing instead? *Most to Jesus, I surrender. Or Some to Jesus, I surrender. How about 95% to Jesus, I surrender*. The only thing that makes sense and that fits with God’s call on our lives is full devotion. And don’t we have a God that is 100% devoted to us. I mean did Jesus give 95% on the cross? Did he leave anything back or did He love us 100%? Can you be any more devoted than to give up your life?

**<ENTER>** OK, let’s look at the 2nd step in the downward spiral. Assuming you’re the exception to the rule. Now, in this step you don’t dispute the rules. In fact, you agree that they’re fine for most people. But you just think that you’re a little more mature and maybe a little more sophisticated than others. You can handle it. You’re the exception to the rule.

The problem with anything less than total obedience is that you’re the one who gets to choose what you will submit to and what ‘really doesn’t matter’. And, in a sense, you have become your own king and your own god.

Solomon was the King. And he began making small compromises and before long he was rewriting the rule book. We are going to look at some clear commands that God gave and Solomon clearly disobeyed. I’m sure Solomon thought that these were good rules and should be obeyed, but somehow they just didn’t apply to him and his situation. **<ENTER>** Take a look at Deuteronomy 17:16-17. These were very specific commands that God gave to those who would rule over his people.

*The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver & gold.*

This seems pretty clear: not a lot of horses and don’t get them from Egypt. We don’t want you going back there. Not too many wives. And not large amounts of wealth. Pretty easy to understand, but we see Solomon disobeying all three of these commands. Turn to 1 Kings 10:26. **<ENTER>** These verses are recorded about 300 years after the commands we read in Deuteronomy and it’s almost unbelievable how they parallel one another.

*Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt.*

*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines, and his wives led him astray.*

God had commanded to kings of Israel to avoid an arms build up, that was horses and chariots in those days, to avoid an arms build up because then they would have a tendency to rely on their own power and not on God. But one of the first things Solomon does is to strike a treaty with the king of Egypt by marrying his daughter. Then he started acquiring horses, 12,000 of them, and many of them were from Egypt. OK, that’s strike one.

God told the kings of Israel don’t amass great wealth because he wanted them to always rely on His provision and not their own stockpile. But we’re told Solomon made silver as common as rocks in the street. In verse 14 we’re told how much wealth Solomon received each year: 666 talents of gold. That may not mean much to you, but 1 talent was equal to about 75 pounds or 34 kilos. That’s 22,644 kg of gold a year. Do you know what a kg of gold is trading for right now? Actually, they don’t sell gold by the kg because few people could afford to buy that much gold? They sell it by the gram and it’s around 40 USD per gram. It’s a big number; over 900 MUSD, let’s just say 1 billion dollars every year just to round it out. But that’s not all. Verse 14 then goes on to say that didn’t include income from several other sources including all the governors of the lands and merchants, etc. OK, I think he disobeyed that command about acquiring much wealth.

How about too many wives? You think 700 is too many? That has to be some world record. I won’t get into this one again, but just how many happy polygamous families have we seen in the Bible? Zero. It’s clear that God always planned for it to be 1 man and 1 woman in a marriage relationship, but mankind started to compromise here as well. Just 1 more wife, 1 more won’t hurt. But it wasn’t God’s will. And besides the messed up family dynamics, God knew that they would turn his heart away from Him and they did.

3 commands for the kings of Israel, but Solomon thought they just didn’t apply to him. I really need this treaty with this king, so I’ll marry his daughter. They did that type of thing back then because it helped everyone keep to the treaty since they didn’t want to kill their own grandchildren. I mean this made sense, it was logical. And Solomon thought that he was the exception. I can handle one more wife. A little more money won’t hurt. A few more horses and chariots to protect the money. It all makes sense, but it goes against the clear commands of God. And in the end, who was right? Was God wrong for giving these commands? No, Solomon was wrong. Don’t ever go against a clear commandment from the Bible. You will be the loser every time.

**<ENTER>** OK, on to step 3 on the downward spiral. When you fail to deal with your weaknesses. Let’s look again at these verses. **<ENTER>** What do you think was one of Solomon’s weaknesses in life? Beautiful women. And notice one word here that sort of describes Solomon’s attitude towards this area of his life – it’s the word **nevertheless**. He knew it went against God’s command and he knew why he shouldn’t do it, but nevertheless he didn’t let that stop him. He didn’t deal with this weakness in his life. He let himself be consumed by it to the point where 700 wives wasn’t enough. He had to have 300 concubines as well; these were women just to have sex with.

Do you know anyone who could not help himself or herself when it came to some kind of sin that was an addiction? Perhaps you’ve been there yourself or you are there right now? Sometimes sin gets a grip on our lives and it seems like as if we can’t get away and that we are almost a slave to it. It comes knocking on our door, and we know it is wrong to open up to it, but we do it anyway. ‘Nevertheless, we say’ and we let it into our lives.

When this happens, God wants us to look to him for strength. And that can be hard because it takes humility to admit that you need help and especially supernatural help. This is the basis of the successful 10-Step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous. And even thought you feel it is impossible to resist, God wants us to know that it is possible. Remember the promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13: ‘No temptation has seized you, except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.’

If you turn your weakness over to God and ask Him for power, He will give it and you will be able to overcome. And that’s where other Christian brothers and sisters can help as well. Not only to pray for you, but to act as an accountability partner and to help encourage you to stand up to the temptation. Don’t give up. Many, many people have successfully dealt with their weaknesses with God’s help and other believer’s help.

