

The Foolishness of a Once-Wise King

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Foolishness is the failure to give God glory in every area of life.

One of the most compelling scenes in J. R. R. Tolkien’s masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings* is when Aragorn, the true king, is finally crowned and takes his rightful place on the throne: “Then Frodo came forward and took the crown from Faramir and bore it to Gandalf; and Aragorn knelt, and Gandalf set the White Crown upon his head, and said: ‘Now come the days of the King, and may they be blessed while the thrones of the Valar endure!’ But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. And then Faramir cried: ‘Behold the King!’”¹

It’s a scene that stirs the emotions. Even though most of us have never been ruled by an earthly king, something within us resonates with this picture. Could it be that deep down we long for a king? Not just any king, to be sure, but a good, wise, and gracious king.

As we read the Bible, we find that this longing is actually rooted in truth. The true King exists, and He is coming back to set all things right! Unfortunately, history has proven that we too often embrace the wrong king. And even good kings can go bad.

Voices from the Church

“We need a king—one who is perfectly righteous, who cannot be corrupted, who is entirely good, in whom there is never any taint of evil. He powerfully saves and transforms his people, who come to him and gladly acknowledge his Lordship. Hail, King Jesus.”²

—D. A. Carson



When have you been disappointed by a godly leader who did something foolish? How did you handle your disappointment?

In today's session, we look at the foolishness on display near the end of Solomon's reign. Solomon's story is a reminder that all of us are capable of derailing our walk with God by making foolish choices. It is also a reminder that our only hope is in the true King whose wisdom and righteousness are perfect—Jesus Christ. As believers, we repent of our foolishness, rely on God for wisdom and salvation, and then call others to trust in Him.

1. Foolish choices compromise our full devotion to God (1 Kings 11:1-8).

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. ³ He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. 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. 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.

What we see here is one of the most illustrative pictures of idolatry in the Bible. Idolatry and foolishness go hand in hand. If wisdom means to fear the Lord first and foremost, then foolishness is to place something above the Lord. Foolish choices *always* accompany idolatry. So how did Solomon get here? How did these idolatrous attitudes take root in his heart?

Idolatry starts with a disregard.

First, it began with a disregard for God's specific instructions. Kings were not to gather much gold and horses for themselves, and they were not to acquire many wives (Deut. 17:14-20). If they did, their hearts would go astray.

This is how idolatry starts, with a disregard for God's law. In our foolishness we turn away from the Creator and choose instead to worship created things (Rom. 1:18-23). We shun the fountain of true joy and stubbornly build our own dirty wells to drink from (Jer. 2:13).



What are some unpopular commands in Scripture that church members are likely to disregard?



How do our material possessions affect our spiritual state?

Idolatry creates division.

Idolatry creates division in our hearts. Some other person or experience or pursuit grabs our attention and thoughts. God is slowly pushed away from the center of our lives. Idols demand our attention and affection. For example, if you make your career your idol, it will demand all your time and energy. You'll overwork, cut corners, miss out on family time, and neglect time in Christian community. What is happening? Your idol has you by the throat and is choking out your devotion to God. Idolatry creates division.



Voices from Church History

"In a word, so many objects as there are in the world, wherein men seek happiness instead of seeking it in God, so many idols they set up in their hearts, so many species of idolatry they practise."³

—John Wesley (1703-1791)



What are some signs that a person has a “divided” heart?



How can you tell if your heart is devoted to the Lord or divided by other pursuits?

Idolatry leads to destruction.

When the apostle Paul talked about the enemies of the cross, he said, “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19). This is idolatry language. When something else has our focus and our passion, our end is destruction unless we repent and seek the Lord.

We know that Solomon derailed his kingship and fell under the Lord’s judgment through his idolatry. God gave him up to his desires, and Israel suffered as a nation. Idolatry always leaves us fruitless and frustrated and can lead to our downfall. That’s what we see as our story continues.

2. Foolish choices create problems for other people (1 Kings 11:9-13).

⁹ And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice ¹⁰ and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. ¹¹ Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. ¹² Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.”

These words must have hit Solomon like a freight train. Not only would Solomon suffer (1 Kings 11:14-40), but his son would have the kingdom torn from his hands. His idolatry led Israel into a downward spiral that would eventually result in their exile into Babylon years later. This is what happens when we allow foolishness to lead us into idolatry. We may think we are only hurting ourselves, but we are inevitably hurting those around us.



What is the relationship between foolishness and selfish decisions? Why is selfishness foolish?

Sadly, Solomon chose to live like he were a private person. The reality is we are not private people. Our walk with the Lord is personal, no doubt, but it is not private. We may make decisions in private, but our decisions have public consequences.

In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul addressed a deviant case of immorality of which the entire church seemed to be proud! Listen to his words to them: “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

Do you see what Paul was saying? The sin of one individual was *permeating* the entire church. All of them were being impacted by the foolish decisions of one person. Choosing to walk in foolishness will impact those around you.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

38. Sin as Selfishness

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mind-set that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mind-set that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.



How have you been positively impacted by someone else's wise choices?



How have you been negatively impacted by someone else's foolish choices?

3. Even the wisest of kings needs a greater Wisdom (Luke 11:31; 1 Cor. 1:30).

We started this session by discussing our longing for a king, but not just any king—one who would rule in truth and faithfulness. Solomon wasn't enough. We need a greater king than Solomon. As we come to the New Testament, that is what we find. Let's fast forward to the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus speaks of Himself as greater than Solomon.

