

Solomons Wisdom

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Date: 23 September 2018

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Kings 4. What we're going to do is we're going to read the first verse, then we're going to jump to verse 20, and then we're going to read through, because this is really a focus on Solomon himself, of course much of the other stuff's included, but we'll pick it up in verse 1 and then jump to verse 20, so now hear God's word. King Solomon was king over all Israel. Verse 20, Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate, drank, and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. Solomon's provision for one day was 30 corns, cores of fine flour, and 60 cores of meal, 10 fat oxen and 20 pasture-fed cattle, and 100 sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl. For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates, from

Tipchash to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates, and he had peace on all sides around him. And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon. Solomon also had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and those officers supplied provisions for the King Solomon, and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month. They let nothing be lacking. Barley also, and straw for the horses, and swift steeds they brought to the place where it was required, each according to his duty. And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure and breadth of mind, like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom suppressed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Israelite, and Heman, Kachol, and Dada, the sons of Mahal, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts and of birds and of reptiles and of fish. And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom. Well, may God bless his word to our very heart this evening. We're going to come back to that. If you have your 1 Kings in front of you. The main attention is really on the entire chapter.

So we'll skip our way through it. But of course, we finish with the very obvious statement of Solomon being wiser than anybody else. So now that we come to chapter 4, there's a few things for us to consider. The first is this, that we really ought to give thanks to God that we've read the first three chapters. You know, I guess this is like a jigsaw puzzle. And, you know, if this was the fourth piece in the puzzle, then it would make very little sense on its own. It only makes sense in the sense that it's connected to the previous three pieces that then builds this picture that God wants us to see.

So just a quick overview. Again, the first three chapters, we have learned that God always appointed Solomon to be king, even though there was a rival for the throne. Solomon became king, not because David appointed him as king, even though that is the case, how it worked out. But he was always going to be king according to God's design and plan. But he was a king through opposition. And God has his way through opposition. And that's a wonderful sort of reminder to us that, you know, God's will cannot be thwarted, something which Job had to learn. Really important. And then in chapter 2, we read twice that Solomon was wise. David, his father called him wise. But one wonders if David was just sort of pleasing his son so that his son would actually do what his father asked. And the reason I say that is because is chapter 2 really a wisdom chapter? Is Solomon really all that wise? I mean, he's, you know, he has a lot of people executed. And okay, while that's consistent with a peaceful kingdom, was it altogether wise? Well, that argument's only then strengthened when you get into chapter 3, as we saw last week, where Solomon identifies

himself as a little child, not a wise person at all. And he comes before God, or God brings him before him and says, Solomon, you can ask for whatever you like. And Solomon, recognizing that he's like a little child, ask and recognizing that he is a king, asks God for wisdom. And we saw that that was a reminder of what Jesus does with us. That when Jesus comes before you in the New Testament and says, ask and it shall be given to you. Ask and it shall be given to you. There are two things you're going to have to consider.

[6 : 34] Firstly, your own self-awareness. Solomon, I was like a little child. Secondly, your responsibility before God, because both of these under sort of strengthen, shall we say, the foundation of what you're actually going to ask. In other words, if you're not very aware of yourself before God, then you're probably going to ask for things that are, you know, not necessarily in line with the relationship with God. The other thing is, if you're not aware of your responsibility before God, you're not really going to ask for the things that will help you in your responsibility before God.

And so these two things are crucially important. Self-awareness and an awareness of your responsibility before God. Ask and it shall be given. It's what God says to Solomon. And Jesus is extending that same type of prayer to us. Ask and it shall be given. Well, now that we come to chapter four, you begin to see a kingdom that is at absolute peace, absolute blessing, and absolute well-being. And we've got to ask the question, well, what is it that contributed to such kingdom blessedness? What is it that actually contributes to a church completely at peace, full of God's blessing? What actually is the contribution to that? Well, it's quite clear that chapter four is in complete contrast to chapter two, which is why I think it's important that we've gone through chapter one, chapter two, and chapter three.

I think one of the main contributing factors for why there's so much peace in the kingdom is to do with the fact that God in chapter three gave Solomon so much wisdom. And with that wisdom, he then undertook his responsibility before God. And of course, that led to the peace and blessing. We could also argue that perhaps chapter two was necessary for the peace in chapter four.

