

"SOLOMON - A SYMBOL OF OUR TIME"

INTRODUCTION

It's interesting to note that when Jesus wanted a word picture to describe the rich splendor of the flowers of Galilee, he stretched back across seven centuries of time to recall a name that was familiar to all of his listeners. "Even Solomon" he said, "in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these". And when we, in the 20th century, want a person - a Biblical character - who portrays power, prosperity, privilege, prestige, wealth and wisdom, we would find it difficult, I think, to find a more fitting symbol than this royal and regal figure who ruled over Israel at the height of its glory. In many ways, Solomon is a symbol of our time and our community.

Who was this man that Jesus hailed as an emblem of elegance. What do you know about him. How much do you remember about him from your days in Sunday School. He was David's son, he was known for his wealth and his wisdom, he built the great Temple in Jerusalem. But from there on our recollections begin to fade into the foggy impression that somehow Solomon never fulfilled the promise of his privilege and ability.

REVIEW HIS LIFE

Certain it is that no ruler ever began his term of office under more auspicious circumstances than did Solomon. David, his father, gave him his blessing and said to him: "Be strong in the Lord and show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord your God - walk in his ways and keep his commandments". The kingdom of Israel that he inherited was quite extensive in miles. There were no internal or external problems in the land. Peace prevailed. And it's interesting to note too that Solomon began his reign in prayerful partnership with God. The prayer which he offered was repeated by a president of our own nation upon his sudden induction into the responsibilities of that high office:

"I am but a little child....give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil"

And it would seem that Solomon's prayer for an "understanding mind" was answered for word soon spread far and wide about his great wisdom. Even the Queen of Sheba heard about it and had to come to see for herself. And after she had heard and seen, she was convinced. "Your wisdom and your prosperity surpass the report I have heard" she said to King Solomon. And of course, Solomon's claim to fame rested not alone on his great wisdom for it was he who master-minded the building of that magnificent Temple in Jerusalem that was for centuries the focal point of the Jewish faith.

The arly chapters in his life suggest to us a man who was destined for greatness for he did have a great mind, a great soul, a great personality, and great wealth. But somewhere along the line he slipped-up and that potential for greatness was never completely realized. This does happen. You began to feel and sense this as you read along through the story of his life, you feel him losing his footing. For instance, in referring to the building of the temple, it says: "He was seven years in building the Temple of the Lord, but was building his own house thirteen years."

The story of his later years is a study in sensuality and selfishness. Luxury and the gratification of his sensual appetites became his chief aim. The climax comes when Solomon became so accomodating in his religious views that the object of his worship was determined by the fancy of his particular wife of the moment. He started with one of the most promising and privileged beginnings on record, but something happened and his life's story ends in the misty flats of comfort, compromise and conformity.

HIS WISDOM

There are two reasons why I suggest to you that he is a symbol of our time. For one thing, he did possess great wisdom. He was given an understanding mind and apparently he used it to probe deeper and push further than any man up to that point. The temple he master-minded was a significant engineering feat. It was superior to anything that Israel had ever seen. So were his palace and his throne. And moreover he was wise in his dealings with people - that rare and brilliant combination of scholar, psychologist, diplomat and sociologist. You remember I'm sure how he solved that riddle of the two women who both claimed to be mother of the same child. Cut the child in half; give half to each mother. "No" screamed one mother. "All right" said the other. And the child went to the mother who had screamed "no".

He had great wisdom. Surely we see parallels in our age. We, too, live in a time that possesses great wisdom. We, too, have probed deeper and pushed further into the mystery of life and the universe than any other generation before us. The advances in the field of knowledge have been breath-taking and it continues. An article in LOOK magazine this Fall said that 75% of the drugs in the pharmaceutical industry today were not in existence ten years ago, that 90% of the drugs used by doctors today were not known in 1944. I'm fond of that story about the two six year olds, two first graders. It is not altogether incredible. "Do you think" said one of them "that these thermonuclear projectiles will pierce the heat barrier?" "No" said the other, "I don't - because you see once the force enters the stratosphere...." - but then they were interrupted by the bell ringing. "Gee...too bad" now we've got to go in and string beads.."