11:31 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Solomon in all his greatness wasn't great enough. There was something coming after Solomon that was even greater. There is a kind of wisdom that Jesus has that even Solomon needed. Jesus' wisdom not only shows us how to live, His wisdom is what gives us life! Jesus *is* the wisdom we need. This is what Paul had in mind when he addressed the Corinthians:

1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, is the wisdom that saves. Ultimate wisdom is found only in Jesus.

As we engage others with the gospel, we must keep two things in mind. First, we ought to be pointing people to Jesus as the source of all wisdom.

Our good deeds adorn the gospel, but good deeds are no substitute for sharing the gospel. The world needs a greater wisdom—wisdom that saves. They don't just need tips on how to have a better marriage or manage their money. They need Jesus, and that's why as Christians, we ought to talk about Him. We should labor to show that even the wisest and strongest among us are nothing without Jesus (John 15:5). We cannot talk about Him too much. We cannot lift Him up too highly in the eyes of the world. He is our greater wisdom.



How can we serve and support unbelievers when the wisdom of this world lets them down?

Second, we must be ready to serve others when the wisdom of this world fails them. Proverbs reminds us, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov. 13:12). In other words, our joy rises and falls with things we look to for hope and security. If we place our hope in physical fitness and we gain a few pounds or incur an injury, our joy shrinks a bit.

Knowing this truth will make us more effective when sharing the gospel. All people put their hope in something, and if that hope is in anything except Jesus Christ, it is going to fail.

Solomon dazzled the world with his wisdom, riches, and power, yet look at how things ended. He failed. Earthly kings and rulers and powers will always fail us. We must not look to them. We must look to Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). He will never leave us or forsake us. His love is constant. His grace is limitless. His mercies are new every day. This is our message to the world.



Voices from Church History

“Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in his almighty arms.”⁴

—Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843)

As you engage non-Christians, listen carefully to discern what they most hope for or what they most fear. Listen as they tell their story of failed expectations and delayed hope. Then consider creative ways to show how Jesus will never fail them in that area.

For example, if they seem to put their hope in work and their career, show how Jesus is the greatest master to work for. He alone is worthy of all our creative energy and productivity. Perhaps they live for the approval of their father. Show how Jesus has done everything they need to receive the favor and love of *His* Father. This is what it means to lift up Jesus as the ultimate wisdom and hope of the world. There is no area of life where He is not wiser, more glorious, and more beautiful.



What are some reasons we avoid talking about Jesus with non-Christians as they struggle with hope or fear?

Conclusion

In this session, we've seen that even the greatest heroes of the Bible can choose foolishness over wisdom. In seeing their failures, we are stirred up to hope even more in Jesus, our King. We have much to learn from men like Solomon. But beyond all the wise proverbs and sayings that he has given us, perhaps the biggest lesson we take away from him is that we need Jesus more than we've ever imagined.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Solomon was a king whose reign was marked by prosperity and peace. Unfortunately, at the end of his reign, Solomon's sinful compromise led to the division of the kingdom. During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of Himself when He claimed "something greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31). Whereas sinful choices divided Solomon's kingdom, Christ's righteous submission to God established a new unity for God's people.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to proclaim the foolishness of relying on our own wisdom for salvation and to lift up Jesus as the only hope.

1. What foolish pursuits in your life are compromising your full devotion to God and His mission? What steps will you take to repent and seek the Lord?

2. What wise choices can you make this week to benefit your family? Your group/church? Your neighbors and coworkers?

3. How can you share the wisdom of Jesus with a non-Christian you know who is struggling with a failed hope or an overwhelming fear? Pray specifically for that person and for boldness and wisdom from God to share the gospel.

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Eric Geiger

Vice President, LifeWay Resources

Ed Stetzer

General Editor

Trevin Wax

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Content Editor

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Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Michael Kelley

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Send questions/comments to:

Managing Editor,
The Gospel Project: Adult Personal Study Guide,
 One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0102;
 or make comments on the Web at
www.lifeway.com.

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About the Writers

Unit 1:



J. D. Greear is the lead pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. He's the author of *Gospel, Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*, and *Jesus, Continued...: Why the Spirit Inside You Is Better Than Jesus Beside You*. J. D. holds a PhD from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Veronica, have four children.



Spence Shelton lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his wife, Courtney, and their four children. Spence and his family were sent by The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham to plant Mercy Church in the fall of 2015. He holds a BSBA from UNC-Chapel Hill and an MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.



Unit 2:

Greg Breazeale (sessions 7-12) resides with his wife, Heather, and three sons in Austin, Texas, where he is the North Campus pastor at The Austin Stone Community Church. He holds an MDiv from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and is currently pursuing a DMin in Expository Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.



Keith and Kristyn Getty (session 13) are writers of modern hymns that teach Christian doctrine sung in globally-accessible melodies. Some of their best known hymns include "In Christ Alone," "Speak, O Lord," and "The Power of the Cross," all three co-written by Keith with Stuart Townend. Their hymns are sung in churches around the world, in fine concert halls of Europe and North America, and on US network and public television and the UK's BBC. Keith and Kristyn live between Northern Ireland and Nashville with their three young daughters.

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