

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"The Need to Apply Wisdom – Part III."*

We have been in a series called, "Pursuing Wisdom."

Go ahead and open your bibles to **1 Kings 11**.

We have been looking at Solomon, basically from two completely opposing perspectives:

1. First, we looked at him as an example of obtaining wisdom.
2. Then we started looking at him as an example of failing to apply wisdom...which is really to say an example of foolishness.

So you could say we've looked at him as an example of wisdom and foolishness.

We know that in **Deuteronomy 17** God told Israel's kings not to:

- Acquire many horses, wives, or wealth b/c they could put their trust in these instead of trusting God.
- And kings were not to cause the people to return to Egypt, b/c it's a picture of the world and when God delivers us from something we aren't to return to it.

After God gave Solomon wisdom, he violated all these commands.

Anyone remember Solomon's worst sin?

Idolatry. The man who built the temple for the LORD stated building high places to the worst idols in the Old Testament.

I shared something w/ you that I find absolutely astounding...

Solomon was worse in every respect AFTER receiving wisdom.

He's the best example in Scripture of failing to apply wisdom that's been given.

The question we've been wrestling with is...

How could the wisest man in history be so foolish?

And this brings us Lesson 1...

Solomon's foolishness was produced by (Lesson 1) years of compromise.

I'd like to review this morning's verses and invite you to notice the progression that reveals Solomon's compromise:

1. First, he married pagan women: **1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women² from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel,**

“You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.

2. Second, he permitted these wives to worship idols.
3. Third, they turned his heart away: **3 He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. 4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.**
4. Fourth, he moved from permitting his wives to worship idols to pursuing the idols himself: **5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.**
5. Finally, he began building altars for these idols: **7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.**

Notice the progression of his compromise?

All this takes place over 8 verses, which can make it look like it happened quickly:

- One day Solomon is building the temple
- The next day he's building altars to Molech to sacrifice children.

But that's not what happened.

Sometimes in Scripture a lot of time passes between only a few verses.

These verses cover decades.

Solomon was ruined by compromise that slowly took place over many years:

- You don't end up w/ 12,000 horses, 700 wives, 300 concubines, and so much gold that silver is worthless overnight!
- Instead you add a few horses, a few wives, a few pieces of gold slowly over time

So we could say Solomon acted very foolishly...but we could also say he didn't become a fool quickly.

And this reveals the danger w/ compromise...

- It happens gradually.
- Instead of jumping off a cliff, it's only one more small step in the wrong direction.

What do these small steps look like?

- Not controlling our thoughts...
- Not ripping our eyes away...

- Pursuing – or continuing conversations – we shouldn't...
- A little exaggeration – or dishonesty – in our communication...
- Shifting blame when we know we should take responsibility

Sometimes it looks like sin takes place without any compromise, but there is always an amount that led to the sin taking place.

For example:

- Someone cuts us off in traffic and we get angry. It looks like it just happened, but there have been some number of times previously that we didn't control our temper.
- We get confronted about something and we're embarrassed so we lie. It looks like it just happened, but there have been some number of times previously that we acted deceitfully.
- We sit down at the computer and give in to the temptation to look at something we shouldn't. It looks like it just happened, but there have been some number of times someone attractive walked by and we didn't rip our eyes away.
- We start coveting a new house, a new car, a new relationship. It looks like it just happened, but there have been some number of times previously that we refused to be content with what we have.

The point is, by the time we sin, we've already engaged in many small compromises to reach that point.

I want to briefly share a story that was shared w/ several us when we attended the biblical counseling training a few years ago...

The gentlemen teaching most of the classes, who happened to be in leadership in ACBC, shared about a time a prominent leader in the organization experienced a moral failure. It was announced at a meeting where the other leaders were in attendance and he said immediately the room went quiet and all the men hung their heads. He said it seemed liked a long time before anyone said anything, but more than likely it was probably only a few minutes.