But knowledge will not save us any more than it saved Solomon. We can travel faster, but what good does it do if we don't know where we're going. Or we can conquer space, but what good will it do if we cannot conquer human sin and selfishness. It comes around to this: something more is needed than factual knowledge if we are to survive what the mind of man has invented. Our world needs light, yes, but it also needs warmth. Those words on the lobby of the RGA building in our own city come to mind:

"Man's ultimate destiny depends not on whether he can learn new lessons or make new discoveries and conquest - but on his acceptance of the lessons taught him close upon two thousand years ago".

What good are the discoveries of our time, if we cannot get along with each other. Something more than knowledge is needed!

WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE

A second reason why Solomon is a symbol of our time is because he was privileged; he was the possessor of great wealth. And so are we! What a contrast

between the early days of his life and the early days of his father's life. David's early years, as we saw last Sunday, were marked by austerity and discipline. He was a farmer's son, brought up on the farm. Solomon was brought up in the palace with all the things that money could buy - a good education, fine clothes. His reign was a peaceful one - no wars, no famine; he could think about building more stately mansions for himself and for God. I suppose David made a mistake in giving Solomon too many of the things he had never had as a boy. Many of us do this.

Yes, we, too, are privileged. Think for a moment of the privileges that the passing of the years has brought. We live in push button homes; for fathers and our forefathers had to push their way across the wilderness. Our parents would take us to the county fair; that was the big event. We think nothing of packing up and taking our children half way around the world. We live in this great affluent society....

And yet, all around us there is such extreme need and poverty. A few blocks to the north of us we can see some of our own citizens living in utter poverty - widespread unemployment, poor housing. Or look at it on a larger basis. In this lop sided world community, one small group of nations has become immensely wealthy. These nations represent 16 per cent of the world's people and they own 70 per cent of its wealth. Meanwhile three quarters of the human race lives in a state of poverty bordering on or below the subsistence level. These are current statistics; taken from last Sunday's New York Times. As long as such things exist in this world, Christian people cannot sit at ease in Zion.

It has been said: "To whom much is given, much is expected" and I believe it. "Rich in things, poor in soul" is the way one hymn sums up our time. We need to be far more agitated, far more concerned and active on behalf of the have-nots of this world. If we were in their shoes, we too would be protesting and demonstrating. Perhaps they will say of some of us what they said of a man buried near a church in Warwickshire, England:

"Here lies a miser who lived for himself
And cared for nothing, but gathering pelf.
Now where he is or how he fares
Nobody knows and nobody cares."

A LOOK AT OURSELVES

I think we need, on occasion, to be prodded to look at ourselves in light of all this. As you know, this is the time of year when your church asks you to review and re-examine your giving to the work of Christ in the world. It's not just a matter of making a budget; it's also a matter of what is happening to us. Next Sunday is not only our Thanksgiving Sunday, but it is also our "Dedication Sunday". And how appropriate that this year we dedicate our gifts to the church for the coming year on the Sunday when we pause to remember the blessings of the past year.

Some of you may have heard the story about the preacher who was pretty hard on his congregation. One Sunday morning he preached on the sin of drinking. There was a little lady over in the corner of

* it's a matter of values, of what things you put first in your life...

his church who responded to what he said with an enthusiastic "Amen, brother, Amen". And then he went to talk about the sin of carousing and again there came "Amen, brother, amen". He proceeded to talk about the sins of lying, cheating and again there came forth this audible and enthusiastic "Amen, brother, Amen". The preacher was beginning to get upset by all of this "Amen-ing" and suddenly remembered that this good sister was a snuff dipper. And so he said, "Friends, let us never forget the sin of snuff dipping". Whereupon she jumped to her feet and pointed her finger at the preacher and said, "Preacher you can edify, you can glorify, you can mollify, but don't you dare specify".

