

Sermon 12: What Blessedness Looks Like, 1 Kings 10

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Introduction

You have heard God asked to bless people hundreds, even thousands of times, many of those times from this very pulpit. We all want to be blessed. We love the Beatitudes, our Savior's list of particular kinds of people who are blessed. But have you ever taken the time to consider what blessing looks like, biblically speaking? That's what our text tonight is about. As the narrator of Kings brings his account of Solomon's reign to a close, he has one final chapter that is supposed to leave no more breath in us. We have read all kinds of pretty amazing stuff about Solomon, impressive stuff. But this is the grand finale. You should come away from 1 Kings 10 saying, "So *that's* what blessing looks like." Even better, the narrator has given us two views — blessing on a special occasion, and blessing in ordinary times.

I. A Blessed Special Occasion: The Queen of Sheba's State Visit (vv. 1-13)

We begin with the blessed special occasion. Even in the modern era of travel among world leaders, you don't get a state visit every day, or even every week. Well, travel took a lot longer in those days, and it would have taken the Queen of Sheba 25 days at 40 miles/day to get up to Jerusalem from Sheba. This was no small trip. It was special. I did not reread all the Biblical history, but I believe that unless you count Abimelech coming to see Abraham, this is the only occasion in the entire Old Testament where a foreign monarch makes a friendly visit to Israel. That's pretty impressive.

A. Her Motive: The Name of the Lord and of Solomon (v. 1)

What is Sheba? It is a territory probably in South Arabia. Some suggest the area of what is now Yemen, a thousand miles from Jerusalem.

What drew this queen? She had heard of the fame of Solomon "concerning the name of the LORD." Now, this is a tricky expression. It doesn't occur elsewhere in Scripture. So the nature of the connection between Solomon's fame and the name of Yahweh is a little fuzzy. The only parallels are all the times that the text talks about building a house "for the name of the LORD"—exact same phrase in Hebrew. The bottom line is that the reputation of Solomon was wrapped up with the reputation of Jehovah. The situation is like that of Daniel. Daniel's enemies at court knew they wouldn't be able to pin anything on him unless it related to "the name of His God." Solomon's fame could not be detached from God's. Now, just a side application here — are you known for your faith in God? Is it the case that you can hardly be known or mentioned apart from your connection to the God of Israel?

In any case, the Queen heard of Solomon's fame, and she came to test him with hard questions. She wanted to see if he was real. We've read chapters 1-9; we know he's real. But she didn't have chapters 1-9. So her function is to stand as an independent witness, someone with no vested interest either way, who will bear testimony to the kind of person Solomon is. Recall also that she stands as a fulfillment of prophecy. She is another foreigner attracted to the chosen people. Solomon has kept a missionary focus throughout his reign, which we can see from his temple construction, his prayer, and his books. Psalm 72 is a missionary psalm; Ecclesiastes,

Proverbs, Song of Solomon, all are written to be valid, accessible, and useful worldwide. You don't need to read Deuteronomy to get a great deal out of Proverbs.

So Solomon wanted to be light to the nations, and this woman responds. She comes ultimately because she's heard about Solomon and the God of Solomon, and to her, the report was good enough that it was worth it to come a thousand miles to hear more.

B. Her Greatness (v. 2)

Now, someone with nothing better to do might be willing to take two months off and go follow up some report about a wealthy king somewhere. But this queen is no fly-by-night loser. She's the real deal herself. This is the equivalent of a foreign leader visiting with a fleet of fifty private jets, an escort of twenty-five fighter planes, a hundred black Escalades for her security detail, and riding in one of three identical Cadillac limousines, with one as a decoy and the third one for her shoes. She brought plenty of treasure with her, too. And she gained admittance to Solomon and took up plenty of his time in conversation. Everything about her suggests that she knows what she's doing. She is no fool.

C. Her Tour (vv. 3-5)

Well, Solomon gives her full cooperation. She saw everything. We've read about most of this, and we tend to forget how impressive it all was. But she knew what she was looking at; she was looking at God's blessing on Solomon. Blessing looks like Solomon's kingdom in all its glory. Blessing looks like the food on his table, and the king's private entrance to the temple.

