

Sermon on Solomon 28.6.20

Good morning to you all.

It's really nice to be with you again on this technology enabled Sunday Service and I must complement Julie on her inspiration and growing expertise on both YouTube and zoom and her ability to include us in this act of worship.

As you know, we are part way through a series of sermons looking at different figures in the Bible.

My task today is to preach about King Solomon.

In light of the current obsession with statues and as I was thinking about Solomon, I wondered if he was the kind of person we might erect a statue to and if so, might that incense anyone to want to tear it down.

That seems to be the new sport that's sprung up during our Covid-19 lockdown. Tearing down statues of individuals who have made major contributions to the development of our nation, but who are now perceived as blemished, when viewed from a very different context and culture.

If we take the view that statues must only be erected to commemorate perfect people we shall only have statues of Jesus.

And what would they look like? The best statues I've ever seen of Jesus were dotted around the extensive grounds of The Crystal Cathedral in the Anaheim district of Los Angeles. And they were brilliant in my opinion because for the most part they depicted Jesus either smiling or laughing.



I'm not aware of anywhere in the bible where we're told that Jesus either smiled or laughed, although there are many occasions where I could well imagine him doing so.

And here's an image of one of the statues and doesn't it make Jesus look more natural and accessible?

Anyway, turning back to Solomon. It is significant that the name Solomon means peace and this will become apparent I hope.

Virtually all we know about King Solomon is found in 2 books of the OT especially the first 11 chapters of the First Book of Kings and the first nine chapters of the Second Book of Chronicles.

Much is made of Solomon's lineage as he was the son of King David.

As you'll remember, the writer of Matthew's gospel goes to great lengths to tell us that Jesus was 'born of David's line'. And in Royal David's city.

But King David was a serial womaniser and prior to Solomon being born he had fathered 6 sons during his 7 years living in Hebron, all to different women.

In 1 Chronicles 3 we're told that Solomon was the 4th son born to King David, but this was when David moved to Jerusalem where he reigned for a further 33 years..

1 Kings has Solomon as the second son born to David in his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba.

It seems the first son died as a punishment for this relationship and the fact that David was responsible for the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah.

So given this family situation, how is it, I hear you ask, that Solomon succeeded David as king?

Well it was actually God who told David to make Solomon his successor, aided and abetted by the prophet Nathan and Solomon's seemingly self-seeking mother Bathsheba,

God wanted a temple to be built in Jerusalem and He didn't want David to build it because he was a man of war, he needed it to be built by a man of peace and this was to be Solomon.

This is what God said to David.

'Behold a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest, I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house in my name. He shall be my son and I will be his father and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.'

We can deduce from this that some at least of Solomon's reputation was provided by God because he promised peace and security during his reign

As there was no temple where God could be worshipped, they had so-called high places where they made their sacrifices.

One of the most sacred was a place called Gibeon and it was at Gibeon that God appeared to Solomon for the first time. God said to Solomon "ask what I should give you" and Solomon replied

"Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil" and God replied "Because you have asked for this and not selfish things like riches and a long life, I will grant your request and give you a wise and discerning mind and I will also give you what you have not asked for, both riches and honour all your life, with which no other king can compare."

So God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the sea shore and his fame spread throughout the world.

People came from all the kingdoms of the earth to hear his wisdom.

The most famous account of his wisdom was when two prostitutes were brought before him each claiming to be the mother of a male child. Famously Solomon decreed that a sword should be brought and the child cut in two and half given to each woman. As we know, the real mother gave up her claim to the child in order to save its life, and so Solomon through his wise counsel, discovered the true mother of the child.

We are told that the land Solomon ruled was the combined kingdom of Israel and Judah and his kingdom stretched from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines even to the border with Egypt and he had peace on all sides. He even married Pharaoh's daughter to create an alliance with Egypt. In fact he married lots of women. The apple certainly didn't fall far from the tree. He married women from many different countries, cultures and religions. In fact all told he had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Quite how he found time to compose 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs remains a mystery.

He also found time to set about building God's temple in Jerusalem, in return for the peace granted to him by God. Solomon conscripted forced labour out of all Israel of nationalities other than the Jews in order to build the temple. 30,000 slaves he sent to Lebanon to cut timber supplied by King Hiram of Tyre who gave Solomon as much Cedar and Cypress and gold as he desired. 70,000 labourers and 80,000 stonemasons he sent to the hill country to cut stone., along with 3300 supervisors.

Solomon also built himself a lavish palace and one for his wife the Pharaoh's daughter.

Much of scripture about Solomon is devoted to the amazing details given to him by God about the size and shape of the temple and its finishes and furniture and fittings. When the temple was completed, Solomon took the Ark of the Covenant and placed it in the temple and they had an incredibly lavish dedication festival where they sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.

God actually appeared to Solomon for a second time promising that if he remained faithful to him, he would establish his throne over Israel forever, but with a warning that if he should fall away from his faith, then he would cut Israel off. Did God know something Solomon didn't?

After 20 years Solomon actually did the dirty on King Hiram of Tyre. In return for all the cedar and cypress timber and the gold that Hiram had given Solomon to build his temple, Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities. So Hiram paid a visit to these cities and was deeply insulted by the poor state of the cities that Solomon had offloaded onto him. So much so that we're told that the area is known as Cabul to this day. (Cabul with a C not like the capital of Afghanistan) And Cabul apparently translates to mean 'good for nothing'

On a happier note when the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame she visited him with lavish gifts and a huge retinue. She came armed with a long list of very difficult questions. Obviously the forerunner of Steve and Angela's afternoon quiz. Anyway, unlike us attendees at the South Crosland quiz, Solomon answered all her questions to her amazement. The queen of Sheba was well impressed by Solomon's knowledge, wisdom and by his enormous wealth. We are told that Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba every desire that she had. (Some commentators suggest this included a child)

Well of course, as we might have predicted, Solomon fell into the trap. Jews were forbidden to marry women from other cultures and religions for fear they would turn their husband's heads to their gods and away from the one true God. This is where Solomon's fate was sealed. He had broken his promise to God. He was lured into worshipping foreign gods. So God sent many adversaries to challenge Solomon and when he died and his son Rehoboam succeeded him the damage had been done and the kingdom of Israel was divided in two. Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

We have of course two references to Solomon in the gospels.

Jesus was very familiar with stories of Solomon and used him to illustrate his message.

Jesus is condemning the scribes and the Pharisees for not recognising who he was. And he says this "The Queen of Sheba will rise up in judgement for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon and see — something greater than Solomon is here."

And when he was telling people they had no need to worry but simply have faith he said this "consider the lilies of the field, how they neither toil nor spin—yet I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."

So how do you feel about a statue of Solomon? He was chosen by God and given all he asked for and things he didn't ask for. God actually spoke to him on two occasions. But he was lured away from the straight and narrow and broke the promise he had made to God. He began to worship other Gods. He had 180,000 slaves and you have to wonder how God felt about his temple being built by slaves. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Quite how that equates to a man of wisdom remains a mystery to me.

He was wise beyond compare and wealthy beyond compare but he did the dirty on King Hiram. Why?

In the end Israel paid the price for Solomon's misdemeanours and became a divided country, so his descendants ruled only over Judah thereafter.

A statue of King Solomon stands on top of the Royal Courts of Justice in London. What do we do?