In other words, some people just have to go. That there was no way that these people who were alive in chapter two could stay alive because they just would have been an absolute thorn in a pain in the kingdom, bringing it down in other ways. And of course, there are many commentators who will read chapter two and say, that's exactly what it's about. Chapter two is about removing those who will be a perpetual pain in the kingdom. Okay, well, I'm not entirely sure whether that is completely true, but you can understand that it is consistent with kingdom throughout the whole Bible. So what actually contributes to a kingdom that is full of God's blessing? Well, number one is clearly no disruption of an unbiblical kind, no disorder of an unbiblical kind. And then follow that up positively, it would be the very wisdom of God in order and blessedness and the peace that comes with that.

Solomon is recognized as wiser than any other man. And this is simple because it's God's wisdom, not Solomon's wisdom. It says in verse 32 that he spoke 3,000 proverbs. And I think it would be fair to say that at this period of his life was when Proverbs was written. And then in the latter part of his life, you could argue that that was when Ecclesiastes was written. And the reason for that is that Proverbs is a man who understands that he has to look at life with a future in mind. Okay, God expects his people to look at today with the future days in mind. That's the only way you can guide yourself through today, or rather be guided through today. Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, is clearly a man speaking in hindsight. He's clearly a man who can look back on life and go, yep, yep, yeah, okay, made a mess there, yep, okay. Okay, and Ecclesiastes is written with this kind of hindsight in mind. Solomon was the man, as we've noticed, who didn't listen to his own wisdom.

[10 : 39] Incredibly wise for other people. You know, there's no doubt that God gifted him with a great deal of wisdom. But what Solomon didn't have is the ability to be able to listen to his own wisdom, or rather listen to the wisdom that God gave. For a period of time, he did it. But after a time, he didn't. And you know, we've all met people who are absolutely brilliant people. And then we're utterly confused why these brilliant people can fall from such a great height. And you think, well, how just how is that possible? That these people who are looked upon by so many, who are given so much power and reputation, then fall? Well, there is a temptation of people, when they have a lot, to throw it all away. Now, that temptation is never for young people, because they don't have a lot to throw away. But the moment you start gaining, and the temptation to say, right, I'm just going to just throw it all away. Solomon done that. The moment he had stuff to throw away, he went ahead and threw it away. Okay, it's absolutely not surprising at all, that some, you know, marriages

break up in their 40s and 50s, and there's disruption amongst the family. Because at the moment when people have got everything, they then look for that and throw away what all the blessing that they've actually had up to that point. Okay, the world will want to interpret it as a midlife crisis. It's not a midlife crisis at all. It is simply just not recognizing the pattern of a sinful life. And Solomon, again, was brilliant for other people, writing these Proverbs, but didn't pay attention, it would seem, to a single word of them himself, or at least not many of them. So here's the summary of how it unfolds. Solomon is king in verse 1. And then in verses 2 through to 18, he has appointed officials. In other words, he has rearranged the kingdom. He has decided who's going to be in what position doing what.

And whatever the reason is, whatever the reason for the rearrangement of officials, of taking some people out of power and putting other people into power, what it's led to is a kingdom at total peace. A kingdom where people live in safety. A kingdom where people are beginning to enjoy all the blessings because of the way that Solomon has handled things. Now, for the people who are removed, are they going to be happy? No, probably not. I mean, if you were removed, would you be happy?

No, it probably gets you a pride, it probably rub you up the wrong way a little bit. But the overall picture of the kingdom is Solomon seems to have made the right decisions in order to bring about this peace and blessing that the kingdom now enjoys. This is why in verse 20, it says that the people ate, drank, and were happy. In verse 25, it says that everyone lived in safety, every man under his vine and under his fig tree. Meaning that here we have a picture of God's people living in God's place under completely God's blessing. What does that remind you of? God's people in God's place under God's blessing. Well, it sounds a lot like the Garden of Eden to me.

God's people in God's place enjoying God's blessing. And again, many commentators have argued that that is exactly the case, that God is showing you that he is restoring things back to the way that it's meant to be. It's only a picture. Only Christ will bring the final restoration. But it is a picture of where things are going. So here's the first thing to notice, order. Chapter four opens with a very orderly account of order being established. In other words, this is an orderly kingdom. And we saw this morning just how important it is for Jesus that when he gives orders to a person, he's actually reordering their life. That the orders of God in a person's life is really the reordering of their life for his purposes. That's really important and really quite precious to go through this reordering that God does.

