

Series: Life's Defining Moments

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

May 10-11, 2014

1 Kings 11

“When Leaders Lose Their Souls”

Friday I was in upstate NY, finishing up a ME conference

- and afterwards I traveled with a friend to his boyhood home
- his father once owned 1000 acres for farming in upper NY—and for a time it thrived
- in the center of it all was a home that was a showcase for collected antiques
- the yard was surrounded by gardens and gazebos and a pool

But it wasn't this way yesterday

- the house is for all intent and purpose abandoned—though still crammed with stuff
- the yard is overgrown and full of debris, old tires, abandoned cars
- with chained up dogs that get little to no attention
- it was an ugly, depressing, appalling picture of NEGLECT

-but there is something even uglier—a life that—once flourishing—falls into ruin and neglect—read 11:1-6

- in a defining moment—Solomon's life became a wasteland
- an empty wallet—a meaningless chase, a house of ruin—“*an evil in the Lord's sight*”

-how does this happen?

- at one time—Solomon thrived—as much as any man on earth
- God lavished upon Solomon everything a man could ask for—and more
- chapters 4-10 picture a garden of Eden stewarded by a second Adam of sort
- it was Israel in its zenith—a golden age—a utopia of peace*

- during Solomon's administration, Israel became the envy of the world
- a superpower that had the whole world at its feet—10:23-25
- Solomon outclassed the world leaders of his day—4:21
- when Queens came to witness Solomon's wealth and wisdom and might—*it took their breath away*—10:5
- he dispensed justice and administered law with skill—from a throne that was crafted with such majesty that “*nothing like it had ever been made in any other kingdom*”

- he oversaw and completed massive building projects
- the temple exhibited wealth and craftsmanship not comparable to anything that has ever been constructed
- and here—God chose to inhabit with His glory and presence!!*

- but over time, as the text reveals, Solomon's life eroded

- how did this happen? How could this happen?
- more importantly—how can this be prevented?
- I have been working through Solomon's life all week—looking for clues

1. RESPECT YOUR VULNERABILITIES

- all of us are susceptible, vulnerable
- no matter how much power and prestige and wealth we attain—no matter how much respect we command
- no matter how well life is going
- no matter how long you have been a Christian
- as long as we live in a sinful world with a sinful nature—we are always at risk of imploding, capitulating
- short of eternity, we can still fall

- Solomon failed to respect this
- in Solomon's highest moments—God would appear and speak—and say the same thing
 - at Mt Gibeon—at a high point of devotion—God said—“If you walk in My ways”—3:14
 - in the middle of his temple project, God again said to Solomon—“If you walk in My statutes”—6:11
 - and when the temple was completed—God appeared again and said—“If you walk before Me”—9:4

-note God always used “if”—not “since”—as if to say—YOU ARE STILL VULNERABLE TO SIN

- don't assume you have a lock on godliness
- don't assume you are impervious to sin—that you are invincible, invulnerable

-the law of sin abides in the soul, always with aim to take one down
“So often when we think sin has been destroyed, it is merely out of sight. It has coverts and retreats into which we cannot pursue”—John Owen

- the reality is—Solomon's blessings were his vulnerability
- over time—the things he relied upon—wisdom and wealth and power—became his undoing
- our greatest strengths can be our undoing

2. MAINTAIN YOUR FENCES

- Scripture tells us that sin is always crouching at the door
- always looking for an opening, a broken gate
- and when it breaks through—sin's aim is always to vandalize—HIJACK GOODNESS
- it has to—for in and of itself—sin has nothing of its own
- it draws its energy from that which exists authentically in God's will—that which is good

-and then perverts something for an unworthy end

-God gave Solomon things that were good

-but because he was not vigilant

-because he did not maintain the fences around his heart

-sin hijacked and corrupted all of them

A. God gave Solomon WISDOM

-so that Solomon could successfully navigate through life

-see things in perspective—know the seasons, respect boundaries, develop the skill set for living life and leading as God intended

-and for a season—Solomon administered with skill

-but in subtle ways—sin intruded and hijacked Solomon’s wisdom and used it for its own purposes

-Solomon eventually used his shrewdness for himself

-his wisdom became a means—not an end

-he skillfully accumulated wealth, traded horses, negotiated treaties, positioned himself geopolitically

-all of which enabled Solomon to imagine autonomy—depend less and less upon God

-in the end, Solomon’s wisdom devolved into a highly refined folly

B. God gave Solomon WEALTH

-so that Solomon might delight in life

-provide for his people—allow them to flourish

-show generosity, convert wealth into food for the hungry, clothing for the poor, and relief for the distressed.