D. Her Verdict (vv. 6-9)

We know she took this as blessing, because that is the word she uses. She once again gives her credentials — "I heard about you, but really, I had no idea" — and then gives her verdict, which begins with the word "blessed" in v. 8. The English versions, except the NASB, translate this as "happy" because it is a different word from the first word of v. 9. But it is rightly the word "blessed." The v. 8 word is the same word used in Psalm 1. *Blessed* are your men!, she effectively says. I have seen what blessing looks like, and it looks like the way Solomon runs things. His home, his wisdom, the way he eats, the way his servants act, the way they dress, the way he goes to worship God--this is blessedness, to be in the presence of Solomon and hear his wisdom!

Now, what does that mean? First of all, we must look to the greater Son of David. If it was blessing to be in Solomon's presence, how much more blessed is it to stand in the presence of Jesus Christ and hear His wisdom? When you come to church and hear God's minister speaking to you, you are sitting there hearing the wisdom of God. That's what being blessed looks like. Drinking in the wisdom of Christ, who is the Divine Wisdom personified, is the ultimate in blessedness. Being in His presence is blessedness. That is the spiritual reality behind the earthly manifestation in Solomon's court. Yes, blessedness appears in earthly things. If you have a beautiful home and well-trained, obedient employees, you are blessed by God. That is the beginning of blessedness. But full blessedness consists of basking in the presence of Christ and knowing fellowship with such a great man, who is at the same time the great God! Blessedness is

pictured in physical terms throughout this chapter, but we see in this declaration that ultimate blessedness comes from knowing Christ. You may not be outwardly prosperous, but you can still be blessed by hearing the wisdom of God!

Second, blessedness results in the praise and honor of God. The Queen of Sheba did not worship Solomon; she blessed God for him. In other words, she knew how to take a blessing. The splendor of the Solomonic court didn't distract her from God; it moved her to cry out in praise to God, recognizing that all these blessings were His gift to His people because He loved them. If she could praise God for putting Solomon on the throne, how much more ought we to praise Him for putting Christ on the throne? In the Lord Jesus, we have a king who truly does justice and righteousness. Solomon did so, and that was a sign of the blessedness of his subjects. Christ does so perfectly, and that is a sign of the perfect blessedness of *His* subjects.

E. Her Unsurpassed Gift (vv. 10-12)

Well, the Queen sought to do her part in blessing the people of Israel by giving a gift of such spices and treasure as never came again. Solomon also engaged in trading ventures which brought a special kind of wood that never came again. This is yet another aspect of blessedness: when people see God's generosity, it makes them generous. The Queen handed over what is today \$170 million worth of gold.

F. Solomon's Royal Generosity (v. 13)

Solomon could not be out-given. He gave to her according to his royal generosity, plus whatever she asked for. Now, just as a side note, this word "desire" has been much abused. It has been believed in Ethiopia for many centuries that what the Queen desired was a son, and that Solomon granted her this wish and slept with her, producing a son who was the founder of the royal Ethiopian dynasty. This dynasty, allegedly beginning in the 900s B.C., did not come to an end until forty years ago, in 1974. Needless to say, you can see for yourself that nothing in the text encourages us to think that Solomon took the Queen to bed, much less that their son founded a royal dynasty in Ethiopia. Rather, such a method of "interpreting" the text is a warning to us if it is anything. In order to make daily life mean something, do we have to tie it to the Bible in some ingenious way? Many people in the generation or two before mine were afraid of the Soviet Union, no doubt with some justification. But in order to make that fear more meaningful, some of them resorted to teaching that the Bible specifically prophesied the USSR and even various models of Soviet helicopters. We see now that in God's providence, the USSR never attacked the USA directly. But in any event, this method of using Scripture is far from dead. Whether it is Ethiopian Christians saying their monarch came from Solomon or American Christians saying their political views came from the book of Revelation, it is Christians misusing Scripture.

The fact of the matter is that Scripture *does* speak to daily life, and make it meaningful, but not in that way. The Queen of Sheba was blessed, but it was by communing with Solomon on a personal level, not by getting her name mentioned here. Be content with what God has told you, and do not attempt to make your life important by foolish overinterpretation of the text of Scripture! In fact, the text goes on to tell us what meaningful ordinary life looks like.