I hope that none of you will react in similar fashion should I specify at this point on this matter of your church and your part in its financial program, crusade. I would be most specific and say this to you: we are a privileged people. We have been blessed abundantly. And to whom much is given, much is expected. What a person gives to the church is solely up to the individual conscience. The Bible speaks of the tithe - the tithe for some may be too much while for others, it may not be nearly enough! If you want a guideline: give until it begins to hurt a little. It's good for the soul, for inner discipline. Then, I think you'll know you're doing what the Lord expects of you!

You may have read the article in TIME magazine this past week entitled: "Churches - Givers, Big and Small". The latest per capita averages of giving for the various Protestant denominations is given. This article pointed out that the holiness sects proved to be most zealous in support of their churches with an average of \$358.17. The lowest per-capita donations were recorded by the Methodists and the Southern Baptists. They recorded \$59.60. About a dollar a week, or roughly a subway token a day to their church. Whom among us, if we care deeply about the church and take seriously its mission, can deny the need to be specific on this matter.

We have set our sights quite high for 1965 in this church. I am not discouraged by this task, however. I know of your love and devotion for the church and the Christian way. To ask for \$30,000 from a congregation of 300 members may seem like a big undertaking to some of you, but it is not outside the realm of possibility. This church, we feel, is on the brink of great things, on the verge of breaking through for real advances in terms of service and witness in this community. If we are to press forward, we shall need your help. ~~But~~ such is the nature of Christianity that when we put our hands and hearts to any big, challenging task, new power comes and we grow bigger in the doing of it. What we make, makes us.

I heard a story this past week about how a congregation back in frontier days built their church. It was a Baptist church in the southland. Like many Baptist churches, it was built by the river side. (The Baptists always like to sing that song: Shall we gather by the river?). The logs for the church were hauled to the river's edge and then a work bee was called and forty or more able bodied men along with their wives gathered for a day's work. There was no machinery to lift the logs; always muscle strength. While the women chatted and prepared the meals, the men worked together and log after log was lifted out of the river and set in place. Finally they came to the last log - the log that was to be set on top as the binder. It was 60 to 70 feet long and was very heavy and huge.

Every man got down in the muddy river bottom. The foreman stood on the side and gave the instructions: "On the count of one, lift it to your knees; on two, catch your breath and bring it to your waist; on three, up to the shoulders, and on four, up, over your head and put it in place". And so they started: "One" up it came to their knees and they grunted and got their breath. "Two" up to the waist. "Three" they hoisted it up to their shoulders and walked over to where it was to be placed. Every muscle taut, every nerve tense. And then "Four" - up it went over their heads and it began to waver. To drop it meant that some would be crushed. "Hold it there" cried the foreman. "Don't move". He called to the women to come. They were standing and watching. They got under it with their weight, some with hands under the elbows of sons and husbands and then all together they lifted the huge, heavy log into place.

Give us a church like that here! And no matter what it is: missionary thrust, evangelistic outreach, training of children in the faith, lifting voices in song in praise to God, raising the yearly budget - with every back under the load, with every member and every friend of this congregation doing his part until it hurts a little, with every hand lifting - there is no victory that we cannot win, no task which Under God we cannot accomplish. I believe it. I believe we can do it here. And in so doing, we shall erect a great church: great in service, great in spirit, great in influence in this city and across this land. It will be a temple to the glory of God that will be greater than any men have ever dreamed of building.....in place.....before us.

LET US PRAY

O God and master of us all, now help us to put into practice these things we believe and feel so deeply. We do this to thy glory always remembering the words of Jesus: "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me". Remembering him we pray in his spirit.

And in so doing, we shall build a church far greater than any Temple ever built by Solomon.... a church

and far greater than anything envisioned by those who in 1837 gathered in this place

~~They have given us a great heritage.~~

~~Will we be able to fulfill their hopes and dreams?~~

~~We have a great heritage....an even greater future.. a glorious opportunity. Will you~~

We have a great heritage.

We have an even greater future.

We have a glorious opportunity given to us. Let us seize it and do something with it.

