

“The Queen of Sheba”
1 Kings 10:1-13
February 26, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

This section of 1 Kings demonstrates the faithfulness of God. God had promised to give Solomon wisdom when he asked for it, and the visit of the queen of Sheba shows the extent to which God had given what he had promised. Solomon was able to answer all her questions in a way that left her breathless. Solomon had not asked for gold, but God said that he would give him gold anyway. The word “gold” appears fourteen times in this chapter, and it is quite clear that Solomon had an exceptionally large amount of it. It was so abundant that he used it, not silver, to make his drinking cups. In our day, gold is worth about 70 times as much as silver, and it was not so different in Solomon’s day. Even silver cups are an indication of wealth, but Solomon’s wealth was such that he used gold. He also made shields with his gold. What do you do with gold when you have such an abundance? People today just make bars out of it and lock them away in a secure vault. Solomon’s aesthetic sense wouldn’t allow that, so he made something useful and beautiful at the same time. Five-hundred gold shields were made.

We do well to listen to Jesus in our approach to this passage. Jesus mentions the queen of Sheba in a passage of warning to unbelievers of his day. He says that she will make an appearance at the last judgment. She will be there to stop the mouths of those in Jesus’ day who didn’t honor Jesus even though he walked among them. “If only we had known who you were,” they will say, “we would have honored you as the Son of God.” That is when she will make her appearance. She came from far away to hear someone to whom God had given wisdom. Jesus’ contemporaries had two great advantages over her. They lived in proximity to Jesus and Jesus’ wisdom far surpassed that of Solomon. In other words, Jesus says that this woman has much to teach us about how we are to honor Jesus, our King.

I. Hear His Wisdom

The visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon was remarkable on a number of levels. First of all, she was a Gentile who was unacquainted with Israel’s God. Secondly, she was royalty, and queens and kings of this era typically did not travel to other nations. They might send emissaries from their nation to another, but would rarely travel themselves. Undoubtedly, this was due to the slowness of travel that would be limited to the speed of a camel’s walk, plus the inevitable suffering accompanying all travel, even for privileged royalty. Yet she travels this great distance. Scholars believe that she came from the southern

part of the Arabian peninsula in what today is the country of Yemen. That is over one-thousand miles from Israel. Such a journey could easily have taken six months or even more between the time she left and her return.

What possessed her to undertake such a challenging trip? The text says that she **“heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, [and] she came to test him with hard questions”** (10:1). She was something of a skeptic at first. She was intrigued and hopeful enough to make the trip, but wanted to see for herself before drawing her own conclusions about Solomon. It shows something of the reach of Solomon’s fame that word would reach this far south, and that the reports were sufficiently positive to entice her to make this arduous journey. She had quite a bit of time on the way to think of all the questions she wanted to ask him. **“And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her”** (10:2-3). Wouldn’t you have loved to be a fly on the wall during that conversation? Solomon not only had an answer to all her questions, but his answer took her breath away (v. 5).

As great as it would have been to have witnessed this conversation between these two monarchs, Jesus reminds us that we have an even greater privilege. We have access to one whose wisdom far exceeds that of Solomon. The New Testament says that in Jesus is **“hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Col. 2:3). Jesus created the heavens and the earth. He knows what the smallest particle of matter is because he made it. He knows the extent of the universe, including every last star among the billions we know exist, as well as others we haven’t even seen. He knows about black holes because he made them. He knows every last detail of your life, including the hypotheticals that we often wonder about. The hypotheticals of life are the things that could have happened but didn’t. What would have happened if you had taken another career path, had married a different person, had a different set of gifts than what you possess? We don’t know a single answer to such questions, but Jesus knows them all. All wisdom resides with him.

On the day of the final judgment, the queen of Sheba will say to those who made no place for Jesus, “If I honored Solomon and his wisdom, you should have listened to Jesus. His word was close to you; you didn’t have to go on a six month journey to hear it. But you chose to ignore the greatest wisdom that was right before you.”

What would it look like for us to honor Jesus by hearing his wisdom? Two things come to mind. First, it means to pay attention to his word and receive it for what it is, the very word of God. And since Jesus received the Old Testament as the word of God, if we listen to Jesus we will do the same the same. And since Jesus promised that the Spirit would lead the disciples into all truth, it means that we receive the parts of the Bible written after the gospels.

To receive it as the word of God means that we believe it and obey it. It means that we give it a place of authority in our lives, above even human reason. By human reason, doctors used to bleed people in an attempt to heal them. How do you know that the human reason of today is not flawed in some similar way? Human reason says that there is no afterlife. The wisdom of Jesus teaches otherwise. You must choose who you will believe.

A second way we honor Jesus by hearing his wisdom is to trust his wisdom at work in the things he is doing in our lives right now. Jesus is directing the affairs of our lives, and his doing so is marked by wisdom. He knows things we don't know. As we've already mentioned, he knows the hypotheticals of life. He knows the things that could be different in your life and the outcome if those things were in fact the case. If you knew what he knew, you would make the same choice.

In Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins and 13 dwarves go on a quest to slay a dragon named Smaug and to recapture treasure stolen from them by this dragon. Their journey takes them through a dark forest named Mirkwood. They walk for days through this forest until they run out of food. They had been warned not to leave the path while in Mirkwood, but in their hunger they foolishly ignore this advice when they see a group of wood elves holding a feast in the woods just off the path. But as they arrive at the feast, the elves suddenly disappear and move their feast to a location deeper in the forest. Bilbo and the dwarves follow them, only to have the elves disappear again as soon as Bilbo enters the circle of the feast. This happens several more times, with each one leading them deeper into Mirkwood, until they are captured by a swarm of giant spiders. The spiders wrap them all up in sacks and sting them with poison and wait for them to die so the spiders can eat them. Before they die, though, Bilbo manages to rescue them and chase away the spiders, only to have them captured by the wood elves. After a long period of time as prisoners of the elves, they eventually escape and are floating down a river when they pass the end of the path out of Mirkwood, the one they would have been on had they not wandered off the path. As they do so, they see that had they stayed on the path, their quest would have most certainly failed. Tolkien adds this comment: "So you see Bilbo had come in the end by the only road that was any good" (p. 184). Each trial that seemed only to take them further and further away from their goal was actually leading them down a path that in the end turned out to be the path providing the only possible success. Instead of exerting our energy in an attempt to control everything in our lives, we would be better served working to trust and rest in God's wisdom for us.

II. Honor Him with your Wealth

The queen of Sheba **"gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones"** (10:10). It was a gift of

unprecedented generosity, of such massive quantity that **“never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.”** Since a talent was equivalent to 75 pounds, her gift of gold totaled 9000 pounds. At today’s prices, that would be worth more than \$181 million. Isaiah uses this incident to refer to the future messianic kingdom. **“The wealth of the nations will come to you. Caravans of camels will cover your land—young camels of Midian and Ephah—all of them will come from Sheba. They will carry gold and frankincense and proclaim the praises of the Lord”** (Is. 60:5-6). There is a traffic jam of camels bringing the wealth of the nations to honor the Messiah.

This has already started to happen. As growing numbers of people around the world have come to know Jesus, they give of their valuables to honor and worship him. Giving is an act of honor and worship. It says to God, “You are the greatest treasure anyone could have.” One of the missionaries at our missions conference made reference to a “theology of abundance.” Do you know what that is? It is a practice of generosity that flows from a deep conviction that I have everything in Christ. If you have the golden goose, it’s an easy thing to give away golden eggs. Jesus is the golden goose, freely giving us treasures far more valuable than gold, the chief of which is Jesus himself. The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). The only way to be cheerful while giving is to believe that you have a greater treasure in Jesus than in the money you are giving away. Many find that the very act of giving increases one’s treasuring of Jesus by eroding our attachment to money.

Money is temporary. Jesus is forever. Solomon himself shows that. The last part of this chapter describes his staggering wealth. Lest we get too enamored with that, it is important to remember that it lasted only one generation. When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, was king, Shishak the king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and took away all the gold in the temple, including the 500 shields of gold (1 Kings 14:26).

The technology to drill for oil was first attempted in Titusville, Pennsylvania in the 19th century. It was successful and made many people rich. One of them was a man by the name of Henry Rouse. When he saw oil gushing from his well, he lit a cigar to celebrate. When a spark from his cigar fell to the oil on the ground, the resulting fire trapped Rouse and burned him fatally. He somehow managed to drag himself to the edge of the inferno and throw his wallet to safety. His wallet was saved, but Rouse never lived to see any profit from his well.

III. Honor Him with your Requests

The account of the visit of the queen to Solomon ends with a word about her requests to Solomon. **“And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all**

that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon” (10:13). She honored Solomon by asking him for things. The Bible repeatedly invites us to do the same with God. When Jesus walked the earth, he frequently asked people, “What is it you want me to do for you?” He asked it of a blind man named Bartimaeus who came to him, even though the answer was obvious (Mark 10:51). The act of stating our need to God in prayer is a way we draw close to him and honor him.

The Scriptures invite us to be like children in this asking, saying that we won’t even enter the kingdom unless we do so (Matt. 18:3). Children are not bashful about asking their parents. It can become wearying to field their incessant requests. Yet we are to become like children in this regard. In his book on prayer, Paul Miller reports how someone told him that Christians are not supposed to pray for things like parking spots in a crowded city or parking lot. When he reported that to his mother, who was serving as a missionary in London at the time, she replied, “How else are you supposed to find a parking place in London?” We could expand on that remark in many different ways. “How else are you supposed to raise children if you don’t pray specifically for them?” “How else is a marriage supposed to survive and even thrive without prayer?” Is it your practice to make specific requests of God? It brings honor to him when you do so.

CONCLUSION:

What will the queen of Sheba say about you at the final judgment? She will either say, “Blessed are you, son or daughter of the kingdom,” as she said of Solomon’s servants (10:8), or she will say, “If I honored Solomon, you had even more reason to honor his greatest heir, Jesus.” Will you select one of these three areas for an application this week? Hear his wisdom, honor him with your wealth or honor him with your requests. But in any case, honor Jesus.