

Thrones and Riches

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[0 : 00] It's wonderful to hear some exciting news about your pastoral search.! That is the answer to many prayers, both yours and ours.

! I'm going to read the measurements put into modern measurements.

1 Kings 10, 14-29. Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 25 tons of gold, besides that which came from the explorers and from the business of the merchants and from all the kings of the west and from the governors of the land.

King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold. Seven and a half pounds of gold went into each shield. And he made 300 shields of beaten gold.

Four pounds of gold went into each of those shields. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest gold.

[1 : 32] The throne had six steps and the throne had a round top. And on each side of the seat were armrests and two lions standing beside it.

While twelve lions stood there, one on each end of a step on the six steps. The like of it was never made in any kingdom.

All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold. And all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None were of silver.

Silver was not considered anything in the days of Solomon. For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put into his mind.

[2 : 39] Every one of them brought his present. Articles of silver and gold. Garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules.

So much year by year. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen. He had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen. Whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem.

And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone. And he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephthela. And Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt in Qa.

And the king's traders received them from Qa at a price. A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver and a horse for one hundred and fifty.

And through the king's traders they were exported to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open to us your word this morning.

[3 : 50] Speak to us that we may hear about your son. That we may see who you are. And that we may know who we are in relationship to you.

In the name of Jesus, your son, we pray. Amen. Amen. Among the greatest films ever, on any list of those films, within the top five places you're going to find The Godfather.

Right? 1972, one of the pinnacle film experiences. And one of the geniuses of the director is a scene at the end.

And this is the scene that gets studied in film classes. Right? It's a baptism scene. But it's not just a baptism scene. Because what it is, is two scenes really cut together.

And so we see a clip from one scene and a clip from another scene. And we see the baptism. And the audio is the baptism liturgy as the priest recites the liturgy.

[5 : 14] And Michael, the protagonist of the story, as he participates in this baptism as the Godfather. But cross-cut with this baptism scene, we get clips of the works of Michael's henchmen.

And we watch as his men commit murder after murder of rival mob bosses. And so what's so striking, what's so powerful about this scene is we hear Michael confessing his faith and renouncing Satan, renouncing the works of Satan.

And at the same time, we're watching his men commit these murders. These stories don't fit. And the dissonance is extremely powerful. Right? If we were just watching these murders, we might get the impression, right, that this is somehow a good thing.

That this is Michael triumphing over his rivals or taking control. And maybe that's a good thing, right?

[6 : 39] But it's striking to hear him renouncing Satan. And at the same time committing these acts, the stories don't fit together.

And we're left with this impression that something has gone wrong. Right? This is not the way that the story was supposed to go.

And our text today is a story about Solomon's wealth. And if you read the commentators, pretty much all the commentators agree that this story is about the peak of Solomon's glory.

That this is supposed to tell us how wonderful Solomon was as a king. See, all throughout the Old Testament, we've been searching for a human.

For Eve's son who will crush the serpent. Right? For the true king. For the savior. For Israel's king to come.

[7 : 58] And we had David, right? David was a promising candidate for this role. God's true king, right? He was faithful, a man after God's own heart.

And yet, he failed. He failed to be the king that Israel needed him to be. And Solomon now, we read that he far surpassed David in wealth and power and glory.

And so we ask, is this? Is this the promised son of Israel? Right? And Psalm 72, which we read this morning, right?

It's a messianic psalm. What we are reading in this psalm is true. This is the Messiah we are looking for. Right?

And this is David's prayer for Solomon. As Solomon is being crowned king and David is dying.

[9 : 06] And so, David is praying, right? For a king who will bring justice and righteousness. Who will rescue Israel from her enemies. And bring peace and power and prosperity to Israel.

And so, what the commentators say is that this text is really the fulfillment of that. Right? We are seeing the prosperity of Israel.

We are seeing the peace and power of her king. And this is supposed to be the answer to that. And that fits a story.

Right? There is a very common story in our world that would view this, what we read this morning as, yes, that is what a king should be, right?

He has immense wealth. He has a powerful military. He has an enormous, glorious throne. But, actually, that's not what's in Psalm 72.

[10 : 19] Right? We read it. There's nothing about gold. There's nothing about horses. There's nothing about a large throne. See, Israel's king is supposed to be a very special kind of king.

God gave specific instructions for what kind of king Israel was supposed to have. Those instructions are laid out in Deuteronomy 17.

