

**THE HARDER THEY FALL****1 Kings 11:1-8**

**Intro:** There's an idiom that says "*The bigger they come, the harder they Fall.*" The origin of it is apparently from boxing, where it's obvious—if a 250 pound blob of pure muscle comes at you swinging, it will take a well-placed punch on the chin to stop him. But if by chance, you succeed, the harder he comes, the harder he falls. It's the law of momentum.

We see this when prominent leaders, or worse yet, preachers or religious leaders are exposed in some kind of sin and perversion. Their influence is demolished, their witness is destroyed, and the residual aftermath is devastating. I've seen my heroes and friends fall over the years and I've been heartbroken and confused every time. Part of it is a sense of betrayal, but a big part of it is the realization that I am just as susceptible to such spectacular failure. Because everyone is if they their guard down.

Solomon was the wisest man. In 1 Kings 3 we read of how, in a dream, the Lord said to Solomon, "*Ask what I shall give you.*" 1 Kings 3:5. While he could have asked for anything, Solomon asked for wisdom. In the end the Lord granted him great wisdom and mind-boggling prosperity. The chapters that follow in 1 Kings describe Solomon as a man who is very wise and astute and successful in building a kingdom, palaces, and a beautiful temple. Interspersed in those descriptions is a picture of a man who enjoyed excess. Yes, he was the wisest man, and he was the richest man. His country expanded its borders and became a superpower. His prayer at the dedication of the temple is amazing. It is a picture of a man who knew God.

Solomon's wisdom writings in Proverbs, which we've been studying for the past two months, show a man who was indeed wise. But his writing in Ecclesiastes shows a man who's wealth and success are proving to be not all they were cracked up to be. And then his Song of Songs, which we know as the Song of Solomon, is a long love story that betray a man who was an incurable romantic – so much so it could get him in a lot of trouble. He was a man of great wisdom and depth and he could even write a sweet love sonnet.

Solomon had it all. But, the bigger they come, the harder they fall. Let's look at our text for today.

**(Read 1 Kings 11:1-8)**

Yep, Solomon was livin' the dream. But the dream becomes a bit unraveled in a more nightmarish scenario as we see here in the recipe for the disaster found in these 8 short verses.

This past week at Vacation Bible School we placed mezuzahs on the door posts of every door into this room. A mezuzah is a little metal case that is in the entry of any good Jewish home. Inside the little case is a piece of paper with scripture on it. As people enter into a home they touch the mezuzah and then kiss those same fingers reverently. What is the scripture in the mezuzah? It's this, "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*" Deuteronomy 6:4-9

It's called the Shema and it's one of the most important passages in Jewish scripture. Solomon, who was a man of God, should have known the meaning and application of the Shema. On top of that, he was the son of a man after God's own heart – King David. But he had forgotten to love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might. He was distracted by many things and not least by the fact that, as our text points out, he loved many foreign women. We read there that he had forgotten what 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.*" (v. 2). because that's exactly what had happened. Solomon was the greatest of the greatest, and it all came crashing down. The bigger they come, the harder they fall.

Are we going to be like Solomon? We have that potential. All of us. We have in us the ability to turn our hearts away from the wisdom of the Lord. Solomon had it all, and he left to go.

Let's look at what was Solomon's, and so many other leaders of such promise, downfall . . .

**He got into the wrong kind of alliances (vv 1-3)**

- When Jimmy Buffet begins *wasting away again in Margaritaville* he sings,  
*Some people claim that there's a woman to blame*  
*But I know it's nobody's fault.*

But by the end of the song Jimmy has taken full responsibility and acknowledges his situation is completely his own fault. Such it was with Solomon. Some people would claim it was a 1,000 women's fault – but Solomon was the guilty party for where he found himself as he neared the end of his life. The problem is, while all Jimmy Buffet was suffering from was a broken heart compounded by a blown out flip flop and a wound in his foot from a pop top, Solomon's situation was tearing a nation and its relationship to the only true God to shreds. His situation was not assuaged by a frozen concoction that would help him hang on – Solomon's sin plummeted the Chosen People of God into centuries of exile and heartache.

- Solomon had made the mistake the people of God have made all through history and they still do . . .

