

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Need to Apply Wisdom – Part II.*"

Go ahead and turn to **1 Kings 3**. I want to show you the last verse for us to look at.

Let me briefly review what we discussed in Part I.

We looked at some verses in **Deuteronomy 17** that list the restrictions God put on Israel's king. Do you remember them? What were kings NOT to do?

They were not to:

- Acquire many horses, wives, or wealth b/c they could put their trust in these things instead of trusting God.
- They were not to cause the people to return to Egypt, b/c it's a picture of the world and when God delivers us from something we aren't to return to it.

As much as Egypt is a picture of the world, the Promised Land is a picture of our spiritual lives in Christ:

- Israel had to fight battles in the land like we must fight spiritual battles in our lives
- Israel had to remove sin from the land like we must remove sin from our lives

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The main sin they had to remove was idolatry. The Canaanites worshiped many idols, so their land was filled w/ altars.

They believed they were closer to their false gods if they worshiped them on high places, such as hilltops, so that's where they built their altars and they were called high places.

When the Israelites moved into the land they started using the altars – or high places – to worship God, and here's the interesting thing:

- Since they were worshiping God on high places instead of idols, they were sort of acceptable.
- But since they were built by pagans and used to worship idols they were sort of unacceptable.

Look at **verse 2**...

**1 Kings 3:2 The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord.**

Notice it doesn't say Solomon worshiped at the high places. The people did. And it's sort of presented as a criticism of him b/c he allowed it...but also sort of acceptable b/c the temple hadn't been built yet. After the temple was built nobody was supposed to use the high places.

Unfortunately, even after the temple was built, when you read about the good kings, it usually says **they did what was right, but they didn't remove the high places**. For example:

- **1 Kings 15:11 Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord...14 BUT THE HIGH PLACES WERE NOT TAKEN AWAY.**

- **2 Kings 12:2 Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord...3 NEVERTHELESS, THE HIGH PLACES WERE NOT TAKEN AWAY; THE PEOPLE CONTINUED TO SACRIFICE AND MAKE OFFERINGS ON [them].**
- **2 Kings 14:3 [Amaziah] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord...4 BUT THE HIGH PLACES WERE NOT REMOVED; THE PEOPLE STILL SACRIFICED AND MADE OFFERINGS ON [them].**

Even if a king was good, if he didn't remove the high places, God noticed!

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Whenever you read about a good king who didn't remove them, if you're like me you ask...

*“He did so much good, why didn't he just do that as well and go all the way in his obedience? He could have been that much better of a king.”*

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Since the Promised Land is a picture of our spiritual lives in Christ, when we read about the high places we should consider which ones we need to remove...and this brings us to Lesson 1...

## **LESSON 1: REMOVE THE HIGH PLACES IN YOUR LIFE.**

Let me be clear about the relationship this has to wisdom. Remember wisdom allows us to discern between good and evil, and right and wrong. Look at **verse 9**...

**1 Kings 3:9 [Solomon said,] “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may DISCERN BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, for who is able to govern this your great people?”...11 And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to DISCERN WHAT IS RIGHT.”**

This is what wisdom does: it allows us to discern between good and evil, and right and wrong.

What does this have to do w/ high places?

Since high places looked sort of acceptable, wisdom is needed to recognize the high places that need to be removed.

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To me, high places are the areas of compromise that we believe are acceptable...those things that don't really look that bad so we're more comfortable doing them. They could be:

- Shows we shouldn't watch
- Jokes we shouldn't tell
- Language we shouldn't use
- Music we shouldn't listen to
- Clothes we shouldn't wear

We will say, *“I’m not going to commit adultery. I’m not going to steal. I’m not going to lie. I’m not going to get drunk. But I do feel okay doing these things.”*

God says, *“I want you to get rid of those high places.”*

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Just as few good kings removed the high places, few Christians remove the high places God wants out of our lives.

The removal of high places is like the level of holiness God wants us to have, but few of us do.

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In the privacy of our own hearts, we should ask what high places God wants us to remove.

Something interesting is that you might not even have to ask, b/c while we’ve been talking about this there have been some things God already convicted you about, right?

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Now going back to the verse, in allowing the people to worship at the high places we see Solomon doing something that wasn’t wise. But as we know from our previous sermon, he hadn’t been given wisdom yet. So it’s almost like it’s understandable.

But we also know from our previous sermon when Solomon received wisdom, he still failed to apply it:

- He multiplied horses...like God told kings not to do.
- He multiplied wealth...like God told kings not to do .
- He returned to Egypt and sent his people there...like God told kings not to do.

By this point he did everything God told Kings not to do, except for one thing, and what’s that?