God says, When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it, then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me.

God says, You may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. But he gives some very clear instructions. And I'm going to cross-cut these.

All right? I'm going to cross-cut these instructions, these commands. I'm going to cross-cut God's law with our text. The king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself, or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them.

[11 : 40] For the Lord has told you, you are not to go back that way again. And now from our text. Solomon accumulated chariots and horses.

He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Qa. From Deuteronomy 17.

The king must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. From our text. Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 25 tons of gold.

King Solomon made 200 shields of beaten gold. Seven and a half pounds of gold went into each shield. And he made 300 shields of beaten gold.

Four pounds of gold went into each shield. And from Deuteronomy 17. The king's heart may not be lifted up above his brothers.

[12:41] And from our text. 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.

Solomon's story sounds wonderful when we listen to it by itself.

But it doesn't fit with God's law. Right? When we read those stories together. They clash.

There's a dissonance. They do not fit. There are three critical themes. Where these clash.

[13:45] There's provision, power, and glory. Right? Solomon. Our text tells us how old. He was overflowing with riches.

But that's not what God commands. Right? Remember the story of the manna in the wilderness? Right?

What was the lesson? That it's God who provides. It's God who provides what we need. And hoarding riches is actually a way for us to assert that we will provide for ourselves.

This is why the Israelites were instructed to gather no more than one day's manna. Andy Crouch, in one of his books, writes that we are tempted in our age to achieve abundance without dependence.

Right? We want to have a lot, but not need anybody. Not need the God who gives these things.

[15:02] Right? Like the prodigal son, we want the father's wealth, but we don't want the father.

Our text tells us about Solomon's horses.

Solomon had amassed immense power. A huge standing army with chariots and horsemen. And this isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Right? We read in Psalm 72 and elsewhere that God's king will be powerful. He will defeat his enemies. But how will he do that?

Right? What is the source of his power? It's the Lord. What's the source of Solomon's power? The chariots and horses from Egypt.

Did Israel need to get chariots and horses from Egypt? Did Israel struggle to defeat her enemies when they depended on God?

[16:05] It's actually quite ironic because God defeated Egypt's chariots and horsemen. Right? He washed them away in the waters of the Red Sea.

That Egypt's chariots and horsemen are a lesser power. And that is what Solomon is depending on. Remember in 2 Kings 6.

The king of Syria. Right? The king of Syria sends chariots and horsemen to capture Elisha.

Because Elisha has been hindering his plans.

And Elisha's servant, he wakes up in the morning and he goes outside and he sees all these chariots and horsemen. And he panics. And Elisha prays and God opens the servant's eyes and the servant sees the mountain.

The whole mountain is covered with chariots and horsemen of fire from the Lord. Solomon did not need Egypt's chariots and horsemen, but he returned to the kingdom of slavery and death to get that power.

[17:27] And finally, the throne. Solomon's throne is a picture of glory. Solomon's throne is a picture of glory. Deuteronomy 17 tells us that the king must not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites.

But literally it says his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers. And it's palpable irony there when he builds a throne that literally lifts him up above his brothers.

And the description in our text I think is a little misleading even. It sounds less impressive than this throne actually was.

Legends tell us, you know, we may think, okay, well, this platform has three steps. So about twice as high. That would be a six-step throne. But the legends are actually, this is about six tiers.

Six tiers high with many steps for each tier. Our text tells us, right, there was never a throne like this in any other kingdom.

[18 : 41] And the legends tell us that the kings of Egypt, Babylon, and Persia actually fought each other just to possess this throne. And glory is God's plan for us, right?

Psalms 8 tells us that God crowned humanity with glory and honor. And the commentators tell us that when Adam and Eve sin and realize that they're naked, the problem there is they realize that they have lost their glory, the glory that clothed them.

But our temptation is to replace the glory of God with a cheap knockoff, right?

And this is what Paul talks about in Romans 1. He says, Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Paul's lament, right? You can feel it. Humans were supposed to be glorious, supposed to resemble God.

[20 : 06] And instead, we shape gold into animals and call it glory. God's true king will be hailed as the Lord of heaven and earth and reign for eternity.

Solomon's throne was a silly prop by comparison. Thankfully, Solomon is not the king that God promised.

When the Gospels introduce us to Jesus, we find a very different kind of king. One whose life actually seems very bleak.