The silence was finally broken when one of the men said, "*When he fell, he didn't fall far.*"

What he meant was before the moral failure took place, there had already been so many small compromises in his life it only took one more small step. He didn't have to step – or fall – far.

And let me ask you to think about something...

Do you think Solomon or the man in the story ever imagined things would reach the point they did?

No.

And this reveals another danger w/ compromise...

It seems harmless – just one more small step – until the very end.

People never expect it to lead where it does:

- They never expect the consequences to be as bad as they end up being.
- They never expect to find themselves so far from where they used to be.

There's a saying...

Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.

I agree with this saying, but it might be equally accurate to say...

Compromising will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.

I'm sure Solomon:

- Never thought after the first few compromises that there would be hundreds more.
- He never thought it would cost him as much as it did.

Later he probably would've given just about anything to be able to go back and not take that first step in the wrong direction.

And many other people have felt the same.

The only solution is to avoid making that first compromise.

We should look at our lives and consider if there are any compromises we need to turn back from.

One reason I think it was so easy for Solomon to compromise is because of all the good he did. And this brings us to lesson two...

Solomon's foolishness was produced by (Lesson 2) justifying.

Despite how bad things look for Solomon, there are two reasons I wouldn't say he committed apostasy, which is to say turned from the Lord completely.

First, it's generally accepted that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes at the end of his life. At the end of the book he wrote...

Ecclesiastes 12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

So it seems like as Solomon reached the end of his life and reflected on all he had done – and wasted – he realized that all along there was nothing better than serving the Lord and obeying him.

The second reason I don't think Solomon committed apostasy is b/c of something repeated in these verses:

- **1 Kings 11:4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and HIS HEART WAS NOT WHOLLY TRUE TO THE LORD HIS GOD, as was the heart of David his father.**
- **1 Kings 11:6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and DID NOT WHOLLY FOLLOW THE LORD, as David his father had done.**

Twice we're told that Solomon didn't **wholly follow the Lord**...which means He didn't turn from the Lord completely. He didn't wholly follow the Lord, but He still kind of followed the Lord. He simply made the Lord one of the many gods he worshipped...but He still worshiped God.

And herein is part of the problem...

Solomon could convince himself he was still worshipping the Lord.

I have enjoyed these few weeks preaching about Solomon. I was familiar with him, as I'm sure most of you are too, but I don't think I had preached on him before, or at least not much. These dedicated weeks allowed me to think about him, put myself in his place, and ask: "What was he thinking?"

And what he was probably thinking was this...

- *Yes, I built altars to these other gods, but I did it for my wives. It wasn't my idea. This is what they wanted.*
- *I haven't stopped worshipping the Lord. I still follow him. I offer sacrifices to him. In fact, to be honest, I probably offer more sacrifices to Him than anyone else.*
- *And I built his house! These idols only got altars and high places. It's obvious how much more committed I am to Him.*

Obviously, I don't know if Solomon said these things, but I do know this...

He could have. He did a lot for God.

I'm sure this allowed him to feel better about what he was doing: *"I'm doing these things I shouldn't do, but look at all these other great things I'm doing."*

It's much easier to justify disobedience when it's accompanied by some obedience.

On Wednesday night Andrew taught on Saul failing to slaughter all the Amalekites.

Listen to the reason Saul gave for compromising...

1 Samuel 15:15 Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen **TO SACRIFICE TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.**”

He said he compromised for a good reason: being able to sacrifice the animals they kept.

We’ve spent a lot of time talking about Solomon, but let’s consider how we can do this too.

We justify disobedience by first saying:

- *I’ve done enough.*
- *I’ve done most of what God wanted.*
- *I’ve been obedient in these other areas.*
- *There are these other good things I’m doing.*

One of the reasons Solomon could believe God was pleased with him is because of how much God blessed him.

And this introduces one of the most confusing parts of Solomon’s decline.

He struggled w/ things...God gave him!

When Solomon asked for wisdom, it pleased God and He said...

