

## **Sermon 21: 1 Kings 10:14-29: Solomon's wealth**

### **OUTLINE**

Gold and gifts  
Chariots and horses

### **INTRODUCTION**

The best of man is man at best is a very helpful saying when thinking about the peak of Solomon reign. We are in the chapter that is marking the high point of Solomon's wealth and influence. The text details for us the staggering wealth of Solomon's kingdom and his effect on the surrounding nations. There is much here that is good and gives glory to God. However, chapter 11 is just around the corner, the chapter that describes Solomon's turning from the Lord. A man does not suddenly become a backslider, it is a gradual thing and often there are signs that betray that course. This chapter which is one that highlights the best of Solomon's reign has some of these signs.

This portion has two sections the first looks at the gold and gifts Solomon received v14-25; the second looks at the horses and chariots Solomon accumulated and traded in v26-29.

### **Gold and gifts**

If word count determined what a section was about then this section would clearly be about gold. In v14-25 the word gold occurs 10 times. Our portion opens with the weight of gold Solomon received in one year was 666 talents, v14. One modern commentator estimates the modern value of that at about 1 billion dollars. V15 tells us that this is besides the other revenue that Solomon received from explorers, merchants and other rulers like the queen of Sheba. V16-17 describe the shields that would most likely be used in official ceremonies. There were 200 full body length shields with 6.6 kg of beaten gold covering them. Then there were also 300 smaller shields with 1.8 kg of gold beaten thin to cover them. Next we are told about Solomon's throne v18-20 It was a throne described as a great throne of ivory and gold covering it the like of which no kingdom ever had. Some have suggested instead of thinking of full and looming elephant tusks, rather think of panels of ivory with engravings of flowers and fruit then covered in gold or interspersed with gold. There were six steps leading up to it, a calf's head on the back of the throne, and two lions of gold on each step. V21 tells us that Solomon's dinner service was all gold and the gold was so abundant under Solomon that silver lost its value. V22 explains that every three years the returning ships from far away places brought in more wealth including novelty items such as pets for Solomon's zoo and of course more gold.

Lets note the positive things before we list the worries. Firstly, it must be understood that Solomon did not originally seek wealth but was promised by God when he asked for wisdom, 1 kings 3:13, 'I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.' It is very clear that God brought great blessing to Israel. Secondly, the goal of demonstrating His own glory through this king and His people was accomplished. We have seen the visit of the queen of Sheba and have here still others mentioned who sought out Solomon and as a result brought him gifts, vv23-24, 'Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.24 And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.' Thirdly, Israel itself would also have been enriched.

But we know that Solomon lost his way, money, sex and power are the three idols of many a person's heart and this was the case with Solomon. This chapter and the next must be read in light of Deut 17:16-17, 'Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.'<sup>17</sup> And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.' We will see that he will do all three of these things. Power in the form of military security through horses, sex, in the form of many foreign wives, and money in the form of excessive gold. Please notice that it says excessive gold and silver. Gold in and of itself is a good thing and a gift from God. Gold was used to furnish the tabernacle and Solomon's temple as a picture of God's heavenly glory. The streets of the New Jerusalem will be gold. A bride's ornaments were of gold, Ps. 45:9, 13. It is a good material that is used for beauty especially since it does not tarnish.

Solomon was someone who was rich but who sought to be richer. He was blessed but he turned his blessings not into gratitude and contentment but into a desire for more. He forgot that gold cannot save us, Ezek. 7:19. That wisdom is more precious than gold, 'and her profit better than gold,' Prov. 3:14b. He forgot God's law is more precious than gold, obedience better than acquisition, Ps. 19:10b-11a, 'the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold.' And that our faith purified by suffering is to be preferred and is more valuable than refined gold, 1 Pet. 1:7.

Paul has some very fitting words for us from 1 Tim. 6:6-10. Paul is addressing the problem of those who are using religion to get gain, and here he puts the things of this world in perspective. The perspective we need if we are to avoid the sin of Solomon.

V6, 'Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment.' Godliness is better than gold. We get more in godliness than any money can buy. Godliness not gold makes for the best happiness. Godliness is able to suffer loss and still be content, but covetousness cannot, Phil. 4:11, 'Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.'

V7 teaches us a truth that helps us attain this contentment, 'for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.' We did not bring any wealth with us into the world nor can we take any with us, it has no eternal value. We are owed nothing when we come into this life and so cannot complain of being robbed or of God not fulfilling His debts to us. We own nothing but all things are the Lord's and we only use everything in this life for a time and so cannot complain that we lose anything when we leave this life without our wealth. On top of that everything we have is a gift by grace. If we were honest with these facts we could feel no injustice at any loss and so learn contentment.

V8, 'But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.' Because we bring in nothing and can't take anything with us all we need are those things that help us get through this life. Food and clothing are the basics we need to survive. Paul is not denying that we can own property or a car, but making a statement to support the truths of v7. The godly who know what lies ahead of them and who know that they can take nothing with them can be content if their daily needs are provided for not their every greed, phil. 4:11, 'I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.'