Well, Solomon here is doing that very thing in the kingdom. Appointing some people into some positions while others are not. Well, that's a reordering. It is an ordering of the kingdom that brings about peace. And so the thing we begin to notice is that people are at peace with each other within the kingdom. Why? Because there's order. That the people are not against those in the positions. Why? Because there's order. And those in the positions are not abusing those who are in the surrounding areas that they rule over or serve over. Why not? Because there's order throughout the kingdom. And so this order is not something to be overlooked. You know, all these people serving in all the areas that they do, that's just no big deal. Well, no, it's a really big deal to have orderly people giving orders that give order to a community of God's people. Why? Well, that's because it produces the fruit of blessedness. But you never get to see it. Here's why. Because when you see a lovely apple tree or a lovely fruit tree of any kind, the first thing that your eye goes to is the fruit. Okay, and you think, wow, look at that. I'm going to take of that fruit. I'm going to bring it down. I'm going to eat it.

[16 : 21] I'm going to enjoy it. Whatever it may be. Good for the harvest. Okay, but where's the order in that? That's the outcome of order. That's the outcome of structure. But where's the order? Well, it's the root system. The root system is what's keeping the tree up. The root system is what's feeding the tree, producing its fruit. And so order may not be that impressive to the eye in the sense that you look at it and go, isn't that beautiful? Everyone enjoys the blessing. But don't forget that the real blessing is in the roots and the structure of what keeps all of this together. And so a kingdom that is full of blessing at its root level of strong roots and structure, holding the whole thing together, which most people never look at. The kingdom of God is exactly the same. No different. Here's the second thing to notice then. That life under the blessing of God, they ate, they drank, and they were happy. Eight drank, and they were happy. Now, most people are familiar with this phrase from Ecclesiastes, not necessarily familiar with it from 1 Kings 4. But he's saying exactly the same thing. And what he's saying is this. It's not often what you think, just eat, drink, and be merry, as though

just do whatever you like. That's not what Ecclesiastes is saying. What the real point here is being made is that in this world, you're going to have to work incredibly hard. Okay? Nothing's going to be put out on a plate for you, and neither should it be. Okay? Whenever a nation or a kingdom becomes bloated on the state, then it's a quick downfall from there. You go back to all the empires, the same thing happens over and over again. The end of an empire, or the second stage to the end of an empire, is a bloated state where nobody wants to do anything. They all want handouts. Okay? And the next stage after that is decadence, and then it's just the downfall immediately. God doesn't hand it out in this way. Solomon understands that you're going to have to work hard. And working hard is so difficult that you better take time to eat, drink, and be happy. In other words, don't get so stuck into work that you forget and overlook the blessings that God gives you in eating and drinking and being happy. In other words, make sure you take time in God's kingdom, in this world, under God, to enjoy all the blessings of God, not just the hard work that you have to do in order to get those blessings.

Now, it is true to say that some people in this world will eat, drink, and be happy not being conscious of God. But that's not what you're meant to be doing. And that's certainly not what Solomon is encouraging. Rather, what Solomon is encouraging is that as you get on with your work, don't forget to enjoy these other blessings of eating and drinking and being happy. Those are blessings as well that God has to give his people. But he says life is not the sum of those parts. Life cannot be the total of just eating and drinking and be happy. Some people make that the total of their life.

Nice restaurants, okay? Nice nights out at certain bars, whatever it may be, and a happiness that is associated with those two. Yeah, everybody could live for the weekend. Everybody could live for the next night out. That could be the sum of some people's living. But that's certainly not the sum of life according to the way God wants us to understand it. We are meant to enjoy those things. But we are meant to enjoy them as blessings of God, okay? Because we have to work hard in the kingdom. When it says here in 1 Kings 4 that God's people ate, drank, and were happy, what it's saying is this is a picture of people enjoying the blessings of God. They know how to enjoy God's blessings and not feel guilty about it.

Okay? Excessiveness, okay. Feel a little guilty, okay? But you shouldn't feel guilty about enjoying the blessings of God as though true Christianity is somehow depriving yourself of as many as those blessings as possible. That's just not the case. True Christianity may be not getting excessive in all of those things. And you know, greedy, that's true Christianity. But it's certainly not a true Christianity to deprive yourself of these things that God has given you. They are meant to be thick and heavy and enjoyable. And that's what Solomon is understanding here and what the people understand here. I also think there's something else here which is really important for us to understand and that Solomon is wealthy, like incredibly wealthy, but it's never at the expense of the people that he serves. It's never at the expense of the people below him. In other words, you look at all the wealth that he has and it's just tremendous amount of wealth. But then you look at the people, they're living in safety, they don't have any wants, each lives under their fig tree and against the vine, they're eating, they're drinking, they're happy. Nobody's complaining. And yet Solomon's wealth and all that he enjoys is meant to be understood as not at the expense of the people that he serves over. Why is that so important? Well, you look at the world today and how many leaders we've had in the world that are wealthy precisely because it's at the expense of the people in their own country.

