

"WISDOM AND WEALTH"

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 personality - who portrays power and prosperity, ~~wealth and wisdom~~, we would find it difficult 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 nation.

Who was this man that Jesus hailed as an emblem of elegance? How much do we remember about him from our days in Sunday School? For one thing, we recall that he was David's son and that he gained a reputation for his unique wisdom and great wealth. We remember, too, that 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. We read in the book of Kings that his father, David, 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 also interesting to note 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 about it, 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 masterminded the building of that magnificent Temple in Jerusalem that was for centuries the focal point of the Jewish faith.

The early chapters in his life's story suggest to us a man who was destined for greatness for he did have a great mind, a great soul, and great wealth. But somewhere along the line he slipped up and that potential for greatness was never completely realized. You began to feel and sense this as you read along through the narrative in the book of Kings - 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 he was thirteen years in building his own house".

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 promosing and privileged beginnings on record, but something happened and his life's story seems to end, unfortunately, in the misty flats of comfort, compromise and conformity.

Pause

Solomon

HIS WISDOM There are two reasons why I suggested to you ~~earlier~~ that ~~he~~ is a symbol of our own time. First, he possessed great wisdom. He was the possessor of an understanding mind, and apparently he used it to probe deeper and push further than any man up to that point. The Temple in Jerusalem that he drew up the blue-prints for 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 may remember how he solved the 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".

Solomon possessed geat 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 that is our home than any other generation before us. The advacnes in the field of knowledge have been breath-taking and they continue.

Sometime ago there was an article in LOOK magazine that pointed out that 75% of the drugs in the pharmaceutical industry today were not in existence fifteen years ago, and that 90% of the drugs used by doctors today were not known in 1944. Perhaps you've heard this story about about the two six year old children. 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 ringing of the school bell. "Gee.....too bad....now we've got to go in and string beads".

But knowledge, my friends, will not save us any more than it aaved 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. Our world needs light, but it also needs warmth - compassion - understanding. The words inscribed on the wall of the lobby of the RCA buidling here 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 conquests - but on his acceptance of the lessons taught him close upon two thousand years ago".

Something more than factual knowledge is needed if we are to survive what the mind of man has invented. What good are all the marvellous discoveries of our time, if we cannot get along with each other.

WEALTH A second reason why Solomon is a symbol of our time is because he was the poessessor 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. The early years of his father, David's, life were marked by austerity and discipline. He was a farmer's son, brought upoon the farm. Solomon was brought up in the palace with all the things

that money could buy. His reign was a peaceful one - no wars, no famine. He could think about building more stately mansions for himself and for God. Perhaps David made a mistake in giving Solomon too many of the things he had never had as a boy.

We, too, are a privileged people, living in a prosperous land, in a world in which there is great suffering, a world in which hunger and poverty have become the dominating issues and on the solution of which the future of mankind depends. Three-quarters of the human race lives in a state of poverty bordering on or below the subsistence level. Dr. Henry Smith Leiper, former associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches, brought our world into brilliant focus in his study of an imaginary city of 1,000 people representing the entire world. Let me share part of this with you.

If in our imagination we might compress the total population of the world, now more than three billion persons, into a community of 1,000 persons living in a single town, this is how it would look:

"Sixty persons would represent the present US population; the rest of the world would be represented by 940 persons. The 60 Americans would be receiving half of the total income of the community; the 940 other persons would share the remaining half. ~~Of the Americans in the town, 36 would be members of Christian churches and 24 would not.~~ In the town as a whole about 330 would be classified as Christians, and 670 would not.

And classified as to skin color, 303 people would be white, and 697 would be classified as non-white. The 60 Americans would have 15 times as many possessions per person as all the rest of the people. The Americans would produce 16% of the world food supply, yet would eat 72% above the minimum food requirements of the rest of the world. Most of the non-American people in this imaginary compressed community would be ignorant, poor, hungry and sick. Half of them would be unable to read or write. ~~Moreover, half of these people in this community would never have heard of Jesus Christ, or what He taught, and for what He lived and died...."~~

It has been said: "To whom much is given, much is expected". And those of us who have been privileged to be brought up in this land, in the midst of this affluent society, have been given much. We need to be far more concerned and agitated and active on behalf of the have-nots of our world. 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 look at ourselves in light of all this. 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. It's tied in with our values, with how much we care and how deeply concerned we are for others. Like Solomon of old, we have been given much. Now the question that we shall be facing is: how much are we willing to give? How much do we care? And can we fulfill the promise of our inheritance of wisdom and wealth in great terms or will we, too, end up in the misty flats of comfort, compromise and conformity?

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How much do we care? This is a question that gets put to us in many ways day after day. Perhaps for those who are part of this fellowship it gets put to us pre-eminently in the budget of the church. For behind all of the budget figures there is simply this question, and only this: "Who cares?" Your pledge is your answer. It is not your only answer, of course. There are many other ways, very personal and private ways that will give your answer to that question. There are people in your family, or neighborhood, or place of work, that you will give your answer to, in ways that will take time, effort and energy, but answer you must finally: "Who cares?" It is through this budget that has been put into your hands and about which Mr. Bush spoke here earlier that we say collectively as a congregation that we care. And through our pledges individually, we say whether we care personally and how much! More and more I feel that what a person cares about can be seen most clearly not in the words he speaks or the creeds he recites, but in the stubs of his checkbook.

Like Solomon of old, we, too, have gotten off to a good start. Do we care, each of us, care enough to stay with this ministry that we have begun? There are times when our victories seem very few and very small and we get discouraged. It is difficult, very difficult, to find effective ways of alleviating human suffering here in this great city, to find relevant ways of ministering to men and women who have needs that are large and complex. But your leaders are trying, and we have pledged ourselves to keep trying. Do we care enough to stay with it? Do we care enough to expand it? To go beyond our present level of caring? Our living costs are going up, and our benevolence giving is being increased by 20% for the coming year. If we are to achieve our goals for 1968, many of us will have to pledge much more, and all of us a little more, as well as enlist the support of new persons who care. 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 challenging task, new power comes and we grow bigger in the doing of it. What we make, makes us!

Some time ago I heard a story about how a congregation back in frontier days built their church. It was a church that was built by the side of a river. The logs for that 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; it was sheer muscle strength that did it. While the women chatted and prepared the meals, the ~~men~~ men worked together and log after log was lifted out of the river and set in place. Finally that came to the last log - the log that was to be set on top as the binder. It was a log some 70 to 80 feet in length, ver heavy; very thick.

Every man present got down in the muddy river. The foreman took a few seconds to offer instructions. "On the count of ONE, lift it to your knees; on the count of TWO, bring it up to your waist; on the count of THREE, up to your shoulders; and on FOUR, lift it up ovr your heads and walk it into position". And so they started. "ONE" up to the waist. "TWO" - up to the waist. "THREE" - they hoisted it up to their shoulders and walked it over to where the church was being built. "FOUR" - up it went, over their heads. And then it began to waver, sway, totter. To drop it meant that some would be crushed. "Hold it there" called out the foreman. "Don'T move". Quickly he called to all of the women to come. They were standing, watching. They got under it with their weight, some with their 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, 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 parish doing his part...with every hand lifting - there is no victory that we cannot win, no task which undre God we cannot accomplisg. 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, and great in influence across this city and nation. God grant that we as a congregation may have the wisdom to share our wealth that this may come to pass.

PRAYER O Thou who art the giver of all good things, who hast given unto us privilege and prosperity, wisdom and wealth, grant that we may use these gifts wisely in behalf of those in need. We pray that thou wilt bless that which in thy name we attempt to do in this church. 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". In his spirit, we pray. Amen