



As a kid I always looked forward to summer. Most of all I looked forward to our family vacation. My grandparents would join us and sometimes even a few cousins would tag along. We always went to the same place up in the gold country of the Sierra Nevada. Just outside of a little town called Downieville was a little resort. It was basically just a bunch of old cabins built on the north fork of the Yuba River, but it was a kid's paradise. We caught brook trout with salmon eggs, we rode the rapids into town on old inner tubes, we hung a swing on a tall tree that allowed us to fly out over the river and jump into deep, cold waters. There was even a General Store in town where we bought real rock candy out of a jar. The resort was called Shangri-la. Maybe you've heard that name before. Shangri-La was actually a fictional place described in an old novel called *Lost Horizon*. In the novel, Shangri-La is a harmonious village tucked away in a valley deep in the Himalayas. Eventually Shangri-La became synonymous with earthly paradise; a permanently happy land, isolated from the outside world. It was a good name for that place we visited every summer.

We all long for a place like that. At some time, we've experienced a place or just a moment where we felt everything was right. Call it peace, harmony, paradise. You don't want it to end. You just want to bottle it up and take it with you.

Solomon's Kingdom was Near Perfect

Today in our study of the life of King Solomon we see a period of time in which Israel was like a Shangri-la. It was a moment in time when everything seemed perfect. It was a golden age; an ideal kingdom. The writer brings this out in several ways.

Unity

First, he describes the unity of the kingdom. Solomon was in firm control of *"all Israel."* Israel's squabbling factions had fallen in line behind him. Within this unity there was organization and division of labor. In verses 1–6 Solomon wisely delegates day-to-day matters to 10 chief officials. You might call this his cabinet. There were priests, secretaries and key administrators. He had someone in charge of the military, another in charge of forced labor. One of the priests also served as a close personal advisor.

In verses 7–19 we also see he divided the land into 12 geographical districts, each ruled by a different governor. He placed a man named Azariah in charge of them. Many of these leaders had a

personal connection to Solomon. Azariah was the son of Nathan the prophet. Two of the governors were Solomon's sons-in-law.

Bounty

He also describes the bounty of the kingdom. Verse 7 tells us each of the 12 districts were assigned a month and during that time it was their job to provide food and supplies for the royal household. And they did so in such a way that nothing was lacking (v. 27). That was no small task! Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines!

Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of the finest flour and sixty cors of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl (verses 22–23).

These numbers are designed to impress. It's like there was a feast every day of the week. But it's no wonder. Scholars say the royal household numbered anywhere from 14,000–32,000 people! And it wasn't just people. Verse 26 says Solomon also had 12,000 chariot horses to feed and so the districts also provided barley and straw. By the way, there's a red flag here. The law of Moses said the King *"must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself"* (Dt 17:16). Horses were used for military defense but the king was supposed to depend on God alone. King David wrote, *"Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God"* (Ps 20:7). So this was like a ticking time bomb that would eventually lead to Solomon's downfall. That's why we call him The Wisest Fool. But here in chapter 4 the emphasis is on the rich bounty of Solomon's kingdom. Verse 20 says it all: the entire kingdom *"ate, they drank and they were happy."*

Extent

Third, we see the extent or the size of Solomon's kingdom. We're not just talking about a few people. Verse 20 says, *"the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore..."* That's an important statement because centuries earlier God had promised Abraham, *"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore"* (Gen 22:17). God's promise to Abraham is now fulfilled. And it was also true in terms of the vast territory he ruled over.

And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as

far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life (v. 21).

Solomon's kingdom was like an empire. Again, ruling over this vast region was a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gen 15:18).

Peace

For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphshah to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree (verses 24–25).

Fourth, we see the peace or the security of his kingdom. This is amazing because the history of the world is one of bloody conflict. Israel has always been the most hotly contested piece of land on the planet. But in Solomon's day there was peace in every direction. I love how it says, *"everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree."* In other words, every Israelite had a place to call their own, with an abundance of good things to eat and drink.

It reminds me of one of my favorite books, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. It's about two drifters, George and Lennie, who move from place to place in search of new job opportunities during the Depression. Lennie is mentally disabled, but he has a dream of him and George settling down on their own piece of land. Lennie loves to pet soft things so he looks forward to being able to tend to the rabbits. He's always asking George "tell me about the rabbits" and together they dream of how they're going to "live off the fatta' the land." That's what this is saying: all the people under Solomon's rule were "livin' off the fatta' the land."