"SOLOMON - A SYMBOL OF OUR TIME"

INTRODUCTION

Those of you who were present last Sunday morning will recall that we looked into the Old Testament and together reviewed the Story of David - the shepherd boy who rose to become the King of Israel. Again today, we turn to the Old Testament - this time to review the story of Solomon - David's son and successor. There are several things in his life's story that we would do well to consider.

DEVELOPMENT

It is interesting to note that when Jesus wanted a word picture to describe the rich splendor of the flowers of Galilee, he stretched back across seven centuries to recall a name that was familiar to all of his listeners. He said to them, "Even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And when we in the 20th century want a character who represents power, prestige, privilege, wealth and wisdom, we should be hard pressed to find a more fitting symbol than this royal and regal figure who ruled over Israel at the height of its glory. In many ways he is a symbol of our time.

Who was this man that Jesus hailed as an emblem of elegance? I'm sure that all of you can recall fragments from the story of Solomon from your days in Sunday School: David's son, known for his wisdom, famed for his building of the great temple in Jerusalem, and then from there on our recollections fade away into the foggy impression that somehow Solomon never fulfilled the promise of his abilities and achievements.

RETRACE HIS STEPS

Suppose we take a few moments to retrace his steps and review the highlights of his life.

You'll recall from last week that David picked Solomon among his sons as his successor and spoke these words to him, words which are unexcelled as an expression of the heritage and hope of a father for his son:

"Be strong and show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord your God - walking in his ways and keeping his commandments".

Certain it is that no ruler ever began his term of office under more auspicious circumstances than did Solomon. The territory of Israel was quite extensive in miles and a peaceful mood in the land prevailed as he assumed the highest office of the land. It's interesting to note that he began his reign in a prayerful partnership with God. The prayer which he offered was repeated by a president of our own nation upon his sudden induction into the responsibilities of that high office.

"I am but a little child....give thy servant there an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?"

Now it would seem that Solomon's prayer for "an understanding mind" was answered and answered abundantly for word about his great wisdom traveled far and wide. The record has it that even the

Queen of Sheba heard of it and had to come and see for herself. And after she had heard and seen, she was convinced. She confessed, "Your wisdom and your prosperity surpass the report I have heard"

Of course, Solomon's claim to fame rested not alone on his wisdom for it was he who master-minded the building of that magnificent temple in Jerusalem that was for centuries to be the focal point of Jewish religion. I remember being in Jerusalem ten years ago and seeing the location, the site of where Solomon's great temple was erected. The Dome of the Rock stands today on that great historic site.

The early chapters in his life's story suggest to us a man who was destined for real greatness for he did have a great mind, a great soul, great wealth and a great personality. But somewhere along the line, Solomon slipped up and the potential for greatness was never completely realized. You begin to feel and sense this as you read through the story of his life, you sense him losing his footing for instance this verse suggests something to us: (speaking of his building the Lord's house) "He was seven years in building the Temple of the Lord, but Solomon was building his own house thirteen years". The story of his later years is a study in sensuality and selfishness. Luxury and the gratification of his sensual appetites became his chief aim, and the climax comes when Solomon became so accomodating in his religious views that the object of his worship was determined by the fancy of his particular wife of the moment. He started with one of the most promising and privileged beginnings on record, but his life's story ends in the misty flats of compromise and conformity.

There are two reasons why I suggest that he is a symbol of our time.

HIS WISDOM First of all, Solomon possessed great wisdom. He was given an understanding mind and evidently used it to probe deeper and push farther than any man up to that point. This great temple he constructed; it was a remarkable engineering feat. It was superior to anything that Israel had ever seen. So were his palace and his throne. Moreover, he was wise in his dealings with people. He was that rare and brilliant combination of scholar, sociologist, psychiatrist and diplomat.