Multiplying wives.

And this brings us to **1 Kings 11!** Go ahead and turn there.

**1 Kings 11:1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which 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.” Solomon clung to these in love.**

Here it is: Solomon violated the command not to multiply wives.

But it’s even worse than it looks...

He also violated God’s standard for marriage that it would be one man and one woman for life.

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Second, it mentions the nationality of these women, b/c it's not just that Solomon married them, it's that they were foreign women. It would've been bad for him to multiply wives, but it was even worse to multiply pagan wives who worshiped idols.

If you look at **verse 2** it quotes **Deuteronomy 7:4** which strictly forbid the Israelites from marrying pagans to show Solomon completely disobeyed God.

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Third, Solomon's complex system of alliances with other nations cut at the very heart of Israel's unique position as the people of God who were supposed to be holy and separate. Solomon united Israel with these nations.

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Look at **verse 3**...

**1 Kings 11:3 He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.**

It seems like Solomon entered into alliances with every ruler who had a marriageable daughter.

God warned foreign women would turn the king's heart away and that's what happened...

**1 Kings 11:4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.**

Solomon did so many things wrong, you could wonder what's worst:

- Was it worst that he multiplied horses, wealth, or wives?
- Was it worst he pointed the people back to Egypt?
- Was it worst he created all these alliances and ruined Israel's holiness?

The worst thing Solomon did is recorded in these verses. He engaged in terrible idolatry. His heart went after other gods.

We know that b/c he's been compromising, but it isn't until after describing the idolatry that it says he **did what was evil in the sight of the Lord**.

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This is also why David is mentioned – 16 times in the chapter to be exact – to contrast him with Solomon.

For all the things David did wrong he never engaged in idolatry. His heart remained faithful to God...unlike his son, Solomon. Look at **verse 7**...

**1 Kings 11:7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.**

These false gods were worshiped through evil practices such as child sacrifice.

Don't miss what this says. It doesn't say Solomon allowed these high places in the land or allowed his wives to worship at them. It says HE BUILT THEM HIMSELF.

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Solomon is one of the most unique men in scripture, in both good and bad ways. There's much good about him, but there's also much bad:

- He's mentioned nearly 300 times in the Old Testament and a dozen times in the New Testament.
- He's in Jesus' genealogy.
- Twice Jesus talked about how well Solomon was splended and arrayed.
- He built the temple.
- Part of the temple was named after him: Acts 3 and 5 mention Solomon's portico.

But then we've also got all the compromise and idolatry we read about.

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Let me tell you something that occurred to me that is absolutely astounding...

Solomon was worse in every single respect AFTER receiving wisdom.

Let me help you appreciate just how far Solomon fell:

- Before he received wisdom in **1 Kings 3** he **made [one] marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt [by marrying his daughter, and he allowed] the people [to sacrifice] at the high places] before the temple was built.** He was sort of criticized for allowing the people to worship at high places, but it was sort of acceptable b/c the temple hadn't been built yet.
- After he received wisdom he repeatedly returned to Egypt, multiplied wealth, multiplied wives, multiplied horses to an extraordinary extent, and built high places to idols AFTER the temple was built.
  - Not only were the people worshiping at high places, Solomon was building them, not for God, but for idols!
  - So the man who built the temple for the LORD stated building high places to the worst idols in the Old Testament.

Solomon was MUCH, much worse after receiving wisdom.

He's the best example in Scripture of the need to apply wisdom.

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Frederick Buechner said, "*King Solomon was among the wisest fools who ever wore a crown.*"<sup>i</sup>

This is such a perfect description of him.

Along w/ Judas he's the biggest anomaly to me in Scripture:

- Judas was w/ Christ, how could he betray Him?
- Similarly, how could the wisest man in history be the most foolish?

We're going to answer this question this morning and next Sunday to help prevent us from being foolish...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

## LESSON 2: STRENGTH ISN'T FOUND IN THE PHYSICAL.

If you remember when we read the verses in **Deuteronomy 17** I told you that God didn't want kings multiplying things b/c he didn't want kings putting their trust in earthly resources...which is exactly what Solomon probably did.

Think about this...

These were Israel's Golden Years. Solomon brought the nation to its zenith. Consider how the nation looked:

- All the horses gave them a very powerful army
- They were extraordinarily rich, which allowed them to buy mercenaries and pay off nations if needed
- They had hundreds of alliances through all the political marriages

Solomon must've felt invincible. No nation ever looked stronger or more powerful politically, militarily, and economically. Outwardly they looked amazing...but inwardly they were rotting. As much as Solomon brought the nation forward physically, he brought it back equally far spiritually.

