

The King Who Had It All
Week 13: The Story
12/28/14

Welcome back to *The Story*.

Of course we never left it, these last few weeks,
we just jumped ahead to the story of Jesus birth.

Today is a Sunday when the Gospel reading is often the story from Matthew,
the story of King Herod's slaughter of the Holy Innocents, when he ordered the killing of all
baby boys near Bethlehem.

It's a hard reading right after Christmas, but it reflects the reality that we live in a broken world
a world in which tyrants like Herod still carry out evil plans. And it's into the darkness of this
world that God came to shine the one true light.

Back in Chapter 13, of *The Story*, where we find ourselves today,
God's plan of salvation had not yet been fully revealed.

Going back a few chapters, we remember that God acted to counter the evils of this world and
to administer justice by sending the people of Israel "judges."
When the people turned their hearts away from God, God sent these spirit-filled leaders to call
them to repentance, and God rescued them, and restored them.

But time and time again, the people did what they thought was right in their own eyes.

And finally, instead of recognizing God as their one true King,
they asked God for an earthly king, so that they could be like their neighbors.
God first gave them Saul, who ended up turning his heart away from God.
And so God gave them David, and even though David also proved to very human
he repented, and served God faithfully, and the people prospered.

After David had ruled for 40 years, he gave the crown to his son Solomon.
As David passes the leadership baton to Solomon, Israel is in great shape.
Financially, they are strong and prosperous, and they are at peace.
If ever there was a good time to be king of Israel, this was it.

That's when God appeared to Solomon in a dream, and said,
"Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Can you imagine that?

God, who can provide anything, comes and says,
"Whatever you want is yours. No boundaries. No rules. Ask for anything, and I'll give it to you."

Be honest. If you could ask for anything, what you would you ask for?

Wouldn't the temptation be pretty strong, to think about material things?

And yet Solomon, asks for wisdom.

That's it.

He wants to have the wisdom to govern wisely, to distinguish between right and wrong
Wouldn't it be great of our leaders today, asked for wisdom?

God honors Solomon's request and it doesn't take long for the new king to put his gift from God to work. One of the duties of a king is to resolve disputes, and shortly after Solomon becomes king, two women come to him with a baby. Both claim to be the mother of the baby, and it is Solomon's job to decide what to do.

How do you settle something like that?

They didn't have DNA tests, back then,
so with both women standing before him, Solomon asks one of his attendants to cut the baby in half and give each mother half of the baby.

The first mother thinks this is a great idea, but the second mother is horrified and rescinds her claim on the child. Knowing that the real mother of the baby never allow this,
Solomon gives the baby to the second mother.

One dad tried this trick, with his sons and it didn't work out.
You see the boys had been fighting over who had the rights to a Hot Wheels car, each trying to clutch the tiny red Camaro. Seeing a Solomon sized teaching moment, the Dad asked them to go get a hacksaw so he could cut it in two.
To which they both yelled, "Cool, Dad! Awesome! let's do it!"

Not quite what he had in mind.

It takes wisdom to know how to use wisdom.
Not only did Solomon desire wisdom for himself so he would lead God's nation well,
but he wanted every citizen to have wisdom and apply it to their everyday lives. So he wrote down hundreds of wise sayings that are included in the Bible in the book called Proverbs.
These short, simple instructions offer practical guidance to help everyone live well and follow God's ways.

I met a young man a couple years ago who told me that the first book in the Bible, that he read was the book of Proverbs. For him, it was a good place to start.

It whet his appetite to know more about God
because he had grown up with friend who did a lot of foolish things.
They were constantly making messes of their lives. Hurting themselves, and hurting others.

And he didn't want to live like a fool. He wanted to be smarter than that.
 And so he looked to the Bible for wisdom.
 But here's where the story of Solomon begins to take a turn.

Yes, Solomon faithfully built a temple in Jerusalem, a temple that was so beautiful that it reminded people of the majestic God they served.

And yes, this temple could serve as a witness to God's glory
 as we saw when the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon.
 She was so impressed with Jerusalem and the temple that she told Solomon,

"Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel."

But, even with all these blessings, and all the evidence of God's hand in Solomon's life,
 even with all the wisdom God so freely gave him,
 Solomon's heart began to take a turn.

He forgot that God does not need temples and places of worship,
 temples and places of worship need God.

As Paul reminds us in the New Testament, that you and I, are temples of the Holy Spirit.
 We belong to God.
 We are created to praise God – to love God with all our heart, mind and strength.
 No exceptions.

But just like the people in the time of the judges,
 Solomon didn't follow God's wisdom.

In Proverbs 3:5-6, Solomon wrote:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
 and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him,
 and He will make your paths straight.

Solomon's downfall was that he didn't trust God with all his heart.
 like the people in the time of the judges, he did what he thought was right in his own eyes.

The first step in his downward spiral
 was that he left a little wiggle room in his commitment to God.

Did you catch that right at the beginning of Chapter 13?
 On p. 176 there was this one line that jumped out at me.

³ Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

Did you catch that?

He loved God, and kept his commandment, **except** he still offered sacrifices in the high places.

Those high places, were the ceremonial places on the hills, where the people still burned incense to the gods of the Ammonites, and Edomites, and Sidonians, and Hittites.

That would be like a husband sending his wife an Anniversary card that said, "Honey, I love you with my whole heart, **except**, for the times I love Alice, and Betty, and Veronica."

That wouldn't work very well, would it?

But the heart can easily be led astray can't it?
And that's what happened to Solomon.

God has warned the people of Israel through Moses, that a king should not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

And a king should not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.
But as Solomon grew old, he thought he was an exception to the rule.

Have you ever said to yourself

"it would be unwise for those people over there to do this thing
but I can handle it.
I won't get tripped up and fall, like they might."

Be careful, because if you do, you too will fall.

The second thing Solomon did, that led to his downfall,
was that he failed to deal with his predisposed weaknesses.

Along with the crown, and the power of the crown, came many temptations.

You and I don't have the power Solomon had, but we each have our own weaknesses.
With God's help, we can become aware of our weaknesses,
and we can learn to stay away from situations and from people that make us vulnerable.

Keep yourself accountable.

Be transparent at all times. Don't keep secrets.

Sin loves the darkness. So live your life in the light of Jesus.

And finally, don't ignore words of warning or correction.
God will use people who know you best, to warn you.

In one way or another, they will tell you if you are playing with matches and dry kindling.

Solomon ignored God's counsel.
He thought he was above it all.

And in his old age, his heart turned after other gods, and was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

And when he sinned, he did not repent like David did.
He did not turn his heart back to the Lord.

If you've been there.

If you identify with Solomon on any level – either in the beginning stages of his life, when he started to make little compromises, or further down the road, when he made life-altering compromises if you can identify with Solomon, then listen to God's Word this morning.

Listen to God's call to faithfulness.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge Him,
and He will make your paths straight.

God wants to bless you.

God wants to fill your life with joy!

If you've messed up already,
remember that God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

While we were still sinners, Jesus died for us.
Jesus has forgiven all our sins, past, present, and future.

And Jesus came that we might have life!
Follow Him and you will experience that abundant life! Amen.