

If Only . . .

I Kings 11; II Chronicles 9

Introduction

Private Joseph Lockard and Lieutenant Kermit Tyler were on duty at their radar station; they would make the final decision, among a series, that would insure a coming disaster. Lockard was just about to go off duty when he saw the characteristic blip of an airplane begin to move across his radar screen. He watched as more than fifty blips came into radar view.

He reported the sightings to Lieutenant Tyler, who assumed the blips represented American bombers returning from maneuvers in California. He told Tyler to forget about it and then, made his gravest error. Instead of calling Major Kenneth Bergquist to confirm his assumption, as normal procedure dictated, he, and his men, went off duty.

The problem, if you have not already guessed, was the simple fact that those blips were not American bombers, but Japanese. Lieutenant Tyler's decision would be the final decision that would insure the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Magnificent, costly ships would be destroyed and many men would lose their lives.

In our last few discussions, we have observed the incredible rise and reign of Israel's most brilliant king, King Solomon. He had the "Midas touch," in that everything he touched worked. His kingdom prospered and his name grew to become a living legend. In many ways, however, he will end his reign like a magnificent ship under enemy fire – breaking apart and sinking in disgrace.

Before we get to the downward side of Solomon's biography, let us briefly review his achievements. They are summarized in II Chronicles, chapter 9, verses 22 through 24.

So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. They brought every man his gift, articles of silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.

Solomon had it all! He had wealth, splendor, fame, adoration, and a powerful, unified kingdom. The Bible calls him the greatest king on earth.

Imagine living life to the fullest! Every adventure is a possibility; every desire is met, from racing stallions to collecting wild animals; from tasting exotic spices to testing the latest weapons. Solomon tried it all.

If you could experience one adventure, with money and time as no objects, what would it be? I want you to know that I would love, just one time, to parachute out of an airplane. I would love to sky dive, just once, if my wife would only let me, and if I had three additional emergency parachutes attached to my body!

There is a company called Thrillseekers Unlimited, in Las Vegas, of course. No, I did not send for a free brochure, trust me! However, I did read about, what they call, an "adrenaline vacation". The owner, Rick Hopkins, promotes a week of skydiving, bungee jumping, paragliding, and rock climbing for the "not-so-faint-of-heart".

One of his vacationers, who chose bungee jumping as his adventure, was a one hundred year old man, named S. L. Potter, from California, where else?! He bungee jumped, for the first and last time,

at age one hundred. His two children, ages sixty eight and seventy four, strongly opposed the leap. Dad refused to listen and he actually, safely jumped from two hundred feet. After his jump, as he got off the cord, his first words were, "Give me back my teeth!"

I like that man! I wondered where his wife was. She probably died years earlier of a heart attack. Or, perhaps she was the one holding his teeth.

Well, for the rest of us, we just read about adventure. It is safer in the Lazy Boy chair, isn't it?! It is just not as much fun!

In Solomon's day, there was nothing he could not try or have. He "had the world by the tail".

Oscar Wilde penned, perhaps the most fitting epitaph for Solomon. He wrote,

In this world, there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.

The Downward Spiral of Solomon's Steps

Now, the biblical record leaves it to no one's imagination as to how someone this great, this wise, and this magnificent could end as a total failure. I invite your attention to I Kings, chapter 11, where God uncovers, for our benefit, the downward spiral of King Solomon's steps. It is meant to warn us. This is God's record for us!

Solomon stubbornly ignored God's command

1. Step number one, in Solomon's digression to spiritual collapse, was that he stubbornly ignored God's command.

Look at I Kings, chapter 11, verses 1 through 2a.

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 sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." . . .

God's command was clear, "Solomon, don't associate with them."

By the way, a similar warning from God to the New Testament Christian is also clear. To associate

with certain people is dangerous to your spiritual health!

The word "associate" could be understood to mean, "developing a friendship with someone that ultimately, gives them the unspoken permission or ability to influence you."

