

Valley View Chapel
January 10, 2016
The Story, Part 13
"The King Who Had It All"
I Kings 11:1-13

Introduction

The name Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson may not mean much to football fans today but 40 years ago he was one of the premier players in the National Football League.

Henderson was selected by the Dallas Cowboys in the 1st round of the 1975 NFL draft. He excelled as an outside linebacker, earning All-Pro honors for the 1977 season. He was one of the first linebackers to run the 40-yard dash in 4.6 seconds. Thomas was gifted with a powerful body, amazing talent, and a natural instinct for the game. Many believe that Hollywood Henderson could have been one of the greatest linebackers of all time. Tragically, an addiction to crack cocaine did him in and by the end of the 1980 season he was one more casualty of the crack epidemic that has ruined thousands of lives.

There's a happy ending to the story, however. After serving two years in prison and spending eight months in drug rehab, he has been sober since 1983 and has lead a productive life giving motivational speeches and anti-drug presentations.

When I read the story of Hollywood Henderson's squandered potential, I thought of Solomon, the third king of Israel. Just as Thomas Henderson had been given extraordinary God-given advantages to excel in football so Solomon had been given extraordinary, God-given advantages to excel as Israel's king. God had blessed him with unusual wisdom, incredible wealth and great opportunities to make a positive and lasting contribution both to his nation and the world at large.

But great privileges require great responsibility. Jesus warned his disciples in Luke 12:48, "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required."

This is where the story of Hollywood Henderson and King Solomon take separate paths. Henderson saw the error of his ways and took steps to correct a life gone horribly wrong. Solomon's life, on the other hand, continued to spiral out of control until the last day of his wasted, misspent life.

There comes a point when a life can become so out-of-control, so hell-bent on destruction, so hardened to the voice of God that there is virtually no hope of reversing its ruinous course. Sadly, Solomon's life reached that point when, at the age of 60 the man to whom God had promised a long life as long as he played the game by God's rules, was removed from his throne, removed from his influence, removed from his wealth, removed from his sin, and removed from the world.

What happened to Solomon could happen to us. The plot line may be different but the end result could well be the same. It was for our sober reflection that Paul counseled us in I Corinthians 10:12, "If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall."

So let's see what we can learn from Solomon's mistakes so that we can steer clear of the potholes that sent the wagon of his life careening down the cliff to destruction – destruction that could have been avoided had Solomon lived according to what *he knew* to be the truth.

Solomon's downfall

I was a Literature major as an undergraduate. My Shakespeare professor was the Academic Dean Emeritus – Bertha Munro. Miss Munro began her illustrious teaching career in 1918. I took her class in the spring of 1968. This old girl knew her Shakespeare!

The day that we started a unit on the great man's tragedies, I walked into Dean Munro's classroom and saw that she had written in large letters on the blackboard: "Great tragedy requires great downfall." She taught me that true tragedy follows a formula: a rise to power; a period of power; and a fall from power, usually under unfavorable circumstances brought on by the protagonist himself. We examined the lives of Macbeth, King Lear, Othello and Hamlet. But contemporary examples aren't hard to come by. Tiger Woods is only one of many examples I could name.

We learned that the downfalls of the rich and famous are never sudden. Downfalls are gradual.

Othello murdered Desdemona only after a series of little concessions and bad decisions.

On June 17, 1972 five men were arrested and charged with breaking into the Democratic National Committee Headquarters at the Watergate Hotel. It took more than two years for President Nixon to resign on August 9, 1974.

By the end of his life, Solomon had accumulated 700 wives and 300 concubines. He had married idolaters and became a card-carrying idolater himself.

Solomon didn't suddenly wake up one morning and say: "I think I'll marry 700 foreign women and while I'm at it, I think I'll become an idolater!" Sin doesn't work that way.

Samson's story began by an infatuation with a Philistine woman who wasn't a worshiper of God. Two chapters later, he had sold his soul to Delilah and was blind, helpless and enslaved.

We're told in 1 Kings 11:4 (p. 192), "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been." (NIV)

Is there any area of your life with God where you used to be faithful but you're not anymore? Are you watching movies you didn't used to watch? Are you going places you didn't used to go? Are you spending your Sundays in ways that you didn't used to spend your Sundays? Are you not faithfully serving God today but you remember a time when you did?

Chances are, you didn't change all of a sudden. You weren't faithful to God yesterday but you're unfaithful today. I'll bet my paycheck that you started to make exceptions, concessions, and compromises that eventually reached a "tipping point." One day you woke up and noticed that you had become a different person with different points of view, values and priorities than you used to have.

That's what happened to Solomon. It can happen to me and it can happen to you.

Steps in his downward journey

Every journey *toward* God begins with a first step and every journey *away* from God begins with a first step. Let's look briefly at three stages of Solomon's downward journey away from God.

He became dissatisfied with God's boundaries

The journey away from God always begins in the "heart." We see this in verses 4 and 9 (p. 192), "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his *heart* after other gods, and his *heart* was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the *heart* of David his father had been.... The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD...." I Kings 11:4, 9

Warren Wiersbe said: "The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart."