Wisdom

Finally, we see the wisdom of the king. The best part of any good kingdom is the king himself. The last paragraph reminds us the one outstanding characteristic of Solomon, and that's his wisdom. We've seen how God gave him the gift of wisdom and here we see several things about it. We see that it was *"as measureless as the sand on the seashore"* (v. 29). We see how it was *"greater than the wisdom of all the people in the East, and...of Egypt"* (v. 30). As a result *"his fame spread to all the surrounding nations"* (v. 31). And his wisdom was demonstrated by all the things he wrote: 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. He also had a scientist's love of nature. His knowledge of plant and animal life was encyclopedic. He was like watching *The Discovery Channel*. Kings came from all over just to listen to his wisdom.

God Has Promised Us a Perfect Kingdom

Now you're probably thinking, Wow! This all sounds wonderful! I wish I lived there! You don't have to go far to see the kingdom we live in is a far cry from what's described in 1 Kings 4. Nations

are at war. Millions go without food. Children shot on city streets. Solomon's kingdom seems more like a dream than a reality.

A few years ago I returned to the Shangri-la of my childhood. I was so excited. I couldn't wait. But it was a disappointment. The General Store was out of business. The river was low. The fish weren't biting. The cabins were rundown. I even remembered how years earlier the new owners had failed to reserve my grandparent's cabin. My grandfather was a stubborn, prideful man and he never returned. Even the swing we'd built was gone. My Shangri-la was more dream than reality.

That's true of Solomon's kingdom as well. At the end of his life, *"Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord..."* (11:6), and *"God raised up against Solomon an adversary, Hadad the Edomite..."* (11:14), and God promised to *"tear the kingdom away"* from him and give it to another (11:11). You see, we live in a fallen world that's very unlike Solomon's kingdom. How then can we really believe something like this is reality? The only way we can believe that is because God has promised it.

It's true—God has promised us a perfect kingdom. This is the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Jesus once said to his followers, *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom"* (Lk 12:32). What's this kingdom like? When the Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah he said, *"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end"* (Is 9:7). He describes that kingdom as being established with justice and righteousness forever. John had a vision of it as well. He said, *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'"* (Rev 21:4).

You see, Solomon's kingdom is a foreshadowing of the Kingdom Jesus came to establish. Spurgeon wrote, "The kingdom of Israel under the sway of Solomon was a fair type of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. The present state of the church may be compared to the reign of David: splendid with victories but disturbed with battles. But there are better days to come, days in which the kingdom shall be extended and become more manifest, and then the Lord Jesus Christ shall be even more conspicuously seen as the Solomon of the kingdom." Let's take each of the aspects of Solomon's kingdom we looked at and think about how they foreshadow the kingdom of Christ.

Jesus' Kingdom is Perfect

Unity

Solomon's kingdom was unified. Today, the church is often divided, but in the kingdom there's no such division. Our unity is grounded in the fact that we serve the same King and from him we all receive grace. Within this unity there's organization.

Solomon appointed 12 district governors; Jesus appointed 12 apostles.

Bounty

Solomon's kingdom had bountiful provision for all. The prophet Isaiah looked forward to Christ's kingdom. He said: "...*the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines*" (Is 25:6). Then Jesus came into the world and fed 5,000 in the wilderness with miracle bread and fish. Afterward, it says, "*They all ate and were satisfied*" (Lk 9:17). On several occasions, Jesus even compared his kingdom to a great banquet where people would come from the east and west to recline at his table (Matt 8:11). Everyone is invited, not just the beautiful people but the folks you normally don't put on the invitation list. At the end of his life Jesus even prepared the best of meals for his disciples. He gave them bread and wine that symbolized his broken body and shed blood for our salvation. The day will come when we'll feast with him in the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev 19:9).

To know Jesus as King is to enjoy the best feast you've ever tasted. I remember an amazing meal Lynn and I once enjoyed in Perugia. When our kids were small we traveled through Italy with Lynn's parents and they agreed one night to watch the kids so we could go out for dinner. We had no idea where to eat but we chose this typical little place where we could eat out on the patio. The weather was perfect; the food and wine were the best we'd ever had. It was amazing. We still talk about it.

The kingdom of God is like that. You come to Christ and you have no idea what you're getting yourself into, but if you're willing to find out, you discover an amazing feast for your soul.

Extent

The extent of Solomon's kingdom was vast, but still he ruled over a limited and carefully defined territory. But Jesus reigns as king over the entire universe. When Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God he claimed dominion over all. The Bible says Jesus must reign until everything, including death, is under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-28). Solomon ruled over a vast multitude, as many as "*the sand on the seashore.*" In Revelation, at the end of time, John sees "*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb*" (Rev 7:9).

Peace

Solomon's kingdom was peaceful and secure. Through the cross and resurrection, Jesus defeated our greatest enemies: sin, death and the devil. The kingdom Jesus reigns over is peaceable. Scripture says "*he himself is our peace*" (Eph 2:14). He offers us peace with God. We can rest in the fact that our sins are forgiven and "*there is no condemnation for those who are Christ Jesus*"

(Rom 8:1). He also gives us peace within. No matter what's going on around us, we can know the peace of God because we have peace with God.