If you read the story of Jesus in the Gospels, it's the kind of story that does not fit the way we conceive of kings, right?

When he's finally recognized as a king, the crown that he is given is a crown of thorns. And when he is lifted up, he is lifted up onto a cross to die.

[21 : 19] But when we put his story together with the rest of God's story, it starts to look very different.

It starts to fit. Jesus faces the same temptations that Solomon faced, right? Satan tells him, turn these stones into bread.

You don't need to trust God's provision. You can provide for yourself. And Jesus says, God knows what I need.

And I rely on him. Satan tells him, get authority over the whole world. It's what God wants for you. Take matters into your own hands. Finish the job. Do you know how the plan is?

[22 : 20] It's going to involve pain, dishonor, submission. And Satan offers all of the authority without any of that.

And Jesus responds, I will wait for the Lord. I will do things his way. And in the third temptation, right, Jesus is offered the chance to be publicly validated, to descend from the temple with angels supporting him, right?

Imagine, you know, the Super Bowl halftime show, right? That would maybe be what this would be like, for Jesus to be recognized by everyone as God's true king.

It would be public proof that no one could deny exaltation lifted up by angels. And he would be made king without needing to be lifted up on a cross.

But Jesus chooses his father's plan. And he says in John 8, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.

[23 : 40] It is my father who glorifies me. Jesus is the true king who rules the way that God commanded.

And scripture tells us that God's plan is for us to reign forever with Christ.

But I think Solomon's story feels a lot more natural to me, right? I understand saving up for the future. I understand taking advantage of when they're available.

Working to have people think well of me. And frankly, I'm not always sure when those things become bad.

It's very clear in Solomon's case, I think. But I don't think it's necessarily sinful to contribute to my retirement account or to try to maintain a good reputation.

[24 : 43] And I can't exactly tell you where the line is between those good things and where they come from. Self-aggrandizement or self-reliance.

But I think it is important that we begin to set our story in Christ's story.

Right? Each of us is living in a story. And that story tells us what's important. Tells us what kinds of things are good, what kinds of things are bad.

Solomon built his life around a story that said a king should sit above his subjects and be surrounded by gold.

But when we put that story into God's story, it doesn't fit. So how do we immerse ourselves in Christ's story?

[25 : 42] How do we make that story become more real to us and let it reshape how we see? Maybe it can reshape our perspective on wealth.

Right? Naturally, we view wealth as a sign that God is pleased with us. And when we have unmet needs, when we suffer, when we struggle, we view that as a sign that God doesn't care about us. And yet, when we see Jesus' story, right? The true king, the righteous servant of God, God's beloved son, he had unmet needs.

Right? He experienced loss. He was never wealthy. So, what would our lives look like if we stopped looking at our circumstances to determine whether or not God loves us?

Or maybe our perspective on power, right? It's very natural for us to focus on the results that we want to achieve.

[26 : 58] But Jesus' greatest victory didn't come from doing anything, right? It was actually his submission to what was done to him.

His acceptance of the suffering and death that was done to him. What would our lives look like if we focused simply on being faithful and let God be responsible for the outcome?

I actually think the vacancy and call process is a good picture of doing that. Or maybe our perspective on glory being reshaped, right?

It's very natural to give a lot of weight to how people treat us. To how people treat us. But Jesus was, he was lauded and praised, and then he was betrayed and abandoned, and a crowd cheered for him to be crucified.

Right? And yet, we are promised a day is coming when every knee will bow before him, and heaven will proclaim to him, Lord of all.

[28 : 25] What would our lives look like if we treated the praises and the condemnations of people as the fleeting, weightless things that they are?

And looked God to be the one who glorifies. I think as we start to see our lives as part of Christ's story, and to fit those stories together, I think that will naturally begin to shape us more and more into the kind of people that Christ has called us to be.

And let's pray for the Holy Spirit to do that work in us. Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, when we read this story of Solomon's wealth, and his power, and his splendor, that resonates with us.

That seems right. We know that story, and that story is a part of us. And when we read about a king who is disrespected, who's humiliated, who's beaten, and who's crucified, we struggle to see ourselves in that story.

We struggle to see how that story fits. Lord, make us more and more people who see the world through your eyes.

[30 : 20] Make us more and more people whose story fits with the story that you are telling. Grant us your grace that we may become people who fit into your story.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.