

Game of Thrones: 2. Finishing Well – Solomon

1 Kings 3:3-14

July 29, 2018

Pastor Steve Richards

Last week I began reading Jon Acuff's most recent book, FINISH. A few years ago, he wrote a book entitled, START, in which he challenged people to get off the couch, launch a business, pursue some goal or life dream or write a book (81% of people want to write a book but each year less than 1% do). He thought if he could just help people get started, everything would work out. And the book became number 1 on the New York Times list of bestsellers. After writing the book, he hired researchers at the University of Memphis to study 900 people for six months as they worked on their goals, and though they learned that getting started matters, what matters more is the finish. Each year 92% of New Year's resolutions fail. 100% start but only 8% finish. Years ago, more years than I want to remember, I decided I would run a marathon. (Don't I look like a marathon runner?) So I started working out. I would run through the neighborhood, and I joined the Y so I could run even when the weather was crummy. And that spring I signed up for my first 10k – and as I walked across the finish line, I decided running a 10k was my new goal, and I stopped running. I started well but my finish? Not so well. This morning, we turn to another of the Old Testament kings of Israel – to look at King Solomon, someone who started extremely well but his finish was lousy. Often God's greatest lessons are learned when we fall short of God's will.

Solomon became synonymous with wealth and power. No other king of Israel, not even David himself, achieved the wealth and power of Solomon. He had a vast building program and commercial enterprises. His military program was beyond that of any other nation. And he was admired by his subjects and visitors from around the world for his great wisdom. He was the second son of David and Bathsheba. David had ten sons and Solomon was one of the youngest, and yet he became king because (as we learned last week) David sinned against Bathsheba by killing her husband to cover up an affair and to make amends David promised that Solomon would be king. Solomon reigned from the time he was 20 until he was 60.

Solomon started well. He was on the fast track to success. In today's scripture, we read how his reign began. Solomon loved the Lord. It was the key to his success. He obeyed the statutes, the good things that his father David did. **At Gibeon, the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."** You get one wish – whatever you want – it's yours! If God came to you tonight and said, "I will give you any one thing you want. I love you and know you love me, and I want to bless you. Tell me one thing and it's yours." What will you ask for? I think \$50 million would be enough. I could give a tithe to the church and then invest the rest and the interest alone would be more than enough to live on. I could set my children up for life and pay off our mortgage. I could set up a foundation to bless others. I think I'd ask for \$50 million. What would you ask for? Maybe 50 million is not enough or maybe you'd ask for beauty or power or prestige. Or maybe it's like the beauty pageant where the finalists are asked, what one thing would you ask for? And what's their answer? World peace. Some of you ask for that in your prayer requests every week.

Solomon says: **I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties... So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.** Give me a what? A discerning heart to govern? That's it? Really? But think about it – wouldn't we all benefit if we had that kind of leader? Solomon is saying – not wealth, not power, not status. What I really want is to be a wise leader. I want to lead well. So, give me wisdom. Isn't that what you would want in a leader? Isn't that the example you want? Isn't that what you'd hope your children and grandchild would say? I want to be wise.

Last week, at the end of 1 Samuel 11, after David's greatest failure, we learned that God was displeased with David, and how when God is displeased with us, we feel guilt and shame. But the same author who wrote 1st and 2nd Samuel also wrote 1st Kings, and he tells us that when Solomon asked for wisdom: **The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.** God was pleased, and the pleasure of God is amazing. We were made to long for God's pleasure. We see all sorts of examples of what this kind of pleasure does. Last Wednesday, the children of our child care center set up a lemonade stand to raise money for certain things they would like in their classroom, but what I discovered was they wanted something that was far more valuable than the dollar bill I gave them for a cup of lemonade and that was praise. I poured on the thanks and praise and that meant so much to them that they offered me their entire tip jar. You know what happens when a child is praised or you praise your dog or if you are praised. It feels amazing! We experience God's pleasure when we love God. You may sign up for a service project because you want to help others, and when you finish, it feels so good. The reason it feels so good is that God made you that way – to feel God's pleasure. St. Augustine said: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." Your heart will always be restless until you decide you want to please and honor God with your life. That will change everything for you.