In the Bible the "heart" is *the real you*. The heart encompasses your *thinking* side (the intellect); your *feeling* side (the emotions); and your *volitional* side (your will). Before we ever sin with our bodies, we sin with our *hearts*.

That's why Solomon said years earlier in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

And it's why Jesus warned his disciples in Mark 7:21 "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery...."

Notice that in verse 4 *his wives turned his heart* but by verse 9 Solomon had *turned his own heart*. Maybe at first there was a struggle, a protest on Solomon's part against taking part in idolatry. But his pagan wives wore him down. By the ninth verse they didn't need to persuade him anymore. He was sinning on his own with no outside encouragement.

And why did he turn his heart away from God? For the same reason we yield to temptation. He became dissatisfied with God's boundaries. Solomon thought God's laws were too restrictive, so he widened the playing field. That's precisely what got Adam and Eve into trouble. They were free to eat from every tree in the garden but one. But they became dissatisfied with God's boundaries. They wanted to be free to eat from every tree.

He fell for the "just-this-once" lie

It would be impossible to count the number of lives that have been wrecked by this persuasive deception – "I'll just do it just this once and never again." How many people have gotten hooked on drugs and alcohol and pornography and gambling and pre or extra marital sex or a thousand other destructive behaviors because they thought they could "just try it once" and get away with it?

Solomon said to himself: "Just this once I'll marry an Egyptian woman who is an idol worshiper. Just this once I'll cross the line; just this once I'll tell God to mind his own business; just this once I'll experiment to see how it feels and if it will work." Did he think that he would accumulate 700 pagan wives and 300 pagan concubines? How did it get so out of control? It got out of control because Solomon thought he could *make* an exception.

Jerry Bridges exposed this deception in his book *The Pursuit of Holiness* when he warned: "Never let an exception occur. When we allow exceptions to occur, we are reinforcing old habits.... Because we are unwilling to pay the price of saying no to our desires, we tell

ourselves we will indulge only once and tomorrow will be different. Deep inside we know that tomorrow it will be even more difficult to say no....”

What happens when we yield to the “just this once” temptation? We allow *desire* to overcome *reason*. One purpose of the intellect is to exercise veto power over the emotions. When reason overcomes desire, we’re safe. When desire overcomes reason, we’re on shaky ground.

Solomon was a smart man. He knew that it was wrong to marry outside of the will of God. He knew that there would be a price to pay. He knew that marriage was between one man and one woman for life. But he allowed desire to overcome reason.

And when desire overcomes reason too often, it leads to the third and most dangerous stage of a journey away from God.

He didn’t care anymore

One word in 1 Kings 11:2 (p. 191) describes the depth to which Solomon had fallen in his slide away from God – “King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, ‘You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.’ *Nevertheless*, Solomon held fast to them in love.” I Kings 11:1-2

It is possible to get so “hooked” on disobedience that we just don’t care anymore what God thinks.

Solomon knew that what he was doing was wrong. He knew that it would bring devastating consequences to himself, his family and the nation. But sin’s hold had become so powerful that he had lost both the desire to say “no” and the ability to say “no.”

Some people know what their addictions are doing to themselves and their loved ones. Some people know how their anger is hurting those closest to them. Some people know that their immorality is causing their spouse and children to lose all respect for them. But they’ve plunged so deep into sin that they say: “I know that what I am doing hurts me; my family; my friends; and the one who died on a cross for me. But I’m going to do it anyway.”

Conclusion

Solomon wanted the best of God and the best of a world that didn’t know or love God. He thought he was smart enough to pull it off. He wasn’t.

Two lessons from Solomon’s life

- When it comes to sin, don’t even go there. It’s not worth the price you’ll have to pay.

There’s a road in Bolivia called “the world’s most dangerous road.” It stretches about 40 miles from La Paz (at 12,000 feet) down to the beautiful rain forest town of Coroico at the edge of the basin of the Amazon River.

Why is it so dangerous? An average of 26 vehicles fall off this road each year; and 200 to 300 people lose their lives on it annually. Steep hillsides, cliffs, and dropoffs with no guardrails present hazards, and the road in places has room for only one vehicle. Rain and

fog complicate the trip, along with muddy surfaces and loose rocks sliding down hillsides. On July 24, 1983, over 100 passengers were killed when a bus veered over the edge and crashed into a canyon.

But, despite the danger, the road has become an increasingly popular tourist attraction since the early 1990s.

Sin is like “the death road.” If you don’t travel that road in the first place, you don’t have to worry about what happens if you do.

- When you do sin, confess and repent *now*. Don’t wait another minute. With God’s help, make a “U-turn” now and come back under the safety of his umbrella.

Sadly, there is no record anywhere in Scripture that Solomon ever repented and came back to God. Though it’s too late to save Solomon from a legacy of failure and compromise, it’s not too late for us.