V9 teaches us what happens to those who do not learn this contentment but instead of contentment experience its opposite covetousness, 'But those who desire to be rich fall into

temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.' Please notice that Paul does not say those who are rich but those who desire to be rich. There are those who are rich by God's providence and then there are those whose heart is set on riches. Solomon was one who was rich providentially as God gave him the riches he did not ask for but then Solomon got carried away with it and began to amass wealth more and more to excess.

There is a profound lesson here. It seems that Solomon did not struggle with wealth as a younger man but it became a snare as he became older. We might be aware of certain sins that we are prone to but let down our guard towards others thinking that we don't suffer from those weaknesses. Here we see that we are prone to all sorts of sins. The reason for this is because soft pleasures harden the heart. We are so affected as sinners that even our blessings can become snares. If even the gift of the law of God can be a tool that our sinful hearts use to envisage sin, e.g. coveting your neighbours stuff. Then the blessings of God which are meant as a token of His bounty can become golden handcuffs if we do not guard our hearts.

Prov. 4:23, 'Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.' Whatever you set your heart upon the rest of your life will follow. Your paths, your hands, your words, the thoughts of your heart will all be given to whatever you have given your heart to. If our hearts are set on the majesty of Christ, the glory of our reward, the beauty of holiness, the horror of sin, the fleeting nature of riches and the sufficiency of God's daily grace then the lures of sin will fall on deaf ears. A happily married man can easily rebuff the advances of a temptress and so a Christian whose heart is properly set on the right things can resist the desire for riches and its empty promises.

We see that the desire for riches puts one on the path where we fall into temptation, because our hearts are already committed to sin we easily fall into it.

Also we fall into snares. When one is out in the wild and going through territory where other hunters may have laid traps the observant traveller will see the traps and avoid them. However those whose attention is fixed on riches is not watching out for traps and warning signs and before they know it they have been taken in and trapped.

Paul also talks about many senseless desires. Some desires make sense and even a veneer of logic as we reason to have them, but when the heart is handed over to a sin even dumb and obviously wrong and destructive actions are made in order to obtain sin. Alcohol and drugs are examples of senseless desires. To put poisons into your body for a fleeting feeling is dumb, but we as sinners are willing to pursue senseless desires. When it comes to money how many have impoverished themselves with gambling seeking easy wealth? How many have destroyed their families as they committed themselves to a career to secure a life others would envy? How many people throw money at the lottery trying to get that desired wealth? Senseless desires!

Paul elaborates on this in v10, 'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.' Please notice that Paul does not say money is the root of all kinds of evil, but rather the love of money. It is a root that bears many types of fruit. Highway robbers and pirates have killed for money. Some have sold their bodies or others into slavery for money. Many have swindled the public with bad products or employed child workers being manipulative and deceptive for money. A lot of evil in the world today can be placed at the foot of the love of money. Paul lists the worst possible sin there is abandoning the Lord for money, 'some have wandered from the faith.' One can think of Judas a handpicked disciple of Christ who saw the miracles and heard the teaching and saw the

perfect life of Christ first hand yet because of his love for money sold Christ out. Paul mentions Demas, 2 Tim. 4:10, 'For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.' We can think of Achan who kept the plunder from Jericho, Judges 7. Paul spells out the consequences, they will be pierced through with many sorrows. Solomon is another casualty of pursuing wealth.

Paul tells Timothy how to avoid this trap, v11-12, 'But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.<sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.' Negatively he must flee these things and positively he must pursue godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness not holidaying but fighting the good fight. Or in the words of Christ, Matt. 6:19-21, "'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

### **Chariots and horses**

The last part of the chapter, v26-29 is also focused upon Solomon's wealth but in particular his horses and chariots. V26, 'And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem.' Your chariots and horses would be the equivalent of today's tanks and helicopters. This is not a record of the infantry but your more powerful armaments. No doubt Israel needed an army but the stats produced here indicate a significant army. It appears that Solomon was no longer practicing the faith of his father David, Ps. 20:7, 'Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.' God had promised Israel that He would be their protector and fight for them. He promised that if they were obedient they would know His blessings of protection and empowering. Solomon moved away from living by faith and depending upon the arm of flesh.

V27, 'And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah.' We have mentioned the gold that Solomon amounted, but here we are told about all the excessive silver he collected as well. This is in violation of the prohibition laid out in Deut. 17:17.

V28-29, 'And Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king's traders received them from Kue at a price.<sup>29</sup> A chariot could be imported from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver and a horse for 150, and so through the king's traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria.' Deut. 17:16-17 forbids Israel from going back to Egypt for horses yet this is exactly what Solomon does. No doubt as a result of his marriage alliance with the Pharaoh he is able to secure the horses cheaper and sell them cheaper than others building up a monopoly on the horse and chariot trade. In other words, Solomon the man of peace became an arms dealer. But there is irony in this. For in 1 Kings 14:25-26, 'In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made.' Egypt who Solomon bought from ended up attacking Judah. And Syria who Solomon sold horses and chariots to ended up attacking later on as well.

Sure there are signs of wealth and success and good business relations and trader savvy, but there are severe signs of spiritual digression and disobedience. Matt. 16:26, 'For what will it

profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?