Listen to some of God's commands. In our overly tolerant age, some of these may surprise you. For example:

- Psalm, chapter 50, verse 18b,
. . . [Do not] associate with adulterers.
Asaph, in this Psalm, disciplined his readers for associating with men or women who were unfaithful to their spouses.
- Proverbs, chapter 20, verse 19b,
. . . do not associate with a gossip.
- Proverbs, chapter 22, verses 24-25a,
Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways . . .
- I Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 11, Paul wrote,
. . . I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous [so, do not develop associations with materialistic Christians], or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one.
- II Thessalonians, chapter 3, verse 14, Paul wrote,

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter [II Thessalonians], take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

So, do not associate with Christians who are openly disobeying scripture.

If Paul were living today, the majority of evangelical Christians would say, "Paul, you're too strict, too judgmental; you're a prude."

However, Paul was right! Do not give someone the permission or ability to influence you, unless they are godly. By the way, that goes for anything that you allow into your life

For Solomon, the command was, "Don't marry foreign women!"

That is exactly what Solomon did, however. He stubbornly ignored God's command.

Solomon foolishly rejected God's counsel

2. Step number two in Solomon's downward spiral was that he foolishly rejected God's counsel.

Notice the last part of verse 2, of I Kings, chapter 11.

... for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods. . . .

This is like a parent telling a child, "Listen, if you touch the eye on the stove, you will get burned. Don't touch it, it's hot!"

Notice the very last phrase of verse 2.

... Solomon held fast to these in love.

What does "held fast to these in love" mean? One commentator said,

He flaunted it. He not only embraced them, he embraced them publicly. He not only married them, he courted them in front of the people of Israel. The foreign women, coming in with their idolatrous and cultural polytheism, brought with them enough seduction to turn Solomon off spiritually.

Solomon evidently, did not realize at the time, that he was on a collision course with total bankruptcy; the blips were coming closer!

I had lunch recently, with a man from our church. He revealed that he flew an F4, which was a fighter plane, during the Vietnam war. He flew nearly two hundred combat missions during his many years with the air force. He told me that one of the most serious challenges, during his career, was flying night missions. At night, the sky is dark and there is no discernible horizon. He explained that, during a night mission, it is possible to enter a state called, "vertigo". This is when, because of the loss of visual ability, the mind becomes disoriented as to which direction is up and which is down or sideways. It all seems the same.

He told me of an incident when he was so intent on his mission that he failed to check his instrument panel for just a few moments. It was in the dark of night and, while he thought he was flying straight ahead, he was actually flying at a steep descent. With only seconds to spare, he looked at his instrument panel, recognized his error, and, even though he was

hurtling earthward at three hundred miles an hour, he was able to pull up just in time. He came within one hundred yards of hitting the ground.

He made a point with this story. The challenge of flying at night was that, in order to avoid vertigo's strange effects, you constantly had to obey the instrument panel, even though your body and brain told you something different.

Ladies and gentlemen, when you are involved in sin, you can enter a spiritual vertigo. This is a state where your body and brain can justify and rationalize; you can sense peace with God and fellowmen; you can be happier than ever before. The truth is, you are flying in the darkness of night and you are hurtling toward a terrible crash.

Solomon himself, wrote in Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 12,

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

The instrument panel is the Word and it provides an objective, outside resource that God uses to keep us in flight. You may remember our brief study of II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16, which tells us,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness

Solomon foolishly disregarded the instrument panel. He ignored God's inspired counsel. And, the text says,

... Solomon held fast to these in love.

Solomon was saying, "Oh Lord, I love these women; I love my life. It has never been better. I'm going to hang on!"

Notice verse 3 of I Kings, chapter 11.

He had seven hundred wives, princesses, . . .

(king's daughters),

. . . and three hundred concubines, . . .

(or, as one little kid said, "300 cucumber vines," which is just as well, for Solomon will become so tangled that he will never cut free),

. . . and his wives turned his heart away.

Solomon openly disregarded God's character

3. The fatal crash occurs in Solomon's final step, when he openly disregarded God's character.

Look at I Kings, chapter 11, verses 4 through 6.

For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully as David his father had done.