[22 : 03] You know, the aid that goes to the country gets swallowed up because it goes through the governmental chain and suddenly it gets taken off before it ever reaches the people. And they live in these big houses and they eat, drink and they're happy and they're enjoying plenty of stuff at the expense, it's pointed out, of the people that they're meant to be sharing it with and giving it to.

Solomon doesn't do that. He's wealthy, not at the expense of the people beneath him. You read Nehemiah 5, what do you find happening? Well, you find that very thing happening. Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah's pointed to leadership and the first thing that he finds out is that the people out on the street, you know, you've got a mother whose husband is working away who hasn't been home for several weeks and now she's having to send her son out to work because there's not enough income coming into the house. That's a terrible condition to live under. Nehemiah gets appointed into leadership and he says to the leaders, what are you doing? Why are you taking the share that you do at the expense of the people that you're meant to be leading over? Serving. And

so Nehemiah has to point out that he's not going to share in his portion that he's entirely entitled to as a leader.

In other words, I'm not going to sit here at the same table you are drinking the same things, eating the same food that you do while I know that there's people out there that I get to enjoy these things at their expense. I'm just not willing to do that. And of course you'll know that Nehemiah creates this wonderful reform only to get to the end of the book to find out that everything is just as bad as it was before he even got there. In other words, the reform lasted for a little bit but the heart of the people was always to take at the expense of others. You know, I'm not surprised at all that one of the biggest industries growing at this minute is gambling. I'm not surprised at all why there's so many adverts on TV for all these apps that you can download and play and, you know, you get to, you know what it is? It's here. Win it somebody else who's playing the same game.

Let them put £10 in while you put £10 in and guess what? One of you will win and the others won't. Okay? You've just got a whole society now being asked to practice in this winning at the expense of other people losing. That's just so immoral and so wrong. It's not what the kingdom of God is made of.

[24 : 39] And yet what we're seeing here in this kingdom is a king who's incredibly rich but not once is it mentioned that his rich in wealth come at the expense of others. He's rich because God has blessed him.

And because it's God's blessing, God doesn't overlook his people. He blesses them as well. Incredible blessing. Proverbs then. A man who's written Proverbs. It says in verse 34 that people came from everywhere to hear Solomon's wisdom. And of course the point is it's not really Solomon's wisdom that they're hearing but rather God's wisdom through Solomon. What Solomon gets to enjoy here is something that I wish I could enjoy more than what I do and I think probably you also. To be able to see everything from God's point of view. You know, we pray that we would but I'm not always sure that we do. But Solomon clearly sees life from God's point of view. That's how he's able to make such clear distinctions and clear judgments between people and nations and what to do and what not to do.

Why? Because he's been given this tremendous wisdom to be able to see things as God sees it. I think one of the best examples of this is Jesus in John 4. Do you remember how Jesus goes off to the well? And do you remember what the disciples did? If you don't, I'll remind you. They went off into town to get some food. And Jesus is sat by the well and he's talking to the lady at the well. And of course after the conversation, of course she's converted, the disciples come back wondering why Jesus is talking to her. Anyway, cut the long story short. It's not even a long story but to get to the point, they wonder what Jesus has had to eat. You know, aren't you hungry? And he says, well I have food that you don't know about. Completely confused as to what this would be. And he says, it's to do the will of my father. And then he says to them, look, you're thinking about your bellies. But don't open your eyes. Look up. The fields are white unto harvest. Well, they didn't see it. In other words,

Jesus wandered through his earthly ministry with the eye of how God saw everything. That's why he went to the woman at the well. The woman at the well was a field white unto harvest, ready for the picking. A harvest of people. The disciples, they were enjoying, eat, drink and be happy a little bit too much perhaps. Or perhaps they were just hungry. Whatever the case is, they did not see the woman in the same way Jesus did. And that's the wisdom of God at work. To be able to see things from God's point of view. How important is that? Well, I'll tell you how important it is that. Because if you want to look at anything clearly as God looks at it, then it's really important we see it from God's viewpoint.