**He mixed up his perfect religion with the evil and the dilution of false religion (vv 5-8)**

- It seems almost incredible that Solomon should have slid into to such full-bore practice of idolatry. Yet his sin was aggravated by the great privileges he had enjoyed – God had appeared to him twice, for goodness sake! And there was no escape from godly discipline. When his father David committed such a great sin with Bathsheba God told the prophet Nathan, *I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, 2 Samuel 7:14-15a.* F.B. Meyer points out, “*The more privileged we are, the more disastrous our fall and the more inevitable the penalty. If God loved us less he might be more sparing of the rod.*” But, as we learned last week, discipline is an act of love.
- Deuteronomy 17 lays down some specific things that are requirements for the king and one is that he should not acquire many horses for himself (v.16). The next verse gets even more specific, *And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.* Deuteronomy 17.17. Solomon was going directly against the law.
- The problem didn't just show up at the end of his life – it was problem that was there all along and grew and festered his entire reign. We see his inordinate love of luxury and showy lifestyle. He also had an enormous harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines. This is all recorded in the account of his life in 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles. His excess seems to be the window dressing of a man who had the ability to gather much and was making sure everybody saw it. And as we saw just a bit ago, he was going against what the law taught and in a huge way.
- But we see also from our text that there was an even more basic weakness in Solomon's character: he had never grasped for himself the real meaning of Israel's distinctive relationship with the one true God. He had a weak faith. In his own mind he was a faithful worshiper of Yahweh.
- The problem, as for many other ordinary Israelites, both in his time and later, Yahweh was not the only God of heaven and Earth, who is the majestic creator of all there is and the giver of moral law. Instead he was merely the god of Israel – a national deity just like the deities of the other people groups who surrounded them. This was despite the fact that though both the Law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets claimed that the God of Israel is a jealous God who forbade his worshipers to have any other gods before him (Commandment #1, Exodus 20:3). But Solomon mixed that only true religion with the popular religion of the day, whatever it was. This made for a more easy going belief system which was tolerant of the religion of the Canaanites, Egyptians, Moabites and anyone else with whom he made an alliance. He fell into a pattern that looked upon Yahweh as a tribal God in the same way the Moabites looked upon their god, Shamash or the Ammonites looked upon Milkum.
- As we already saw, he saw no harm in allowing his wives to worship their own gods in temples he had built for them. In fact, he even joined them in that worship from time to time. This man who wrote with great insight things like, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* Proverbs 1:7, and *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.* Proverbs 9:10, blew off his own teaching with an easy-going tolerance of all gods.
- This mixing of religion is called syncretism which is when you make your religion a mixture of many religions. Syncretism was the chief enemy against which later prophets had to contend, and even down to present day. The Catholic Church has fallen victim to it in some ways and if we don't guard our way, it can happen to us too. Think about it, how much credence do you give to your horoscope? And do you fall

for the false teaching that you can communicate with loved ones who have died and that they watch over you. This is dabbling in the occult and it's not only spreading false hope but it's insidious.

- Another kind of syncretism has afflicted the American Church increasingly over the years: The national religion of blindly following a politician or a political party and disregarding how immoral that person or party is or is becoming, is syncretism in its rankest form. And it's not just in one party, it's in all of them. Far too many Christians have forgotten they are Christ Followers first and foremost and have diluted their faith with the false religion of politics and in the process have severely compromised their witness for Jesus. What William Inge said is so very true, *Whoever marries the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next.*
- We need to remain true. Solomon did not. We read here that . . .

#### **His heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God v 4**

- In fact it's all through this text. He, plain and simply, forgot who's he was. This is not really a point I want to cut short – but I need to wrap this talk up. We need to have eyes only on the one true God and that means we need to know what is here in the word of God. As Christ Followers, we need to do what Christ Followers do – FOLLOW CHRIST! We need to ask what Jesus would do and not what TikTok says or that we saw on the View on Thursday or hang on every word Donald Trump said on Fox. We let's remember WHO'S we are!

**Conclusion:** Let me conclude with some of the lyrics of Steve Green's song, GUARD YOUR HEART. Listen,

*Oh, be careful little eyes what you see  
Oh, be careful little eyes what you see  
For the Father up above is looking down in love  
Oh, be careful little eyes what you see  
What appears to be harmless glance?  
Can turn to romance and homes are divided  
Feelings that should never have been awakened within  
Tearing the heart in two, listen, I beg of you  
Guard your heart, guard your heart  
Don't trade it for treasure, don't give it away  
Guard your heart, guard your heart  
As a payment for pleasure, it's high price to pay  
For a soul that remains sincere with conscience clear  
Guard your heart  
The human heart is easily swayed  
And often betrayed at the hand of emotion  
You dare not leave the outcome to chance  
You must choose in advance  
Or live with the agony  
Such needless tragedy*

Solomon and so many others are prime example of the truth, the bigger they come, the harder they fall. Let it not be true of us. Amen.