We had a friend visiting from the USA this past week, she and her husband were missionaries here in Sweden for many years and they left about 20 years ago. When she visits Sweden now alone as her husband passed away a few years ago, she meets with old friends and former students and she told us that many had struggled in life and faith. So, I asked her, why do you think that is so? And she told me that she thinks one reason is that they didn’t have any really close Christian fellowship. I think she’s right. We all need someone else in our life who has permission to slap us in the face. Now, that sounds strange, but I read this yesterday in a story of a Christian man from a small town who has become somewhat famous due to a popular TV show in the USA, and he said this, "*If I do become someone else, there's about three or four people that will slap me because I told 'em to*.” He understands some of the foolishness that destroys so many people and he’s already taking steps to avoid these traps that Solomon fell for. What about you? Do you have a few people in your life who will slap you if you start to do something really stupid? Don’t we all need that? Have you ever thought or done something that could have been terribly damaging in your life had someone not intervened and told you ‘Don’t be an idiot!’ Or maybe there wasn’t anyone there and you have made some mistakes in your life that have cost you a lot. Perhaps it is time to get some other voices in your life. That is one of the ideas with the Discipleship group that we’re starting up.

Now, perhaps you’re not sure what you’re weaknesses are? One good thing to do is to take a look back at your family to see if you see any signs of weaknesses there. When we look at Solomon’s family it becomes obvious why he had weaknesses when it came to sexual temptation. Who was Solomon’s father? David. Who was his mother? Bathsheba. They had an affair together, so it’s not too unexpected that Solomon would have a problem with sexual control.

What about your family? Do you see any weaknesses that you should also be careful about? Ask God to show you through the Holy Spirit where your weaknesses are if you’re not sure. If you’re married, ask your husband or wife. They’ll definitely be able to tell you, but listen for a change.

And parents, what hidden sins are you hoping that don’t get passed on to your children? Too often, we deceive ourselves into thinking that this won’t affect our children, but so often it does. And we need to start dealing with our weaknesses if we are truly going to stop the cycles of sin we see in many families.

And it’s OK to get help. Don’t be ashamed. Kathy and I have both been helped by Christian counselors for various issues we’ve had to deal with concerning our weaknesses. And God has been there for us in real and powerful ways. And the good news is that He’ll be there for you too, if you ask Him. The other good news is that we can also pass on good habits and attitudes to the next generation.

**<ENTER>** OK, the last step in the downward spiral is to ignore correction. This is one of the surest signs of disaster. When someone is sliding down into sin and they refuse to listen to anyone who comes with wise and loving correction; you know the end is near and that disaster is coming. Unfortunately, by the time someone has taken steps 1, 2, and 3, they are usually somewhat deaf to hearing God’s voice.

In 1 Kings 9, Solomon has just finished the temple and God comes to Solomon again in a dream, but instead of asking Solomon what he wants, this time God gives Solomon a warning. He tells Solomon, “If you follow me, I will bless you. But if you refuse to follow me, I will cut you off!” God knows the condition of Solomon’s heart and it is time for a firm warning. Solomon’s on a crash course to disaster and it’s time for some correction. Unfortunately, Solomon doesn’t listen and God raises up a new leader in a man named Jeroboam. **<ENTER>**

*Then he (prophet Ahijah) said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes.*

*Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon’s death.*

God has had enough and he sends a prophet to tell Jeroboam that he will become the King for the Northern 10 tribes. Now, we don’t know from the text if the prophet confronts Solomon, but it is obvious that Solomon hears about it and he sets out to kill Jeroboam, who flees for his life.

And that’s one of the big differences between Solomon and his father, David. When Nathan came and corrected David for his sin with Bathsheba and killing her husband, David got on his face and repented and cried out to God. We read David’s response in Psalm 51, ‘create in me a clean heart, O God’. But Solomon tries to kill the messenger.

Our hearts need to be open to correction. We need to humbly listen when God speaks and calls us to change. Sometimes our defense mechanisms are turned up so high that we have a hard time hearing corrective words from God or his servants.

When Solomon finished dedicating the new temple, God spoke these words **<ENTER>**

*if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land*

God asks us to be humble and to seek Him and to turn from our wicked ways. I think humility is the real key and something that is often lacking in our society. Now, actually, I think humility is valued in Sweden and I really appreciate that, but that isn’t always the case in my homeland. I saw this article just last week on CNN. **<ENTER>**

Why confidence is overrated. And it was written by a professor of psychology at Columbia University. He concludes that most people are over-confident; they have too much confidence, and therefore have a natural tendency to misjudge danger. And he gives statistics that show there is no shortage of confident people. For example, if you ask people if their driving skills are better than average, 85% of people will say ‘YES’. And that is the same if you ask them about sense of humor, leadership skills, and singing ability. And the truth is that 35% of people who say ‘YES’ are wrong. And even when you point out this bias to people in the survey, 80% still come back and say they are still better than average. **<ENTER>**

The point is maybe we all need a good dose of humility from time to time. It is something that I ask God for often and I believe He helps me in this area of my life, but I am equally thankful that God doesn’t answer YES to all my prayers. I have asked for some stupid things also and I am thankful that I waited on God and didn’t take things into my own hands. We need to be humble and when we ignore God’s clear instructions and assume we know better, then we’re headed for trouble just like Solomon.

**Closing Prayer**

.