Can you imagine?! It gets worse! Continue to verses 7 and 8.

Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

Do you know who Molech was? This was the statue of iron whose belly was an open furnace. The fire would be stoked in his belly and the entire statue would be glowing with heat. His arms were fashioned outward and, into those red hot arms, infants would be laid as sacrifices to Molech. The screams of the helpless infants would pierce the air and satisfy this monstrous false deity.

My friend, how incredible it is to read of a man like Solomon, who was raised and tutored by Nathan the prophet; who built the temple of God; who had great wisdom; who penned the books of Proverbs and Song of Solomon, yet who, if you look at him now, is blind and deaf, with his conscience seared shut! Solomon lived his midlife years turned off to God, and this led to open defiance in his old age.

He is building sanctuaries for idols! How could he fall so far?! By associating with women who slowly wore down his theological defenses and ate away at his Judaic morals. Then, "Look! Just across from the golden temple of Yahweh, there on the mount of Olives, are Solomon's monuments to the goddess of the Sidonians and to Molech!"

What happened to Solomon? Are there any clues?

Yes! Turn in your Bible to Solomon's personal diary. It is the book of Ecclesiastes, which is located next to the book of Solomon's Proverbs. Look at Ecclesiastes, chapter 2. Six times in four verses, the phrase, "for myself," is written.

- Verse 4,
I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself
- Verse 5a,
I made gardens and parks for myself . . .
- Verse 6,
I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.
- Verse 8,
Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men – many concubines.

Let us put it this way, young Solomon was dedicated to the Lord; middle aged Solomon was dedicated to himself; aged Solomon was dedicated to other gods.

Now, notice the ramblings of a self-obsessed man, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 2, verse 9.

Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.

Notice that this was not God's wisdom, this was his. Continue to verses 10 and 11.

All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold, all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

In other words, "Big deal!"

Anyone who is wrapped up in themselves makes a very small package.

It is interesting that in his list of building projects in Ecclesiastes, he does not even mention what everyone considers to be his crowning achievement. And, what is that? Building the temple. He never mentions it.

I did not mention this previously, because I did not want to get off of the subject of Solomon's positive contributions. I will now, however. I Kings, chapter 6, verse 38, informs us that it took Solomon

seven years to build the temple to the glory of God. That sounds like a long time, until you read in I Kings, chapter 7, verse 1, that it took Solomon thirteen years to build his own palace, which was a house built to his own glory.

Now, you are looking at an empty old man who looks around his kingdom, and at his harem, and at his possessions, and at his power, and says, "It's all empty!"

C. H. Macintosh wrote, a century ago, in his commentary, *Genesis Notes*,

Many a vessel has sailed out of harbor in gallant style with all its canvas spread; amid cheering and shouting, and with many a promise of a first-rate passage; but alas! Storms, waves, rocks and quicksands have changed the aspect of things; and the vessel that commenced with hope has ended in disaster.

If only . . .

The real tragedy is that Solomon could have spared himself the waste of his life, if only . . .

If only Solomon had listened to his own writings

1. If only Solomon had listened to his own writings!

Listen to Proverbs, chapter 4, verses 26 and 27.

Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil.

And, what about all of the other Old Testament scripture? Listen to a passage that Solomon knew and had undoubtedly heard many times in his youth. Turn to Moses' writings in Deuteronomy, chapter 17, verses 14 through 17. These are writings that Solomon knew well.

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me," you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to

return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, "You shall never again return that way." He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

Now, look II Chronicles, chapter 9, verse 25.

Now Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem.

Imagine, Solomon owned so many horses and chariots that he built cities just to house them! Continue to verses 26 through 28.

He was the ruler over all the kings from the Euphrates River even to the land of the Philistines, and as far as the border of Egypt. The king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the lowland. And they were bringing horses for Solomon from Egypt and from all countries.

If only Solomon had listened!

If only Solomon had remembered from his own writings

2. If only Solomon had remembered from his own writings.

Listen to several of his writings that are worthy or remembering:

- Proverbs, chapter 21, verse 17a,
He who loves pleasure will become a poor man . . .
- Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 25,
The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the stomach of the wicked is in need.
- Proverbs, chapter 19, verse 23a,
The fear of the Lord leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied . . .

If only Solomon had obeyed

3. If only Solomon had obeyed.

Look at Proverbs, chapter 5, verses 22 through 23,

*His own iniquities will capture the wicked,
and he will be held with the cords of his sin.
He will die for lack of instruction, and in
the greatness of his folly he will go astray.*

Timeless Lessons for Today's Christians

There are timeless lessons in Solomon's story for all of us, in any generation, at any age.

The deterioration of any believer into a lifestyle of sin never occurs without warning

1. Lesson number one is, the deterioration of any believer into a lifestyle of sin never occurs without warning.

In other words, spiritual collapse never happens overnight and it never happens without God being able to say, "I told you so!"

Imagine the warning of God through His Word to be something like the light that flashes on your car panel when your gasoline supply is getting low. You notice it and momentarily panic. Then, imagine someone seeing that warning light and saying to himself, "I probably have three or four more gallons left, so no sweat."

As he drives, however, that light irritates him. So, he pulls over, goes back to his trunk and pulls out a hammer, gets back into the car and proceeds to smash that little light, saying, "There, that fixed that! Now I can drive as long as I please."

No! He may have removed the reminder from his view, but in a few minutes, he is going to be stranded somewhere; he is going to be walking somewhere. *If you ignore that warning light, you will suffer* from the unchanging truth that you cannot drive your car without gasoline – even though most of us are dumb enough to test that truth!

That illustration relates to your walk in that, you never fall into a life of sin without ample warning. In fact, there is really no such thing as falling into sin; you walk into it with your eyes wide open. You run toward sin; you leave your telephone number so sin knows how to reach you; you call out for sin so it knows you are available.

Sin might start with something small: just one date with a non-Christian, just one lunch with a married man, just one bad check, just one sip or snort, just one magazine, just one shortcut here and

another one there. Do not ever say, after you are stranded spiritually or bankrupt morally, "It just happened so fast, I didn't have a chance."

No! This sermon alone, is just one more way that God is flashing a warning light at you. Do you see it?! None of us fall in a moment; it is really more of a slide past many different warning signs!

Making wise decisions today does not guarantee wise decisions will be made tomorrow

2. The second lesson that I believe we can learn from Solomon's collapse is this, making wise decisions today does not guarantee wise decisions will be made tomorrow.

You might say, "That's a little frightening. That makes me feel a little uncomfortable."

Well then, my job today, is to make you feel uncomfortable. As one man said, "A preacher's job is to comfort the troubled and trouble the comfortable."

So be it!

The way you can make wise decisions, you may remember from a previous discussion, is to begin with the condition of your heart and keep your ears open to wise counsel, to the Word of God and to the Spirit of God.

I read an unbelievable story in a news clipping that I was given. It was a story that had been reported in a Santa Cruz, California, area newspaper. A newly retired couple had cashed in their stocks and bonds to purchase their dream motor home. It had every "bell and whistle" imaginable. It was undoubtedly the most luxurious thing that they owned. One of the nice features on the motor home was the cruise control. They had never owned a vehicle with it before and the man was thrilled.

It was on their maiden voyage, as they were traveling up the West Coast, that the husband became tired. He asked his wife to drive while he went in the back to take a nap. She slipped behind the wheel and he showed her where everything was, especially the cruise control. He explained to her that, when she hit a stretch of straight highway, the cruise control was especially helpful at keeping a steady pace. He went to the back and fell asleep.

After an hour of straight highway driving, she finally decided to activate the cruise control. She did, and then, got up and walked back to the bathroom. She thought cruise control was automatic pilot . . . or

so she told the Highway Patrol after the accident. Neither of them were hurt, but the motor home was totaled. What a ride that must have been!

That is not only a true story, but a wonderful illustration of the Christian life – there is no such thing as automatic pilot, ever! Even when your spiritual life is “cruising,” you are advancing; making progress. That is not the time to slack off!