You know the promise: Don't worry but pray, "*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 4:7). A day will come when our peace will be made perfect. No more death or dying. No more temptation or trials. No more devil or demons. Once in a while, we get a glimpse of this perfect peace. We sit at the beach and watch the waves crash with the sun warming our face. Or we bask in the glow of warm fellowship with good friends. Those moments don't last, but they do whisper to us of what's to come.

Wisdom

Finally, Solomon's wisdom was renowned. Philip Ryken says, "If Solomon's wisdom was like the sand on the seashore, then the wisdom of Jesus is like sand that has miraculously been turned into diamonds." His wisdom was vast. He talked about farmers and sparrows and wind and fish. He understood people. His wisdom was superior. The greatest minds of his day were dumbfounded by it. Still, to this day, people from the ends of the earth seek the wisdom only he can provide.

The Perfect Kingdom of Jesus is Not a Dream but a Reality

The perfect kingdom of Jesus is not a dream but a reality. I believe that has implications for how we live our lives. Let me suggest three ways this can change your life. Three words I want to leave you with: promise, warning, call.

Promise

First of all, promise. A promise is something you count on but you don't have yet. God has promised us this kingdom but we don't have it yet; we only get a taste of it now. But we're a people who count on God to fulfill his promise and because of that we live with great hope and great expectancy. We're like people on a ship, traveling to the New World, sailing through storms, deprivation and the roughest of waters, but willing to endure it all for the hope of a new life. Life here on earth can be brutal. "Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come." We can all sing that, can't we? But we don't have to become bitter and defeated, because we know, "'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home."

Warning

But there is also a warning here. Solomon's kingdom seemed so perfect. Do you think he would have been reelected? Of course he would have. But eventually the people who voted for him would be disappointed. You see, we tend to look for earthly leaders like Solomon to create earthly kingdoms and for awhile it may all seem to work but eventually they all fail. They fail

because we live in a fallen world with fallen people and fallen leaders. So here we are on the eve of an election. We care about our country. There are important issues at stake: the right to life, health care, national defense, our role in the world, religious freedom, education. We should all do our best to study these issues and vote. But the warning is to not put your hope in any earthly kingdom or any earthly candidate because eventually they'll all let us down. Even a king as great as Solomon teaches us that.

Call

Finally, there is a call in this for us. Jesus is our King. If we believe he rules every aspect of life, then our response won't be to withdraw from the world but to engage with the world. Solomon had this rambunctious curiosity to learn about God's creation, and so should we. Read his Proverbs. He wrote about ants and badgers and mountain springs. There is something in 1 Kings 4 that's difficult to see in our English translations. The word used for "rule" in verses 21 and 24 is the same word God used after creating Adam and Eve. Remember, he told them they'd "*have dominion*" or "rule" over every living thing (Gen 1:26). This is part of being made in the image of God. Solomon is fulfilling the original mandate God gave to Adam and Eve to rule over creation.

This is our calling as well. God rules and under him we do too. We have a responsibility to tend and subdue creation so that it will be fruitful. Instead of retreating into our religious ghettos, we can even claim our community as a place where Christ has dominion. We can claim the media, the entertainment industry, sports, education, science, medicine, politics as under his reign. Abraham Kuyper once wrote, "In the total expanse of human life there is not one single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, 'That is mine!'" So rather

than surrendering our world to the powers of hell, we claim every aspect of our world and our community as a place where Christ is King, and we work to make it a fruitful place.

In his book, *Simply Christian*, N. T. Wright shares a story about a dream he had. The frustrating thing is he couldn't remember what it was about. He says, "I had a flash of it as I woke up, enough to make me think how extraordinary and meaningful it was; and then it was gone." Then he says, "Our passion for justice often seems like that. We dream the dream of justice. We glimpse, for a moment, a world at one, a world put to rights, a world where things work out, where societies function fairly and efficiently, and then we wake up and come back to reality."

He goes on to say we all strive for justice, but we often fail to achieve it. He says, "You fall off your bicycle and break your leg. You go to the hospital and they fix it. You stagger around on crutches for awhile. Then, rather gingerly, you start to walk normally again. There is such a thing as putting something to rights, as in fixing it, as getting it back on track. You can fix a broken leg, a broken toy, a broken television. So why can't we fix injustice. It isn't for lack of trying." But in spite of failures to fix injustice, we keep dreaming that one day all broken things will be set right. He says, "Christians believe this is so because all humans have heard, deep within themselves, the echo of a voice which calls us to live [with a dream for justice]. And [followers of Christ] believe that in Jesus that voice became human and did what had to be done to bring it about."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.