II. Blessed Ordinary Life, Nothing Special Happening (vv. 14-29)

So there was a blessing in the visit of the Queen of Sheba. There is also blessing in the ordinary business of rule. Again, you are supposed to be impressed with how Solomon ran things. Here is blessing in the everyday--ordinary life lived under God's favor. Some commentators complain that Solomon is too wealthy, that the ordinary people aren't mentioned here and that he was doubtless exploiting them, that the food of chapter 4 has disappeared and been replaced by precious metals. That approach is wrongheaded. That's like saying heaven is only for the rich because the streets are paved with gold. To interpret Scripture like that is to miss the point. Everything we're going to read about Solomon's wealth is simply the physical outworking of spiritual realities. Heaven would be wonderful even if the streets were only ordinary asphalt; Solomon would have been a good king even if he had a tiny income. But the entire point of Israel is to translate spiritual realities into physical terms, so that we can see what they look like. What does blessing look like in ordinary life?

A. Income (vv. 14-15)

Blessing can be seen in financial prosperity. This 666 talents was not all of his income; this is just one kind of it. Again, this is a pretty penny. We would call this amount \$950 million--not bad for a kingdom with a population of only three or four million people! To put that in perspective, Los Angeles has about 4 million people. Its budget this year is \$8 billion.

B. Shields, Symbolizing Protection for the Righteous (vv. 16-17; Ps. 89:18)

The king is called the shield of his people in Psalm 89. Solomon made these because he was a protector of the weak and needy, because he loved beautiful objects, and because he needed someplace to store his wealth. The shields symbolized all of that. They show the blessing of God in giving prosperity, in protecting the weak, and in strengthening godly rulers. Blessing can be seen in rulers who do their job.

C. The Throne, Symbolizing Rule (vv. 18-20)

This was a pretty impressive throne. One commentator said we aren't sure whether these were real lions or carved lions. I had not thought about it in those terms, but there is no doubt that a throne with 14 lions around it would be extremely impressive. Solomon was a junior version of the lion of the tribe of Judah, and his reign showed that. Blessing can be seen in the appropriate glory of a ruler.

D. The Luxury Goods, Symbolizing Egregious Blessing (vv. 21-22)

We see that with all these luxury goods, as God just pours out favor on Solomon. This is over the top, yet it points us to the greater glory of Christ. Again, brothers and sisters, this is God's blessing on the kingdom of Israel!

E. The Attractive Power of Solomon's Splendor (vv. 23-25)

Now, all this was emphatically *not* "conspicuous consumption." Solomon wasn't doing it because he had wealth to burn. He was doing it because it was his responsibility to use wealth well. God blessed him with wealth, and he used it to glorify God by glorifying the kingdom of God, over which he was ruler. The whole earth was coming to see him. They were coming for

the wisdom, not for the wealth; but he wanted to present that wisdom in attractive splendor. Solomon was not a democrat. I told you before how Thomas Jefferson would receive visitors to the White House in his bathrobe, because he wanted to make it clear that he was no better than anyone else. Solomon was not like that. He wanted to make sure that the splendor of heaven was reflected in downtown Jerusalem. He was all about glory--but he had a right to be, because that glory was directed toward glorifying the God who made it all possible. He used it for evangelism. Again, this is all a fleshing out of God's blessing. It is Psalm 67 in action:

God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us.

2 That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.

3 Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. (Psa 67:1-3 NKJ)

God's blessing was the occasion for the further fulfillment of God's promise that Israel would be a light to the nations.

F. Prosperous Trading a Good Thing (vv. 25-29)

Finally, God's blessing was seen in the prosperous trading that Solomon did. In many countries, in many eras, it has been believed and taught that classy people do not work. Gentleman don't trade, and so on. In fact, one of the main applications Matthew Henry makes in his commentary on this text is that no less a king than Solomon was willing to go into business and work hard to turn a profit — therefore, says Matthew Henry, “modern” 18th-century gentlemen should be willing to work for a living too! God blessed Solomon's work, just as Moses prayed. “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the works of our hands.” One sign of God's blessing is when your business prospers. Some commentators even suggested that Solomon got into the horse and chariot business because Pharaoh his father-in-law cut him a deal on tariffs, thus making it extremely lucrative for him to import and export horses.

What is most interesting about the end of this chapter is that Deuteronomy 17:17 warns against multiplying wives, horses, chariots, silver, and gold. Solomon did all of these. But he is only condemned for his wives, who turned his heart away. You see, God blessed Solomon with wealth and military power. It was his responsibility not to reject that wealth, but to continue to let it point him to the giver of wealth. That's why he's not condemned for his horses and silver. The wealth didn't turn his heart away from God; the wives did.