And this reveals the problem. A nation isn't exalted by anything physical, such as the military, wealth, or alliances.

Consider these verses:

- **Proverbs 11:28** Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.
- **Proverbs 14:34** Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.
- **Psalm 20:7** Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.
- **Psalm 33:16a** The king is not saved by his great army

All these verses make the same point that the physical doesn't make a nation strong. The spiritual does.

This is why we've been praying together on Wednesday nights. If you haven't joined us yet, we hope you'll come out and do so.

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Let me share something from David's reign to help you understand this moment in Solomon's reign...

The end of **2 Samuel 10** is universally recognized as the high point of David's life. In **2 Samuel 11** he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. Although there was the occasional victory or triumph in the following chapters, the rest of his life was mostly filled w/ pain and suffering b/c of the sins he committed. The entire trajectory of his life changed; he never again knew the greatness, peace, or success he knew earlier.

This is that moment for Solomon and the nation of Israel! They will never again know the glory, peace, or prosperity they knew earlier.

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Remember God told David through the prophet Samuel...

**2 Samuel 12:10 The sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.**

God told David He would raise up adversity against him.

That's what God did w/ Solomon too.

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If you look down at **verse 14** does your Bible have a subheading? In the ESV it's around **verse 9**.

- Adversaries of Solomon
- Solomon's Adversaries
- God Raises Adversaries

Here's what's going on...

The first half of **1 Kings 11** records Solomon's apostasy. The second half records the enemies God raised up against him:

- 1 Kings 11:14 And the Lord raised up AN ADVERSARY AGAINST SOLOMON, Hadad the Edomite.**
- 1 Kings 11:23 God also raised up as an adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada...25 HE WAS AN ADVERSARY of Israel all the days of Solomon, doing harm as Hadad did.**
- 1 Kings 11:26 Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also LIFTED UP HIS HAND AGAINST THE KING.**

Now let me spell it out...

Solomon looked – and more than likely thought – that he was invincible. But God had no problem bringing him down.

God used these men – and the foolishness of Solomon’s son Rehoboam – to rip the nation in half. In a moment – literally – ten of the twelve tribes broke away.

God quickly and easily tore down the most powerful nation in history.

The lesson is strength isn’t found in the physical: God has no problem taking down any person or nation that turns from Him...no matter how invincible they look.

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The next lesson we can learn from Solomon...

### **LESSON 3: NO AMOUNT CAN SATISFY A DISCONTENT HEART.**

Solomon lived a life of absolute excess. The amount of gold and wives he had is beyond imagination.

Elsewhere we read that:

- He had 500 shields that required 2,525 pounds of gold to make
- He had an ivory throne overlaid with gold
- He and his guests drank only from golden vessels

You have to wonder why one man coveted so much.

But despite all he had, he was discontent.

How do I know that?

I’ve read Ecclesiastes!

We’d expect Solomon to be the most contented man in history b/c of all he had, but he was cynical and despairing:

- He questioned whether life was worth living.
- He said life was empty.
- At least 38 times he wrote that life is vanity of vanities.

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A year ago I preached on contentment for a few months, so I don’t want to spend much time talking about it again, but we can’t look at Solomon’s life w/o considering this lesson, so let me say...

Solomon shows us better than anyone in Scripture that if we aren’t content w/ little, we won’t be content w/ much:

- If a little wealth doesn’t satisfy, no amount of wealth will satisfy
- If one wife won’t satisfy, no amount of wives will satisfy

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So the question is, how can we be content?

The author of Hebrews gives us the answer and reveals why Solomon was so discontent...

**Hebrews 13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for (or because) [the Lord] has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”**

This promise is one of the most forceful in the NT in that it contains two double negatives:

- I will never leave you
- [I will never] forsake you

It's like saying, “*I will never, ever, ever leave you.*”

The Lord wants to make it overwhelmingly clear He will always be w/ us...and this reality should allow us to be content! If we have the Lord we have what we need to be content.

No amount of money or possessions can ever replace the beautiful truth that our God will never leave us or forsake us.

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This gives us a window into why Solomon was so discontent:

- His life wasn't free from the love of money.
- But more importantly he turned from the spiritual to the physical. When he had everything he could have physically he was discontent b/c he'd forsaken the spiritual...or he'd forsaken his relationship w/ the Lord.

Solomon failed to apply the wisdom he had: he looked for contentment in the physical, which can never provide lasting contentment.

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I would ask you today where you're looking for your contentment?

Are you – perhaps like Solomon – looking to the physical: wealth, fame, power, relationships?

You'll never find contentment there. Only vanity. The wise person looks to Christ.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures* (New York:Harper and Row, 1979), p. 161