In other words, there is never a point in your life when you can coast. The New Testament is filled with exhortations to the believer to be alert; to be on guard. “You don’t coast to the finish line,” to paraphrase Paul from I Corinthians, chapter 9, “you run to it.”

A believer can never say, “I think I’ll just put my Christian walk on cruise control and slip out the back.”

It is interesting that, because of Solomon’s sin and his final acts of rebellion in building pagan altars, the country of Israel will be profoundly affected. In fact, the temple that Solomon built will be destroyed just a few years after his death; but those pagan altars that Solomon built will still be standing three hundred years later. A king by the name of Josiah, will finally destroy them. Solomon had bought the lie that it was possible to serve God half-heartedly; it was possible to have a golden temple and, at the same time, an altar to Molech.

Does that same deception occur today? Oh yes. Perhaps one of the biggest lies of our day is that you can have it both ways.

Pastor Ed Young writes that thinking that, you can be “Executive of the Year” and “Parent of the Year;” that you can love God and, at the same time, love the dollar bill; that you can be intimate with Jesus Christ and, at the same time, be intimate with someone other than your spouse, is a dangerous deception.

The truth is, no matter what your age, you never outlive the dangerous undertow of temptation.

The time to walk with God is not yesterday, not tomorrow, nor one day; the time to walk with God is today

3. The final lesson is this, the time to walk with God is not yesterday, not tomorrow, nor one day; the time to walk with God is today.

Alexander Maclaren wrote, in a sermon on this passage, the words,

Solomon warns us that till the very end of life, failure is possible. Solomon’s ship went down when the voyage was nearly over. He stands on the page of this history, a sad figure – a man that has had the reputation for wisdom and honour, who now shames the record of his life by a great splash of mud on the white page, near its end. Solomon’s unbridled and monstrous polygamy sapped his manhood and his principle, darkened his clear spirit, blinded his keen eye, and turned a youth of noble aspiration and a manhood of noble accomplishment into an old age without dignity, reverence, or calm. All his wisdom was worth little since it could not gain control of himself.

How do we avoid the “if only’s” at the end of our lives; at the end of this year; at the end of this coming week? By asking God to forgive you for not walking with Him yesterday – and the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse your sin.

Some of you need to do that today! Your ship is in danger of disqualification; you are in danger of moral collapse.

You avoid the “if only’s” by not planning to walk with God only when tomorrow arrives. Oh no. The way to avoid a life of “if only’s” is to walk with God today.

If only Solomon had listened; remembered; obeyed.

If only Solomon had repented

4. I will add one more “if only,” and that is, if only Solomon had repented.

Do you know that nowhere in the record of scripture is there a reference to aged Solomon repenting? You would think, after God had promised to tear his kingdom away from his son, that Solomon would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. However, that is not found!

One commentator put David’s life and Solomon’s life on a graph. David’s looked like a roller coaster: intimacy – sin – repentance. Solomon’s looked like a sheer cliff: intimacy – sin.

Turn back to I Kings, chapter 11. The final act of Solomon, recorded in verse 40, reveals that he tried to kill Jeroboam, God's anointed replacement.

Solomon sought therefore to put Jeroboam to death; but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt to Shishak king of Egypt, and he was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

Imagine, the last days of Solomon mirror the last days of King Saul. He is trying to kill God's replacement for the throne, out of rage, jealousy, and obstinacy against God's command. This is a tragic end to such a great beginning.

Conclusion

Is there an "if only" attached to your life story right now? The good news is, since you are hearing

this right now, it is not too late to set the record straight. Will you listen to God's Spirit? Will you repent? Will you remember? Will you obey? Or, will you "hold fast to these things in love"?

Dr. John Walvoord, the chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, visited our church a few years ago. We were riding in the car, talking, and he, an eighty year old Christian statesman, mused aloud and said, "I just want to finish well."

This brilliant theologian, famous author, respected statesman of the Christian faith wanted to finish well. So do I. And, so do you. We can! If we will listen, remember, repent, and obey, our vessels will come sailing into the port of heaven as gallantly as when we began.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/25/1995 by Stephen Davey.

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