Okay, here's the exhortation as we sort of come to a close. There is no doubt that Jesus is greater than Solomon. But how is he greater than Solomon? Now, the pat answer would be something like this.

[28 : 00] Oh, because he's God. Okay. No one's disagreeing that Jesus is God. No one's going to disagree here that Jesus is greater than Solomon. I'm asking, how do you know? How do you see that Jesus is greater than Solomon? Where do you see that greatness in Jesus compared to Solomon? Well, I think you see it in the same areas. Number one, Jesus is the king. Jesus is the king. Why is he greater than Solomon?

Well, I think clearly because he's never going to die. That's one clear example. He is the true and good king who will never die. And therefore, this is why his kingdom will never end. Because the

king never dies is the greatness of Jesus and his kingdom. I think another way that clearly shows us that Jesus is greater is Solomon was clearly wealthy and wise, and all of it was given to him by God. But it was kind of a ground upward sort of blessing. In other words, if you look at Solomon's life, he was blessed from the ground upwards. And what I mean by that is he had the same flesh and blood as any of us. He had the same type of life, you know, where we had to live, you know, in a physical world. And he was blessed by God from the ground up. He was rich, and everyone underneath him in the country was blessed by God. But when you look at Jesus, what do you see? Well, this is what you see, that though he was rich, that though he was rich, he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. How do we become rich? Well, we become rich at the expense of Jesus becoming poor.

We become rich in God, rich in blessing, rich in every way, at the expense of one who had everything to begin with, and who became poor, so that we might become rich. Jesus, in becoming a man, in coming down into humanity, became poor. And I think it's incredibly humbling. I have to remind myself, as you know, as I'm sort of getting a little bit older now, I have to remind myself even more than I did when I first started out in ministry, when I start worrying about where am I going to live in the future, and how am I going to provide for my wife and kids. I have to remind myself that though he was rich, he became poor, he became poor, I have to remind myself that I belong to one who saved me. And who is that one that saved me? Well, it was a homeless man. I was saved by a homeless man. That's incredibly humbling and reordering to life, isn't it? That though he was rich, the man that saved us had less than you have. The man that saved us lived a life at a lot lower position than what I do. That's incredibly, well, it's like a lead in your stomach, that I'm saved by a homeless man. He's God, I know he's God, but a homeless man as he lived his life on earth. This kingdom is established by one who was rich, who became poor, so that we through his poverty might get to enjoy all the blessings, get to enjoy to live in peace, to eat, drink, and be happy in a very God-ordered way. But here's the final thought. One of the things that I don't want us to overlook here, and I just want to touch on it as we close, is that you'll notice that Solomon's wealth and wisdom is given to him by God, but in verse 20, you'll notice that God keeps his promise. It says in verse 20 that Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. And what we should truly understand and appreciate about chapter 4 is that this is nothing more, or rather nothing less, than God keeping his promise. All the way back in

Genesis 22 verse 15, 16, or 17, somewhere around there, God promises to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. And here we have, in Solomon's day, that very promise being kept by God in a single verse. That all the blessing that we get to see here is simply the fulfillment of God keeping his promise. And the fact that we are able to sit here and enjoy all the blessings that we do, the fact that we are relatively able to eat, drink, and be happy, and live at peace, and know that we have peace with God, and know that we have an eternal kingdom that we actually belong to, that we can never be separated from, is because God has kept his promise.

Too often it's possible to read 1 Kings or any book of the Old Testament and think, okay, it's a part of history, but it's not really part of my history. No, you're wrong.

[33 : 26] You're so wrong. It is exactly part of your history because you're part of God's people.

This is your history. This is where you have come from in the historic line. You are simply the continuation of God keeping his promise throughout the generation, just like these people here are after Abraham. They all get to enjoy the promise that God is keeping, just like we are here.

It's an important part of history, but it's an important part of our history because this is who we are, kingdom people living in God's kingdom with all the blessings that God has for us.

As we close, remember this, that the greater thing that Solomon's life points to, and the greater kingdom that 1 Kings 4 actually point to, is what we actually have, the kingdom of God with us. God established his kingdom through Jesus and he brought us into it to eat, to drink, to be happy, to work, of course, but to live at peace with God and with each other until the fullness of the kingdom appears. Amen.