Surely we see parallels in our age. We too live in a time that is the possessor of great wisdom. We, too, have probed deeper and pushed further into the mystery of the universe and life than any other generation before us. The advances in the field of knowledge in our lifetime have been breath-taking and these advances continue. I happened to read in a copy of LOOK magazine this Fall that 75% of the drugs in the pharmaceutical industry today were not in existence ten years ago. And that story about the conversation held by two first graders outside school one morning is not altogether incredible. "Do you think" asked on six year old, "that the thermonuclear projectiles will pierce the heat barrier?" "No I don't" said the other, "For once the force enters the stratosphere..." but then they were interrupted by the sounding of the bell. "Too bad" said the first..."now we've got to go in and string beads"

But knowledge will not save us any more than it saved Solomon. We can travel faster, but what good does it do if we don't know where we are going. Or we can conquer space, but what good will it do if we cannot conquer human sin and selfishness. I think it comes around to this: something more than factual knowledge is needed. Our world needs light, yes, but it also needs warmth. What good are the discoveries of our time if we cannot learn to live in harmony and understanding with each other. We're reminded of those words inscribed on the wall of the lobby of the RCA building in our own city:

"Man's ultimate destiny depends not on whether he can learn new lessons or make new discoveries and conquests - but on his acceptance of the lessons taught him close upon two thousand years ago".

Like Solomon, we are wise. But remember that his wisdom did not save him. Something more than factual knowledge is needed.

WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE

Secondly, I say that Solomon is a symbol of our time because he was the possessor of great wealth and was privileged. And so are we. What a contrast between the early days of his life and the early days of David's life. David's early years were marked by austerity and discipline. Solomon's years were marked by privilege and all that money could buy. Solomon had peace and prosperity within the borders of his kingdom in comparison to the tumultuous reign of his father. Solomon didn't have to worry about wars and famine. He could think about building more stately mansions for himself and for God.

We, too, live in a privileged society. Just think for a moment of the multiplication of privileges that the passing of the years has brought. We live in push button homes; our forefathers pushed their way across the wilderness. Our parents would take us to the county fair; we think nothing of packing up and taking our children around the world. We live in this great affluent society.....

And yet all around us there is extreme need and poverty. Ten to twelve city blocks north of us we can see some of our own citizens living in utter poverty - widespread unemployment, poor housing. Look at it if you will on the larger basis. In this lop sided world community one small group of nations has become immensely wealthy. These nations represent 16 per cent of the world's people and they own 70 per cent of its wealth; meanwhile three quarters of the human race lives in a state of poverty bordering on or below the subsistence level. These percentages are current. I quote an article here from last Sunday's New York Times.

It has been said: "To whom much is given, much is expected". "Rich in things and poor in soul" is the way one of the great hymns sums up our civilization. As concerned Christians we need to be far more agitated and active on behalf of the under-privileged and less fortunate than we are. I wonder whether they will say of some of us what they said of this man buried near a church in Warwickshire, England:

"Here lies a miser who lived for himself
And cared for nothing but gathering pelf.
Now where he is or how he fares
Nobody knows and nobody cares"

A LOOK AT OURSELVES

"To whom much is given, much is expected"

So much for Solomon. I think we need to seriously look at ourselves in light of all this. As you know, this is the time of year when your church asks you to review and to re-examine your giving to the work of Christ in the world. Next Sunday is not only our Thanksgiving Sunday, but it is also "Dedication Sunday". And how appropriate that this year we dedicate our gifts to the church for the coming year on the Sunday when we pause to remember the blessings of the past year!

Some of you may have heard the story about the preacher who was pretty hard on his congregation. One Sunday morning he preached on sin and he started off by talking about the sin of drinking. There was a little lady over in the corner who responded to what he was saying by saying "Amen, brother, Amen". Then he went on to talk about the sin of carousing and again she responded with "Amen, brother, Amen". Then he talked about the sins of lying, and cheating and again there came forth an enthusiastic and audible "Amen, brother amen". The preacher began to get a little irritated and agitated by all this "amen-ing" and he remembered that she was a snuff dipper. And so he said, "And good friends, let us never forget the terrible sin of snuff dipping". Whereupon she jumped to her feet and waved her arm and said, "Preacher - you can edify, you can glorify, you can mollify, but don't you dare specify!"