1 Kings 3:13 I GIVE YOU ALSO WHAT YOU HAVE NOT ASKED, BOTH RICHES AND HONOR, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.

If Solomon obtained all his riches, honor, and fame, in his own effort it would be one thing. But God gave them to him...and then they plagued him.

It almost looks like God was wrong for giving it all to him.

How do we explain this?

This brings us to Lesson 3...

Solomon’s foolishness was produced by (Lesson 3) letting blessings become “Nehushtan.”

Let me give you the background to this odd sounding lesson.

If you’re familiar w/ Israel’s time in the wilderness, you know they frequently complained. Listen to this account...

Numbers 21:5 The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.”

God is patient, but sometimes His patience comes to an end and this was one instance.

Listen to what happened...

Numbers 21:6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. **7** And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. **8** And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” **9** So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Bronze is a picture of judgment, and a serpent is a picture of sin. When the bronze serpent was lifted up, it's as though sin was lifted up and judged.

The people were saved by faith by simply looking up at the serpent.

That might sound like the Gospel, which is why Jesus compared Himself w/ the bronze serpent...

John 3:14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

In one of the most beautiful instances of **Rom 8:28** and God making all things work together for good, He used the people's rebellion to produce a dramatic type of His Son on the cross.

The people ended up keeping the bronze serpent, but tragically, over time, something happened. Turn one book to the right to **2 Kings 18**. We won't turn back to **1 Kings 11**.

2 Kings 18:1 In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. **2** He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. **3** And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. **4a** He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah.

Hezekiah was one of the greatest reformers in the Old Testament. Last week we discussed the high places and I said that few kings removed them. Hezekiah was one of the kings who did!

Look what else he had to remove...

2 Kings 18:4b And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

While Hezekiah was going about his reforms and destroying the idolatry in the land he had to **break in pieces** the bronze serpent. The object that brought miraculous healing became an idol. The people even gave it its own name.

Here is what I initially wrote about this, but then upon further reflection realized it wasn't accurate...

The sinful nature we have allows us to turn even the good things, or blessings, God has given us into sinful things.

This isn't true. The blessings don't become sinful.

The way we use them becomes sinful, or our relationship to them becomes sinful.

So the correct thing to say would be this...

The sinful nature we have allows us to use blessings in sinful ways.

For example:

- Food is a blessing but we can be gluttonous
- Work is a blessing but we can be workaholics
- Physical intimacy is a blessing but we can be fornicators and adulterers
- Marriage, children, homes, relationships, and jobs are blessings, but we can turn them into idols.

These things are no more sinful than the bronze serpent, but when we worship them, they become Nehushtan.

God gives us blessings, but we're responsible w/ what we do w/ them. We must be good stewards. It's our responsibility to make sure we handle them well...which is to say in a way that honors God.

In Solomon's case, God gave him riches, fame, and honor...but it was his responsibility to make sure he handled them well, which is to say in a way that honored God.

And this looks to the main reason Solomon failed...

I told you I wanted to explain how the wisest man could be so foolish. The reasons I gave you are more symptoms than reasons. There's only one reason for Solomon's failure and it's something that changed in his life...

If you remember in **1 Kings 3** when Solomon asked for wisdom to serve the Lord well, I said he was a good example of the principle that Jesus preached to his disciples...

Matthew 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

If we put God first things go well.

Solomon had this right when he was younger but then he got it out of order when he was older.

He was motivated less by the spiritual – his relationship w/ God – and more by the physical – such as wealth, horses, wives, and alliances.

If fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, this is how we see Solomon's foolishness. He stopped fearing God.

He replaced his love for the spiritual with love for the physical and his heart gradually turned from the Lord. Then the physical blessings became curses, b/c he tried to enjoy them apart from God.

God wants to bless us, but those blessings can only be enjoyed in fellowship w/ Him. When they're enjoyed apart from Him they can become curses.

Let's pray.