So God said to Solomon, "I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart... Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both wealth and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. Solomon asked for wisdom, and God gave him that. But he was also blessed with what he didn't ask for. Those blessings came to him because his heart was in the right place. It's also what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount: **Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.** (Matthew 6:33) Where are your priorities in life? The story doesn't tell us that wealth is wrong or evil. The Bible says it's not money, but "the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil." Money is morally neutral. It can be used for good or for harm.

God blesses Solomon for his commitment. He's on the right track. He has wisdom, but something goes terribly wrong. He begins to stray. It's what happened to David once he found success. David took a wrong turn. Before David, it was King Saul who started well, but then took a wrong turn. What does this tell us about success in life? The start is easy, but the finish – that's the challenge. We drift. Maybe there was a point when you said to God, I love you. I want to follow you. Maybe it was at church camp or a mission trip or a moment in the midst of worship one Sunday. Somewhere along the way you had a profound sense of God's presence. God, I will follow you the rest of my life. And we even told others what we experienced. But somewhere along the way – months or years went by – and we stopped going to church, stopped praying, stopped feeling God's presence – and we did foolish things. That's Solomon. And the writer of Kings tells us when that happened. 1 Kings 6: **In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it. It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace.** Do you see the disconnect? 7 years to build the Temple; 13 years to build his own house. Have any of you had a house built? How long did it take? 6 months, a year? Solomon took 13 years with thousands of people building it. And it was a nice house – gold, tapestry, walls lined with cedar. One commentary that I read said it was likely 110,000 square feet. What's happened to the man who said, I don't need wealth; I need wisdom? He's changed. The book of Proverbs provides us with the wisdom of Solomon. Let's look at two verses, and you tell me whether the wisdom came from early in his life or later on. Proverbs 11:4 **Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.** Early or later? Early. Proverbs 14:20 **The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.** Early or later? Later. It doesn't even sound like the same

person. Solomon changed. He wandered from his original purpose of loving God and serving others, and he fell in love with wealth and power. And when my primary focus is ME and my happiness, impressing others – I will never be satisfied.

After Solomon built his fabulous palace, what's next? He starts collecting horses – 12,000 of them. How many does a person need? And if you have 12,000 horses, you need stables to put them. He starts collecting wives – 700 of them and 300 concubines. How many do you need? This is a man who was never satisfied. Long before there was Mick Jaeger and the Rolling Stones, King Solomon was singing: I can't get no satisfaction! And in a lot of ways, that's where we live today with an obsession for more wealth and more stuff. Am I the only person who bought something I thought I could not live without but once I had it, I quickly forgot about it. Anybody have a treadmill in the basement that's now where you hang your laundry? I wonder if we've taken our eye off God's purpose for us and in an effort to fill our lives we focus on more stuff – only it will never satisfy. Solomon got lost. He started well. He was so wise that people around the world came to listen to him. But in chapter 9, he trades 20 towns to Hiram, the king of Lebanon for the cedar trees he wants for his palace, but when Hiram sees the cities, he realizes they are cities Solomon didn't want. They are worthless. And how was it that Solomon could build such a palace? He forces his own people to be his slaves. First it was foreigners but when there were not enough foreigners, he oppresses his own people to build his kingdom – and as we will learn in a couple weeks, the consequence of this will be felt by his son, Rehoboam. What happened to Solomon's values? His integrity? David violated Commandments 6-10. Solomon violated Commandment One: You shall have no other gods before me. Who was Solomon's true god? It was Solomon. Who have you put on the throne of your life?

At the end of his reign, Solomon experienced chaos. He felt God's displeasure. Tradition tells us that the book of Ecclesiastes was written at the end of Solomon's life. Listen to these words from chapter 2: **I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself... I owned more herds and flocks than anyone... I amassed silver and gold,,, I became greater by far than anyone... I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.** (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10) If you are not seeking God to seek his pleasure, if you are not doing that first, you are "chasing after the wind." You are missing out on what you were made for. That's the lesson learned from Solomon's life.

Early in my ministry, I was called upon to do a funeral for a man who died unexpectedly of a heart attack. I remember meeting with his wife, asking what I could lift up to celebrate her husband's life – and she said there was nothing. The only people at the funeral were his wife, two children, and a few people who came to comfort them. It was the one time, I could not say, he was a good man. I could not say anything good about him – only that God must have loved him. And I contrast that with another funeral years later, a woman without any family who also died unexpectedly. She had been a Girl Scout leader for decades. She taught third grade Sunday School for as long as anyone could remember. She went on mission trips with our youth well into her 70s. She had lived on almost nothing – which none of us knew. She never talked about her needs. She had lived to bless others. And the day of her funeral, the sanctuary was filled to overflow. One lived for himself; the other to bless others. At the end of your life, which will you be?