So blessedness is shown largely by outward splendor. But even though this chapter focuses heavily on outward splendor, it is clear in its teaching that real blessedness is to commune with David's Son, to hear His wisdom, to behold His glory in His kingly reign. Solomon understood this. That's why in his books he tells us that wisdom is the principal thing, and that we must fear God and keep His commandments. The outer glory is appropriate, but it's not necessary. You can be blessed and have no outward glory at all, for a time. But if you are truly blessed, eventually that glory will no longer be hidden. Christ's glory was veiled on earth, but it shines now. And for all those who trust the Son of David, glory like this of Solomon's will someday be theirs too.

III. Application

So what do we make of this text? How is Solomon's blessedness relevant to us?

A. Blessedness Is the Outworking of Christ's Royal Generosity (v. 13)

You can't out-give God. The prosperity gospel preachers may say it, but it's still true. Just as the Queen of Sheba couldn't out-give Solomon, so you can't out-give the Lord Jesus. His royal generosity provided everything that Solomon had. It has provided everything you have. None of you are homeless; all of you have enough to eat, whether through your own labors, the labors of your fathers and husbands and mothers, the generosity of Uncle Sam and of this church, or in some other way. Count your blessings, brothers and sisters. You will quickly see that Christ loves to be generous. He is the source of all blessedness.

B. Blessedness Makes Life Good

It does. Solomon lived a good life. But even he testifies that the goodness of his life was not in the glorious material surroundings, but in fearing God and keeping His commandments. Hearing the wisdom of Jesus Christ by communing with Him in worship is what made Solomon's life good.

C. Blessedness Draws Strangers

When God blesses you, people will wonder what's going on. They will want to know you, and they will want to ask you why you're different. Blessedness is one of our greatest evangelism opportunities. The Catholic Church went wrong by believing that building ornate church buildings was the best way to look blessed. But no amount of earthly prosperity can make up for a hollow soul. People will be attracted to you if you can lose everything with grace, and remain quietly joyful in your daily work. They will also be attracted if you gain worldly prosperity and glory, and remain quietly joyful in your daily work.

D. Blessedness Teaches us the Value of Spiritual Riches

Solomon did not have any desire to go and visit Sheba. Why not? Because he had so much wealth and splendor right there in Jerusalem! Imagine how little you would need more if you had what Solomon had. But brothers and sisters, when it comes to spiritual riches, you have more than Solomon ever thought of having! You have the complete word of God. You have the labors of generations of brilliant, godly theologians. You have the New Testament church and outpouring of the Spirit. When it comes to sitting down and hearing the wisdom of Christ, you have it all! The Queen of Sheba saw that the blessing of being a citizen of Solomon's kingdom lay in hearing the king's wisdom. Well, the blessing of being a citizen of Christ's kingdom still lies in hearing the king's wisdom. Do you want blessedness? Don't kill yourself trying to earn 666 talents of gold every year! Rather, sit at the feet of king Jesus and listen to His wisdom. That's where true blessedness lies.

E. Blessedness Warns its Recipients (Matt. 12:42)

We live in the era of the greatest material prosperity the world has ever seen. Solomon did not let wealth turn away his heart, which is good news for us. That means that simply being wealthy doesn't mean you're guaranteed to apostatize. But at the same time, Christ tells us that the Queen

of Sheba, who traveled a thousand miles to hear Solomon's wisdom, will be a witness against everyone who heard the word of God and missed it. The people of Christ's day failed to recognize that they were hearing from one greater than Solomon. So if you have the blessing of hearing the word of God — and you do! — then pay attention. Your condemnation is all the greater because you have seen the splendor of Solomon's wisdom, of Christ's wisdom, and so far rejected it. Reject it no longer; embrace the forgiveness Jesus offers. Embrace Him. He offers you Himself, and He is the greatest blessing one can possibly have.

F. Blessedness Results from Seeking First the Kingdom (1 Kings 3:13-14)

All this blessedness came from Christ. That's clear. But why did Christ give it to Solomon? Because Solomon asked for wisdom. He wanted God's wisdom. He wanted to hear Christ's wisdom. God granted that request, and on the side promised him riches and honor. The fulfillment of that promise is recorded in this chapter. To be honored by a great monarch like the Queen of Sheba is a very great honor indeed. To be so rich that silver is counted as nothing is to be very rich indeed. But all of this was only because Solomon sought first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness. Then, literally, "all these things" were added to him.

Will you seek first the kingdom? Will you seek by faith to appropriate the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and then to daily sit before Him and hear His wisdom? If you do, then you will truly be blessed. Amen.