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SESSION 10

The Foolishness of a Once-Wise King

SESSION SUMMARY

In today's session, we look at the foolishness on display near the end of Solomon's reign. Solomon's story is a reminder that all of us are capable of derailing our walk with God by making foolish choices. It is also a reminder our only hope is in the True King whose wisdom and righteousness is perfect—Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 11:1-13; Luke 11:31

THE POINT

Foolishness is the failure to give God glory in every area of life.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

One of the most compelling scenes in J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*, is when Aragorn, the true king, is finally crowned and takes his rightful place on the throne. If you've seen the movie, you know it's a scene that stirs emotions. Even though most of us have never been ruled by an earthly king, something within us resonates with this picture. Could it be that, deep down, we long for a king? Not just any king, to be sure; but a good, wise, and gracious king. One who will rule and reign with justice and righteousness. One who will set all things right.

As we read the Bible we find that this longing is actually rooted in truth. The true King exists, and He is coming back to set all things right! Unfortunately, history has proven that we too often embrace the wrong king and even good kings can go bad.

When Israel first asked for a king like the other nations, God was displeased with their request. But His displeasure was not that they wanted a king, it's that they wanted the wrong king and they sought to be like other nations. Even though God conceded to their request, He warned them about living under kings whose hearts turned away from following Him.

Perhaps the saddest of these examples is King Solomon. At one time he ruled in wisdom and justice. But as we will see today, Solomon's life and reign spiraled out of control as he turned from the God who called him and established him as king. Earlier we looked at him as the example of wisdom, but now we look to him as an example of foolishness.

- **When have you been disappointed by a godly leader who did something foolish? How did you handle your disappointment?**

Option 2

On June 15, 1858 Abraham Lincoln gave one of the United States' most noteworthy speeches concerning the issue of slavery. Though Lincoln would not be elected as Illinois' Senate representative, this speech propelled him onto the national stage, particularly the quote: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

What many people don't know is that this phrase has biblical roots. Jesus said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand." (Matt. 12:25). Solomon's heart became divided between his wives, his riches, and following God. Because of this division, He made some foolish decisions. In the same way, if our hearts are divided, we can easily fall into a pattern of making foolish decisions as well.

- **When have you seen this happen in your own life? What happened to help you realize your focus was misplaced?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Foolishness is the failure to give God glory in every area of life.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Solomon** - son of David who succeeded him as king over Israel. Solomon is known for his God-given wisdom—having authored many books in the Old Testament wisdom literature—and his building of the temple

PLOT

Everything we have seen about Solomon has been positive up to this point in the story. God has blessed him with wisdom and Solomon has used that wisdom to benefit God's people. God has blessed him with peace, giving Solomon the ability to build the temple. Things have gone well. It looked like God's promises to Abraham were coming true: God's people had been rescued, they were living in the land God promised to them, they had a good and wise king, and other nations were being blessed by Solomon's wisdom. But would it last? How would history remember Solomon's reign?

TIMELINE

SOLOMON'S FALL INTO IDOLATRY

Foolish decisions ultimately lead to idolatry.

MEANING OF LIFE IN ECCLESIASTES

Solomon reflects on the purpose and meaning of life.

THE SUFFERING OF JOB

The suffering of Job and the mercy of God.

SOLOMON COMPROMISES HIS DEVOTION TO GOD

1 Kings 10 describes Solomon's great wisdom and his great wealth. It describes the Queen of Sheba as mesmerized by the depth of his insight and it gives us a detailed list of his possessions.

If Solomon's story stopped there, we would be applauding him as the greatest king in Israel. We might even be wondering if he was (at last!) the long-awaited king whose sons would rule over God's people in God's promised land forever. Unfortunately, the story goes on to reveal Solomon's compromise and downfall.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. (1 Kings 11:1-8)

What we see here is one of the most illustrative pictures of idolatry in the Bible. Idolatry and foolishness go hand in hand. If wisdom means to fear the Lord first and foremost, then foolishness is to place something above the Lord. Foolish choices always accompany idolatry.

In Solomon's case, there is no outright rejection of God. He wasn't setting God aside; he was adding other gods around the Lord. He wasn't disregarding the Lord altogether; he was partially regarding the Lord. He chose to follow Yahweh alongside other gods.

Solomon's sin began when he decided to disregard the Lord's commands. Before God brought Israel to the promised land, He gave them specific

commands about how kings were to conduct themselves. They were not to gather much gold and horses for themselves, and they were not to acquire many wives (Deut. 17:14-20). If they did, their hearts would go astray.

We see this fleshed out in Solomon's life. He acquired much wealth, vast amounts of horses and chariots, and he had 1000 women in his court. The result? His heart was led astray.

Remember Joshua's black-and-white challenge to Israel? "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15). For Joshua, it was all or nothing. You're either with God or you're not.

- **How is your focus sometimes divided between God and other people or your possessions?** (*p. 66, PSG*)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

David had also married foreign wives, but they did not change either his religious life or that of the nation. Solomon's wives, on the other hand, were known devotees of their national deities... These religious compromises were likely seen as politically expedient acts of courtesy to Solomon's foreign wives, comparable to extraterritorial privileges that allow embassies in our time to conduct themselves according to the laws and customs of their native land, but these common-sense principles conflicted with faith in God and God's covenant with Israel. Both Ashtoreth (Astarte, Ishtar) and Milcom (Molech) were international deities worshiped under numerous names in different countries. Chemosh, by contrast, was a god of Moab, probably a god of war.¹

SOLOMON'S CHOICES HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Our choices impact others, often more than we know. When we make foolish choices, we inevitably create problems for those around us. Solomon's son reaped the consequences of his idolatry, and so did the nation of Israel, which saw a divided monarchy for the first time in its history. Let's read about the Lord's response to the folly Solomon allowed in his life.