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of July 29, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach us your ways. Give us your wisdom. Teach us to serve and to bless, and like you, to find more glory in what we give than in what we get. In your holy name, Amen.

Monday, July 30

Scripture: 1 Kings 1:1-2:25

King David had become very old. His servants covered him with blankets, but he couldn't stay warm. They said to him, "Allow us to find a young woman for our master the king. She will serve the king and take care of him by lying beside our master the king and keeping him warm." So they looked in every corner of Israel until they found Abishag from Shunem. They brought her to the king. She was very beautiful. She cared for the king and served him, but the king didn't have sex with her. Adonijah, Haggith's son, bragged about himself and said, "I'll rule as king myself." He got his own chariot and horses with fifty runners to go in front. Now Adonijah's father had never given him direction; he never questioned why Adonijah did what he did. He was very handsome and was born after Absalom. He took advice from Joab, Zeruiah's son, and from the priest Abiathar. They assisted Adonijah. But Zadok the priest, Jehoiada's son Benaiah, the prophet Nathan, Shimei and his friends, and David's veterans didn't join Adonijah. So Adonijah prepared lamb, oxen, and fattened cattle at the Stone of Zohelath, next to Enrogel. He invited his brothers (the royal princes) and all the citizens of Judah who were the royal servants to come. But he didn't invite the prophet Nathan, Benaiah, David's veterans, or his brother Solomon. Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Did you hear that Adonijah, Haggith's son, has become king, but our master David doesn't know about it? Let me give you some advice on how you and your son Solomon can survive this. Go to King David and say, 'Didn't my master the king swear to your servant, "Your son Solomon will certainly rule after me. He will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' While you are speaking there with the king, I'll come along and support your words." So Bathsheba went to the king in his bedroom. The king was very old, and Abishag from Shunem was serving the king. Bathsheba bowed down on her face before the king. The king asked, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Your Majesty, you swore by the LORD your God to your servant, 'Your son Solomon will certainly rule after me. He will sit on my throne.' But now, look, Adonijah has become king, and my master the king doesn't know about it. He has prepared large quantities of oxen, fattened cattle, and lamb. He has invited all the royal princes as well as Abiathar the priest and Joab the general. However, he didn't invite your servant Solomon. As for you, my master the king, the eyes of all Israel are upon you to tell them who will follow you on the throne of my master the king. When my master the king lies down with his ancestors, then I and my son Solomon will become outlaws." While she was still speaking with the king, the prophet Nathan arrived. The king was informed, "The prophet Nathan is here." Then Nathan came in before the king and bowed his face to the ground. He said, "My master the king, you must have said, 'Adonijah will become king after me and will sit on my throne.' Indeed, today he went down and prepared oxen, fattened cattle, and lamb in large numbers. He invited all the royal princes, the generals, and Abiathar the priest. They are eating and drinking with him, and they said, 'Long live King Adonijah!' Adonijah didn't invite me, your servant, Zadok the priest, Jehoiada's son Benaiah, or your servant Solomon. If this message was from my master the king, you didn't make it known to your servant. Who should follow you on the throne of my master the king?" King David answered, "Bring me Bathsheba." She came and stood before the king. The king made a solemn pledge and said, "As surely as the LORD lives, who rescued me from every trouble, regarding what I swore to you by the LORD, Israel's God, 'Your son Solomon will certainly succeed me; he will sit on the throne after me'—I'll see that it happens today." Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground. She honored the king and said, "May my master King