-but then sin sneaked in and attached itself to Solomon’s wealth

-and it began to master Solomon

-Israel became materially rich and spiritually poor

-his avarice led him to violate God’s parameters for achieving wealth—
Deuteronomy 17:14-17

-he created 12 tax districts to finance his projects

-obsessed with money—he became a wheeler dealer on a large scale—alienating former allies—9:10-14

-like all too many—Solomon allowed things to have an ultimacy and an urgency that they were never intended to bear.

C. God gave Solomon POWER

-for power is a gift—for flourishing

-for bringing life, creating possibilities, stewarding resources, managing creation, fighting injustice, bringing peace—accomplishing divine purposes

- but then sin got through the fence and attached itself to Solomon's power—
and it perverted his authority
- turning it into selfish ambition and self-advancement
- Solomon began to abuse power—began to play God in the lives of others

- enamored with might—Solomon became an arms merchant—using power like his father in law Pharaoh—who he sought to emulate
- he wanted to have the same kind of influence and control
- the same administrative finesse, same political savvy, same cultural sophistication, same kind of navy and army

- obsessed with power—he schmoozed with the power brokers, the wealthy bureaucrats
- built numerous alliances using marriage to secure more and more diplomatic muscle
- and in the process Solomon's heart turned away from God
- in the end, his whole house of cards collapsed under the weight of conscripted labor

-there is a third clue—which tells us how to prevent a similar fate

3. WATCH YOUR HEART

- for all of his success—Solomon seems to have lost his soul
- and when leaders lose their souls—so do the nations, the organizations, the churches, the homes they lead*

- he stopped reading his gauges, watching his heart, spending time with God—creating any deep interiority
- he stopped finding the space and making the time to stand outside his life and look reflectively at it
- and as a result—Solomon's actions no longer issued from any center, from a deep inner well
- there was no vital sense of God—no first hand drinking from the Living Waters**

- and over time, Solomon lost his way—this is clear in chapter 11, clear in Ecclesiastes
- his actions became products of compulsion—running with more speed than direction
- he worked to the point of exhaustion—but it eventually began to feel like a waste—hebel—meaninglessness
- life became an empty assignment—Ecclesiastes 4:8
- relationships with women became traps—Ecclesiastes 7:26

- driven by his lusts, his ego—and failing to be grounded
- Solomon was a man who had everything and eventually became bored—setting him up to be seduced
- the pressures and distractions and temptations of life simply consumed him—and he lost control

-a final clue—key to avoiding ruin—found in I Kings 11

4. STAY THE COURSE

- old age has its temptations—we should not read past 11:4
- “when Solomon became old”
- he stopped pressing on—running hard with God
- and lost his soul without realizing it

Barton—

- “*Losing your soul is like losing a credit card. You think it’s in your wallet so you don’t give much thought until one day you reach for it and can’t find it*”
- Solomon reached back—and nothing was there to guard him

- eventually, the kingdom was ripped apart
- enemies that had been exiled re-emerged with a vengeance to take some of Solomon’s power.
- the house that was once a showcase became an eyesore

CONCLUSION

So—a check

- are you aware of your particular vulnerabilities?
- are you maintaining the fences around your heart? (prayer + Word)
- are you watching your heart? (submitting to regular examinations)
- are you staying the course—getting stronger as you get older?

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) what vulnerabilities must you keep close watch over?
- 2) what do you do to keep the fences strong?
- 3) when is the last time you had a thorough spiritual checkup?
- 4) if you were to chart your spiritual life, is it declining, staying flat, or growing stronger? Would those who know you best agree?