I hope that none of you will react in similar fashion if I should specify, if I should be specific at this point - on this matter of your church and your part in its financial crusade. Yes - we are a privileged people; we have been blessed abundantly. And to whom much is given, much is expected. Of course, what to give to the church is solely up to the individual conscience. The Bible, I know, speaks of the tithe - but the tithe for some may be too much (not leaving a margin for living) while for others, the tithe may not nearly be enough. I think it's good to give until it begins to hurt a little - it's good for the soul, good for the inner life.

You may have seen the article in this week's TIME magazine entitled: "Churches - Givers - Big and Small". The article lists the latest averages of giving (per-capita giving) for the various Protestant bodies. Mr. Lowry who presented the budget last week called my attention to it. The article points out that the tiny holiness sects proved to be most zealous in support of their churches with an average of \$358.17. The lowest per-capita donations were recorded by the Methodists and the southern baptists. The Methodists averaged \$59.60 a year. That's about a dollar a week - or roughly the cost of one subway ride a day. Who among us, if we care at all about the church and its mission, can deny the need to become more specific on these matters.

What a great ministry we would carry on in this church in Christ's name were money no problem, no consideration. We find ourselves surrounded by a sea of human need. What we could accomplish in Christ's name - in this place, in this community, in this city, in meeting human need - if we could afford two full time ministers, or one full time secretary, or a social worker on the staff of this church. Holy Trinity on East 88th Street this past year added one person to their staff this year solely to work in the field of narcotics and drug addiction.

I am not the least bit discouraged by the task we have set for ourselves for 1965. To ask for \$30,000 from a congregation like this may seem like a big undertaking to some of you, but it is not outside the realm of possibility. This church, I feel, is on the brink of great things, of significant break through in terms of witness and service and growing membership. And such is the nature of Christianity that when we put our hands and hearts to any big, challenging task, new power comes and we grow bigger in the doing of it.

I heard a story this past week about how a congregation in frontier days built their church. It was a Baptist church. Like many Baptist churches it was built by the river side. The Baptists always like to sing, "Shall we gather at the River?" They had hauled the big logs to the river's edge and then called a work "bee" - 40 or 50 able bodied men with their wives and children came together to spend the day working. There was no machinery in those days to lift the logs. It had to be done with sheer muscle strength. So while the women chatted and prepared the dinner, the men got down in the mud and lifted log after log into place, until they came to the last log - the log that was to be set on top as a binder. It was a huge, heavy log - 70 feet long.

Every man got down in the muddy river bottom. The foreman gave instructions: "On the count of one, bring it to your knees and catch your breath; on the count of two, bring it up to your waist. On the count of three, up the shoulders, catch another breath and then on the count of four - up over your head and set it on." They started. "One" they lifted it to their knees and grunted. "Two" up it came to their waists. "Three" they hoisted it to their shoulders. "Four" shouted the foreman. "All together". And up they lifted, every muscle taut, every nerve tense and then - it wavered. To drop it meant that someone would be crushed. "Hold it" cried the foreman. "Don't move - any of you". He shouted to the women who stood watching and they got down in the mud, too, and put their weight under the log, some with hands under the elbows of sons and husbands and all together they lifted the great log and set it into place.

Give us a church like that here! And no matter what it is - missionary thrust, evangelistic outreach, training of our children in the faith, raising the yearly budget - with every back under the load, with every member, every friend of this congregation doing his or her part, with every hand lifting - there is no victory we cannot win, no task which under God we cannot accomplish. I believe we can do it here. And in so doing, we shall build a great church - great in service, in spirit - that will rival any Temple of any age that men have ever dreamed of building.

LET US PRAY

O God and master of us all, help us to put into practice in our daily lives these things we feel and believe deeply and honestly. And now as we go about our way, help us to live and to manage that which has been given to us as a trust from Thee remembering the words of Jesus: "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me". Remembering Him, we pray in his spirit. Amen