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom

from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.” (1 Kings 11:9-13)

These words must have hit Solomon like a freight train. Not only would Solomon suffer (1 Kings 11:14-40), but the kingdom would be torn from his son's hands. His idolatry led Israel into a downward spiral that would eventually result in their exile into Babylon years later. This is what happens when we allow foolishness to lead us into idolatry. We may think we are only hurting ourselves, but we inevitably hurt other people as well.

Near the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis explains to us the nature of kingship when King Caspian announces that he will abandon his ship, forsake his crown, and sail on to the end of the world in search of adventure. Reepicheep makes it clear to Caspian that he cannot do as he wishes. He says, “You are the King of Narnia. You break faith with all of your subjects and especially with Trumpkin, if you do not return. You shall not please yourself with adventures as if you were a private person. And if your Majesty will not hear reason it will be the truest loyalty of every man on board to follow me in disarming and binding you till you come to your senses.”² One wonders if Lewis had Solomon in mind when he wrote these words.

Sadly, Solomon had no one to help him come to his senses. In fact, he did choose to live like he was a private person. The reality is, we are not private people. Our walk with the Lord is personal, no doubt, but it is not private. We may make decisions in private, but our decisions have public consequences.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sin as Selfishness

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mindset that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mindset that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.

TIMELINE

WORSHIP IN THE PSALMS

A look into the psalms and their importance in the Christian life.

Beginning Fall 2016

ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

God makes it known that He alone is God.

ELIJAH'S PERSECUTION

Elijah flees in the midst of persecution.

CHRIST CONNECTION

When we look at the life of Solomon we have reason to be both disheartened and encouraged. We are disheartened that he compromised his devotion to God and derailed his kingship. But we should also be encouraged because we know that the story does not end there. Solomon is not our king. He is not the true king. We are only to glance at Solomon, and then turn our gaze on the True King.

Solomon was never enough. We need a greater king than Solomon. As we come to the New Testament, that is what we find. Let's fast forward to the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus speaks of Himself as greater than Solomon.

The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Luke 11:31)

Solomon dazzled the world with his wisdom, riches, and power, yet look at how things ended. He failed. Earthly kings, rulers, and powers will always fail us. We must not look to them. We must look to Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). He will never leave us or forsake us. His love is constant. His grace is limitless. His mercies are new every day.

In this session, we've seen that even the greatest heroes of the Bible can choose foolishness over wisdom. In seeing their failures, we are stirred up to hope even more in Jesus—our King. We have much to learn from men like Solomon. But beyond all the wise proverbs and sayings that he has given us, perhaps the biggest lesson we take away from him is that we need Jesus more than we've ever imagined.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Solomon disregarded God's command about having too many physical possessions. How can this serve as a warning for us? What are some physical possessions that have interfered with your walk with Christ?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **Solomon also allowed personal relationships in his life to direct his affections away from God. How can we avoid similar outcomes in our own relationships?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **Solomon's foolishness blinded him to the long term effects his sin would have on those around him. Why do you think people don't usually consider the negative impact sin can have on those around them?** *Most people view personal sin as a private affair, with perhaps the only consequences being to themselves. Not only that, but sin, having the selfish nature that it does, has blatant disregard for others around us to the point that when we are engrossed in our sin, we simply don't care about how it will impact those closest to us.*
- **How has this session challenged you personally?** *Answers to this will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul addressed a case of immorality of which the entire church seemed to be proud. Listen to his words to them, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump” (1 Cor. 5:6-7a). Do you see what Paul is saying? The sin of one individual was permeating the entire church. The foolish decisions of one person affected all of them. The same is true for us as well. Choosing to walk in foolishness will impact those around you.

- **How have you been positively affected by someone else’s wise choices?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **How have you been negatively affected by someone else’s foolish choices?** *Answers to this will vary.*



HEART

We have seen time and time again the devastating effects that come from heart idols. Idolatry creates division in the hearts of God’s people by setting up on the throne of our hearts. When some other person, experience, or pursuit grabs our attention, thoughts, and affections, God is slowly pushed away from the center of our lives. The Psalmist recognized this when he prayed, “Unite my heart to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11b). He knew that he could not worship and fear the Lord appropriately unless God had his undivided affections.

- **What are some signs that a person has a “divided” heart?** *Answers might include treasuring God’s gifts more than God, putting others before your relationship with God, and so on.*
- **What tends to divide your heart from devotion to God?** *Answers to this will vary.*



HANDS

There are several practical applications that stem from this session that should challenge the way we live from day to day. We can learn from Solomon about the traps of material possessions and unhealthy relationships, and how those can lead one’s heart astray. We can be on guard more when it comes to fending off heart idols. We can be challenged with the fact that, as with the people of Solomon’s time, our world today needs a greater wisdom—a wisdom that saves. And as Christians, we are the ones to talk about Him. Whatever the application, be sure to not just hear this story, but allow it to challenge you to live differently as a result.

- **How can we serve and support unbelievers when the wisdom of this world lets them down?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **How has this challenged you to live differently this week?** *Answers to this will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

SOURCES

1. *Holman Christian Standard Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010).
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1953), 261.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPKingsSUM16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject