

The disaster of drifting

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Date: 14 June 2020

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[0 : 0 0] So the reading today is from 1 Kings 11 and we're reading from verse 1 to 13. Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite women, 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. He had 700 wives who were princesses and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods.

And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord, the God, as was the heart of David, his father. For Solomon went after Asherah, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.

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. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Moloch, the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountains east of Jerusalem.

And he did for his foreign wives who made offerings and sacrifices for their gods. 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 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods.

[1 : 5 3] But he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, But 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.

Well, good morning, everyone. Please do keep that passage open. As Simon said, my name is Andy. I'm the youth and children's minister here at Grace Church. It's great to be with you.

Hopefully you have a handout with you, Andy. We'll be going through that later. Now, I wonder what your opinion is of the film Titanic. It's the third highest grossing film of all time.

The winner of 11 Oscars. And when you're watching it for the first seven and a half hours or so, everything is going great. The upper class are eating caviar above deck.

The lower class are dancing below deck. Jack and Rose are falling in love. But however good it gets, You know you're watching the Titanic.

[3 : 2 3] And so you know disaster is coming. Well, we're back in 1 Kings for our final look at King Solomon. If you remember, we left him in all his wisdom and splendor.

Has he asked God for wisdom? And he built the great temple. This is the golden age of Israel. Things have never got better than this. If this was the Titanic, then chapters 1 to 10 are full steam ahead.

Everyone having a great time. And Celine Dion belting out, my heart will go on. But the iceberg is just around the corner. All because Solomon's heart didn't go on.

Loving God. And 1 Kings was written not just as a history lesson of what happened, but why it happened. So we can learn from it.

Solomon is the king who points to a greater king. But he's also someone who goes off the rails. He's a warning to us.

[4 : 25] In Nehemiah 13 verses 23 to 27, Nehemiah looks back to King Solomon and warns God's people then not to follow suit.

Because just as the Titanic shows that no ship is unsinkable, well, Solomon shows us that no heart is unsinkable. And some of us are painfully aware of that, aren't we?

As we've seen loved ones, friends, Christian leaders fall into sin and scandal and turn their hearts from God altogether.

And so 1 Kings 11 acts a bit like a public inquiry into the disaster of Solomon's fall. This is the Solomon lessons learned report for us.

And so we're going to go through the missteps of Solomon and then draw together the lessons we can learn from it then. So on the handout, the downfall of Solomon, step one, Solomon ignored God's word and followed his heart.

[5 : 34] You may have picked up as it was read, the repeated idea throughout these verses is Solomon's heart. It comes six times in verses one to nine. Now, heart in the Bible is not just our emotions and feelings, but our very self, our thinking, our actions, our feelings are all connected and summed up in that word heart.

And it's clear here that when Solomon's thinking and his feelings went against God's word, he followed his heart. Have a look down at verse one with me.

Now, King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite women 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.

But surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, princesses and 300 concubines.

700 wives. I mean, that works out in Solomon's reign as getting married every three weeks. I found planning one wedding stressful enough, let alone 700.

[6 : 57] He's probably got someone else to do it for him, to be honest. Imagine the Christmas shopping. Absolute nightmare. So this is not driving 32 in a 30 zone, is it?

This is disobedience on a spectacular scale. And verse two makes clear that God told his people not to do this. But each side of that command, we're told of Solomon's love for these women.

Solomon ignored God's word and he followed his heart. Now, recently my brother signed up for the Disney Plus streaming service and he offered us a free login.

Yes, please. So we did that. And we've watched a few films so far. And one of them was the new version of Aladdin. This is the old version. You've probably seen the old version, maybe. In it, you may remember the iconic song, A Whole New World.

I'm not going to sing it now for you. But it includes these words. Tell me, princess, when did you last let your heart decide? A whole new world.

[8 : 03] A fantastic point of view. No one to tell us no or where to go. Follow your heart. Let your heart decide.

This is the Disney philosophy that screamed to us and our children all around the world. And Solomon falls for it. Hook, line and sinker.

Let's be clear here that this is not an issue of race, but religion. Have a look at verse two again. He was told not to marry these women because they will turn away his heart after their gods.

God gave this command out of love and concern for his people. Solomon knew what God said. He was the king. He was required to write out the law.

He said to himself, It won't happen to me. On the 14th of April 1912, the Titanic received six warnings from other ships about icebergs.

[9 : 08] But it didn't slow down. And it didn't change course. It ploughed on full steam. And we know what happened hours later. Well, Solomon received not just a warning, but a command.

But he didn't listen. He ploughed on full steam ahead into danger. He's essentially calling God's bluff. God, you've given me a warning, but I back myself to be okay to ignore it.

But he's not. And it takes just one verse to show that. End of verse three. Have a look. And his wives turned away his heart.

Solomon chose to ignore God's word and instead follow his heart. And his heart was turned away. So then step two. Leading to the worship of other gods.

Here we see the domino effect in action. Verse three. Careers into verse four. Have a look down. Solomon. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods.

[10 : 16] And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord, his God, as was the heart of his father, David. For Solomon went after Ashereth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.

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. Solomon's heart is now divided.

Notice he didn't give up worshipping God. He's not an atheist here. Verse four and verse six both say that Solomon's heart's not wholly devoted.

He's brought other gods on board. You see, God used to be the sole occupier of his heart. But over time, Solomon added bedrooms and a loft conversion for other gods to live in.

And God is now relegated to one of many tenants, including the false gods, Ashereth, Milcom, Chemosh, Molech. And he had temples built for them.

[11 : 21] And those temples were simply outward signs that the royal heart had become divided. But what's the big deal? We might say he's investigating alternative forms of human spirituality.

But God sees it differently. Verse six. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. This is a first commandment error, a schoolboy error, we might say.

As God said, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. God will not tolerate a shared tenancy in Solomon's heart.

Just as a loving husband or wife will not share their spouse with anyone else. God is his people's rescuer and provider.

And so turning elsewhere is evil. Solomon has broken God's covenant. And so God acts. Step three.

[12 : 32] Bringing God's judgment of a divided kingdom. Have a look down at verse nine. 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 and commanded him concerning this thing.

That he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore, the Lord said to Solomon, since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.

God blessed Solomon tremendously. Verse nine. He had two personal encounters with God. But he's turned away into idolatry.

He's broken God's covenant with his people. And so he falls under God's judgment. Verse 11. God will tear away the kingdom from him.

God will tear away the kingdom from him. The golden age of Israel will be over. And the rest of chapter 11 shows how the infighting and fighting from outside starting to happen.

[13 : 44] And the rest of the book tells the story of Israel as a divided kingdom. And so Solomon's downfall is complete.

The iceberg has been struck. He limps on until the end of the chapter where he dies. Oh, how the mighty have fallen, we might say.

Well, that's the what happened and the why part of the report. So now the lessons learned for us. Firstly, then, beware of following your heart.

This Disney philosophy comes up time and time again. It's in school assemblies and graduation speeches each year. In 2005, the former Apple boss, Steve Jobs, said this to graduating students at Stanford University.

Don't let the noise of others' opinion drown out your inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.

[14 : 48] They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary. It's an alluring message, isn't it?

The only thing you can really trust is your heart. Go with it. It's your inner voice. Listen to it above all else. But King Solomon teaches us a very different lesson.

It's that hearts cannot be trusted. You see, the world tends to think that who we are deep down is fundamentally good. But Jesus, later on in the Bible, gives us a damning verdict.

On your handout is Mark chapter 7. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within. And they defile a person. Solomon's heart problem is our heart problem.

[15 : 58] If you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus, then here is where the world's problems flow from. Not out there, out the window, but in here, my heart and your heart.

And no amount of education and legislation can fix that. It's a heart problem that comes when we turn away from God.

Now, followers of Jesus, Christians now enjoy the assurance that our hearts are no longer what they were through receiving forgiveness and God's spirit.

But our sinful nature hasn't gone completely. That sin is still in our hearts. Sometimes our hearts are in tune with what God says in his word.

But other times they're not. And so it's still dangerous to adopt the Disney philosophy and blindly follow your heart. But what can be trusted is the objective truth of God's word.

[17 : 00] It's good. And he knows what is best for us. And when we find sin in our hearts, we must be prepared to kill it early. The Puritans used to compare small sins to baby snakes.

They're small, but deadly. And if you let them live, they grow into huge serpents. So beware of following your heart.

The next lesson is about faith and marriage. We can't escape the fact here that Solomon's faith and his marriage are intertwined. And again, Nehemiah warns God's people about following in Solomon's footsteps.

And so we too need to hear this today. So if you're not married, please see the warning of going out with and marrying someone who doesn't share your commitment to the Lord Jesus.

They may really get you. You may feel they complete you. But spiritual compatibility matters more than any other compatibility.

[18 : 12] Mercifully, people do come to faith through the witness of a Christian spouse. And we know times of when that has happened at Grace Church. But much more often than not, the influence generally flows the other way, as it did with Solomon.

And no doubt we can think of people for whom it was this issue that led to a spiritual shipwreck. I'm conscious, though, that amongst us there are a number who are married to someone who wouldn't call themselves a Christian.

Perhaps you became a Christian after you got married or came back to Jesus after drifting away. I'm sure you'll know how hard it is being pulled in different directions.

Well, please know that God is able to keep you and use you to reach your family. But it is a tough situation, as Solomon shows us.

And so we all as a church family need to support and pray for marriages in this situation. And for those of us who are married to another Christian, well, our marriage has a significant impact on our primary relationship with God, as Solomon shows, for better or worse.

[19 : 30] And so this is a reminder for us to keep working to centre our marriages around the Lord Jesus and encourage our spouses. And lastly, the last lesson, beware gradual drift.

I'll put on your handout a couple of verses. Solomon's reign was launched in 1 Kings chapter 3, verse 3. That Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David, his father.

And then fast forward 40 years later to 1 Kings 11. Solomon didn't wake up one day.

To stop loving God and start loving other gods. But a gradual drift made up of wrong choices and wrong priorities made earlier on.

Now, for us, it's unlikely we will drift into worshipping Allah or Buddha. The danger is much more subtle. The theologian John Calvin called the human heart a factory of idols.

[21 : 02] We just keep producing these things that we worship. And the American pastor Tim Keller puts it like this. The human heart is an idol factory that takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions and even family and turns them into ultimate things.

Our hearts deify them as the centre of our lives. Because we think they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfilment if we attain them.

So we must ask ourselves, what might that look like for us? Are there other things that are beginning to take the place that Jesus once had in our hearts?

Are we drifting towards worshipping the career, the family or perhaps the prestige, power and prosperity which women in the church were thinking about last weekend?

Verse four is striking, isn't it? In one Kings 11. For when Solomon was old. We might think that once a Christian navigates the choppy waters of the teenage and student years, it's plain sailing into midlife and then cruising into retirement.

[22 : 20] But when it comes to turning our hearts away and drifting to worshipping idols, we are all in the at risk category.

The devil doesn't go into retirement when we do. He continues to try and lead us astray through idols all of our lives. And particularly, I think, through lockdown, when we are more isolated than normal from each other.

When practical weariness of our situation seeps into spiritual weariness. And so Hebrews chapter two, verse one is very apt, isn't it?

Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. We are to keep fixing our eyes on Jesus, keep listening to him and keep encouraging each other to do the same.

I imagine, though, that for all of us, there will be sin in our hearts and lives that leaves us crushed. Times that we're feeling that we're drifting without any chance of rowing back.

[23 : 33] Times when we know God's word and yet follow our hearts instead. The small snakes have grown into deadly vipers.

But there is hope. Because at the bottom of your handout, Solomon leaves us longing for a greater king. You see, mixed with God's judgment to Solomon is his mercy.

Have a look at verse 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.

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.

God remained faithful to his people. He doesn't wipe out Israel. For the sake of David. And eventually the one greater than Solomon did come.

[24 : 36] King Jesus. The apostle Paul says this in Acts 13. Of this man's offspring, God has brought to Israel a saviour.

Jesus, as he promised. Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers. That through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

King Jesus, born in the line of David. Didn't turn away from God's law. But kept it completely with an undivided heart. All so he could die on behalf of idolaters like me and ye.

So we can be forgiven. And so our hope now is in Jesus, the saviour king. And because his heart is pure, he can keep us in a relationship with God forever.

If we turn and cling to him. If you wouldn't call yourself a follower of the king, then please see the forgiveness that is on offer.

[25 : 40] The forgiveness that he brings that we won't find inside our own hearts. And if you have failed him, as I have time and time again, then we are not to let sin go unchecked.

But to repent and cling to Jesus. Experiencing God's renewing mercy again and again. Let's pray together.

Father God, we thank you for Jesus, that he is the saviour of us, that his undivided heart led him to the cross, to the grave and now to glory.

We thank you that because of him, our divided hearts can be washed clean. And Father, please help us to see where we're tempted to drift from you.

Please help us to be ruthless with our sin and to follow you wholeheartedly. Amen.