David live forever!" King David said, "Bring me Zadok the priest, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah, Jehoiada's son." They came to the king, who said to them, "Take with you the servants of your masters. Put my son Solomon on my mule and bring him down to Gihon. There Zadok the priest and the prophet Nathan will anoint him king over Israel. Blow the ram's horn and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' You will follow him. He will enter and sit on my throne, and so he will succeed me as king. I have appointed him to become ruler over Israel and Judah." Benaiah, Jehoiada's son, responded to the king, "Yes, may it happen as the LORD, the God of my king, says. Just as the LORD was with my master the king, so may he be with Solomon. May his throne be even greater than the throne of my master King David." Zadok the priest, the prophet Nathan, Jehoiada's son Benaiah, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and put Solomon on King David's mule. They led him to Gihon. Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. They blew the ram's horn, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" All the people followed him playing flutes and celebrating. The ground shook at their noise. Adonijah and all his invited guests heard this when they had finished eating. When Joab heard the sound of the ram's horn, he said, "What's that noise coming from the city?" While he was still speaking, Jonathan, Abiathar the priest's son, arrived. Adonijah said, "Come on in! You are an honest man and will bring a good report." Jonathan replied to Adonijah, "No! Our master King David has made Solomon king! To support him, the king sent along Zadok the priest; the prophet Nathan; Benaiah, Jehoiada's son; and the Cherethites and the Pelethites. They've put Solomon on the royal mule. Zadok the priest and the prophet Nathan have anointed him king at Gihon. They went up from there celebrating so that the city was thrown into a commotion. That is the sound you heard. There's more: Solomon has taken over the throne of the kingdom. The royal attendants blessed our master King David: 'May your God make Solomon's name better than your name. May God elevate his throne above your throne.'" The king then worshipped on his bed and said, "Bless Israel's God, the LORD, who today has set my son on my throne, and has allowed my eyes to see it." Trembling with fear, all of Adonijah's guests got up and fled, each going a different way. Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, so he got up and went to grab hold of the horns of the altar. Solomon was told, "Look! Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and has grabbed the horns of the altar. He's saying, 'King Solomon must swear to me first that he won't execute his servant with the sword.'" Solomon said, "If he shows himself to be an honorable person, then not a hair of his head will be harmed. But if any evil is found in him, he will die." King Solomon sent word and had him brought down from the altar. He came and bowed down to King Solomon. Solomon said to him, "Go home!"

David's time was coming to an end. So he commanded Solomon his son, "I'm following the path that the whole earth takes. Be strong and be a man. Guard what is owed to the LORD your God, walking in his ways and observing his laws, his commands, his judgments, and his testimonies, just as it is written in the Instruction from Moses. In this way you will succeed in whatever you do and wherever you go. So also the LORD will confirm the word he spoke to me: 'If your children will take care to walk before me faithfully, with all their heart and all their being, then one of your own children will never fail to be on the throne of Israel.' You should know what Joab, Zeruiah's son, has done to me and what he did to the two generals of Israel, Abner, Ner's son, and Amasa, Jether's son. He murdered them, spilling blood at peacetime and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet. So act wisely: Don't allow him to die a peaceful death. As for Barzillai's sons from Gilead, show them kindness. Let them eat with you. When I was running away from your brother Absalom, they came to me. Now as for this Shimei, Gera's son—a Benjaminite from Bahurim—who is with you, he cursed me viciously when I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD, 'Surely I won't execute you with the sword.' But you don't need to excuse him. You are wise and know what to do to him. Give him a violent death." Then David lay down with his ancestors and was buried in David's City. He ruled over Israel forty years—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and

his royal power was well established. Adonijah, Haggith's son, went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. She said, "Are you coming in peace?" He said, "Yes. I have something to say to you." She said, "Say it." He said, "You know how the kingdom was mine. All Israel had appointed me as their king. Then suddenly the kingdom went to my brother as the LORD willed. Now I have just one request of you. Don't refuse me!" She said to him, "Go on." Adonijah continued, "Ask King Solomon to let me marry Abishag from Shunem—he won't refuse you." Bathsheba said, "Okay; I'll speak to the king for you." So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to talk with him about Adonijah. The king stood up to meet her and bowed low to her. Then he returned to his throne and had a throne set up for the queen mother. She sat to his right. She said, "I have just one small request for you. Don't refuse me." The king said to her, "Mother, ask me. I won't refuse you." "Let Abishag from Shunem be married to your brother Adonijah," she said. King Solomon replied to his mother, "Why ask only for Abishag from Shunem for Adonijah? Why not ask for the entire kingdom for him? After all, he is my older brother and has the support of Abiathar the priest and Joab, Zeruah's son." King Solomon swore by the LORD, "May God do to me as he sees fit! Adonijah has made this request at the cost of his life! Now, as surely as the LORD lives—the one who supported me, put me on the throne of my father David, and provided a royal house for me exactly as he promised—Adonijah will be executed today." So King Solomon sent Benaiah, Jehoiada's son. He attacked Adonijah, and Adonijah died.

Observation: Solomon's mother was Bathsheba. David passed over his oldest living son, Adonijah, and instead declared Solomon heir to the throne. When Adonijah tried to seize the throne, Bathsheba and Nathan appealed to David, who immediately had Solomon crowned king. Before David's death, Adonijah received a pardon from Solomon on the condition that he showed himself "a worthy man;" however, after David's death he made a second attempt to gain the throne by trying to marry a young woman who took care of David. Solomon refused to authorize this engagement and Adonijah was executed.

Application: It is difficult to find a moral lesson here; yet, this story shows that God is at work in the midst of human plots, schemes, and political motivations. Recall a time when you have failed, but God brought good out of it. Let this memory bring you hope for the future.

Prayer: God, help my thoughts! They stray from me, setting off on the wildest journeys. Dear holy Christ, who can see into every heart and read every mind: Take hold of my thoughts. Bring my thoughts back to me, and clasp me to yourself. Amen.

Tuesday, July 31

Scripture: 1 Kings 3:1-15

Solomon became the son-in-law of Pharaoh, Egypt's king, when he married Pharaoh's daughter. He brought her to David's City until he finished building his royal palace, the LORD's temple, and the wall around Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the people were sacrificing at the shrines because a temple hadn't yet been built for the LORD's name in those days. Now Solomon loved the LORD by walking in the laws of his father David, with the exception that he also sacrificed and burned incense at the shrines. The king went to the great shrine at Gibeon in order to sacrifice there. He used to offer a thousand entirely burned offerings on that altar. The LORD appeared to Solomon at Gibeon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you." Solomon responded, "You showed so much kindness to your servant my father David when he walked before you in truth, righteousness, and with a heart true to you. You've kept this great loyalty and kindness for him and have now given him a son to sit on his throne. And now, LORD my God, you have made me, your servant, king in my father David's place. But I'm young and inexperienced. I know next to nothing. But I'm here, your servant, in the middle of the people you have chosen, a large population that can't be numbered or counted due to its

vast size. Please give your servant a discerning mind in order to govern your people and to distinguish good from evil, because no one is able to govern this important people of yours without your help." It pleased the LORD that Solomon had made this request. God said to him, "Because you have asked for this instead of requesting long life, wealth, or victory over your enemies—asking for discernment so as to acquire good judgment—I will now do just what you said. Look, I hereby give you a wise and understanding mind. There has been no one like you before now, nor will there be anyone like you afterward. I now also give you what you didn't ask for: wealth and fame. There won't be a king like you as long as you live. And if you walk in my ways and obey my laws and commands, just as your father David did, then I will give you a very long life." Solomon awoke and realized it was a dream. He went to Jerusalem and stood before the chest containing the LORD's covenant. Then he offered entirely burned offerings and well-being sacrifices, and held a celebration for all his servants.

Observation: Solomon and his people continued to sacrifice at local shrines because there was no temple built to the name of God. God appeared to Solomon in a dream, and Solomon prayed to God for an understanding heart to judge God's people and discern between good and evil. God was pleased by his request and granted it along with riches and honor. In return, Solomon promised to walk in God's ways and keep God's commandments.

Application: Although Solomon's prayer was humble, his actions were selfish. Notice how God responded to imperfect love with undeserved blessings, only asking yet again for us to love and obey. When have you felt God's blessing even when you have not been the person that you hoped to be?

Prayer: God, I so want my words to be consistent with my actions. Help me to see when they are not. Draw me ever closer to you so that through me others will see your love in action. Amen.

Wednesday, August 1

Scripture: 1 Kings 3:16-28

Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. "During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne." The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours." But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king. The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'" Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other." The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

Observation: In this story two women who were fighting over a baby came to Solomon for help. Solomon asked them to bring a sword and divide the baby in two, giving half of the child to one

woman and the other half to another. The first woman would not allow the baby to be killed, instead offering the child to the other mother. The second woman agreed to the plan. Solomon made a just decision (v 27).

Application: This story appears to be an ideal example of Solomon's wisdom. Other interpretations notice that Solomon did not look for clues, or witnesses, or ask any questions of the women. Read the story again. What is your response to the story?

Prayer: God, living in this world is not always easy, and it often comes with challenges and confusion. Be my guide, leader, and moderator. Enable me to be faithful to you in even the little things that I face each day. May I always remember that you are with me, loving me now and forever. Amen.

Thursday, August 2

Scripture: 1 Kings 8

Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David. All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month. When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark, and they brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up, and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted. The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles. These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today. There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple. Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever." While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them. Then he said: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David. For he said, 'Since the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my Name might be there, but I have chosen David to rule my people Israel.' "My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, 'You did well to have it in your heart to build a temple for my Name. Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, your own flesh and blood—he is the one who will build the temple for my Name.' "The LORD has kept the promise he made: I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. I have provided a place there for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt."

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: "LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David

my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today. “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’ And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true. “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. “When anyone wrongs their neighbor and is required to take an oath and they come and swear the oath before your altar in this temple, then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing down on their heads what they have done, and vindicating the innocent by treating them in accordance with their innocence. “When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and give praise to your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their ancestors. “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and give praise to your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance. “When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple—then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart), so that they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our ancestors. “As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name—for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name. “When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the LORD toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name, then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. “When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly’; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against you, and cause their captors to show them mercy; for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace. “May your eyes be open to your servant’s plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you. For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant

Moses when you, Sovereign LORD, brought our ancestors out of Egypt.” When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.”

Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the LORD: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the LORD. On that same day the king consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar that stood before the LORD was too small to hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings. So Solomon observed the festival at that time, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. They celebrated it before the LORD our God for seven days and seven days more, fourteen days in all. On the following day he sent the people away. They blessed the king and then went home, joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the LORD had done for his servant David and his people Israel.

Observation: This is one of the richest passages in the book of Kings. Let it sink into your heart. Solomon’s prayer portrays human desperation and need in terms of their personal, political, social, and natural circumstances. Even foreigners – non believers – may come to God in prayer.

Application: In John 1:14, we read: *The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us.* How does that compare to what we read in 1 Kings 8? God’s enthroning presence is manifest in Jesus. The existence of the “temple” of God is a testimony to the hope that God will freely forgive and save. Do you see the church as a testimony to that same hope?

Prayer: Creator God, you have designed and fashioned each of us, young and old, in your image. As I acknowledge you in all your glory, help me to accept all your children as glorious creatures of your divine intentions. Amen.

Friday, August 3

Scripture: 1 Kings 10:1-29

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made

at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.” And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. (Hiram’s ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones. The king used the almugwood to make supports for the temple of the LORD and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almugwood has never been imported or seen since that day.) King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country. The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the territories. King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each shield. He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon. Then the king made a great throne covered with ivory and overlaid with fine gold. The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. All King Solomon’s goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon’s days. The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons. King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon’s horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue at the current price. They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

Observation: The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon and his connection with the Name of GOD. Along with the construction of the Temple and the Palace, Solomon had many commercial successes as well. The queen came to put his reputation to the test and found that his accomplishments and wisdom were accurate. She bestowed riches upon Solomon, the equivalent of tons of gold, and Solomon gave the queen her heart’s desire.

Application: We are awed by Solomon in all his glory yet when we read Luke 12:13-27, we realize that those who store up treasures for themselves are not rich toward God, and even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like the lilies of God’s field. How has money, power, and status become a stumbling block preventing God from having your whole heart?

Prayer: Lord, you know my heart’s desire and how easily I can be drawn away from you and what you want for me. Help me to seek you first, to be focused on your presence in my life, so

that whatever flows from my heart will honor your best intent for me and those around me.
Amen.

Saturday, August 4

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Observation: Tradition suggests the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, identifying him as the “Teacher” in the opening words of the book. Solomon, however, is never mentioned by name. But throughout this book, the wisdom of the Teacher points to the meaninglessness of a life focused on rewards. Surely, this is what Solomon had discovered by the end of his life. Wealth, power, and status are not guaranteed to bring joy and satisfaction even when that’s what has been pursued through life.

Application: In the final analysis – the end of one’s life – the writer of Solomon has learned what life is truly about. “Respect and obey God.” Do you agree or disagree? What has been your experience thus far in life?

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, thank you for your persistence – the way you seem to point me in the way to go. I regularly choose my own way, only to find it is not the direction that honors you or the people around me. Help me to “respect and obey” your way this day. Amen.