



What can we learn from a man who was given everything and still failed? That's a scary question, isn't it? None of sets out in life to fail. We all want to succeed in whatever area you've determined is important. All of us thinks something like this. "Well, if I could just get **that**, then I'd be a real success." Or "If I had the same opportunities as **that** person, look out. I would achieve all I'm dreaming of." Or "If my family didn't have such brokenness and heartache, then I'd have peace."

You get the idea. Each of us, if given the chance would eradicate **something** from our lives with the expectation that getting rid of it would somehow transform us. We wouldn't have any fear because it wasn't an option for any longer. We'd be transformed into someone successful and happy and beautiful and content and it would be amazing!

But it will never work. How can I say such a thing? Because today we're going to read about a man who had **everything** and he still failed. As much as we'd like to believe that we could really make it if we had everything, it's a lie. And here's why. None of these things touches the heart. And without a heart transformation, none of these things mean anything.

Today we are going to look at the life of King Solomon, the third King of ancient Israel, a man who was given everything and yet he failed miserably. How could this have happened? Because he gave his heart away.

Being given everything is no guarantee for success. Nor is eradicating difficulties or hardships a guarantee for success. If we haven't carefully considered the deepest affections of our hearts, we are going to end up just like Solomon: squandering our blessings and living a life filled with regret. So as we look at Solomon's life we're going to answer four questions:

- » What advantage was Solomon given?
- » What did Solomon do with his advantage?
- » What caused Solomon's downfall?
- » What does God want us to learn from it all?

Turn with me to 1 Kings 3:9 to see how Solomon begins. Prior to this verse God tells Solomon "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." And this is Solomon's response.

"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

This is a great response! He asks for wisdom so that he can lead God's people the best way possible. This is a noble request. A selfless request. And that's not just my evaluation. The Lord thought the same. The Lord tells him,

"I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be" (v. 12).

But God goes on,

"Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both wealth and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings" (v. 13).

Wow! Talk about a set up for success! He was blessed with more wisdom than any human being, ever; more wealth; more honor; the most exalted and successful king in the world during his time.

Let that soak in. This is an unparalleled advantage. Solomon is set up to be the greatest success in all of human history. Now, let's be honest with one another. We think that if we were given such an advantage, we'd make it. We would be successful. We would rule well. We would have amazing marriages with amazing kids and make amazing contributions to the world. We would have it all. That's what makes the story of Solomon so enticing. There's a part of us that thinks, "Oh, if God would just give me such a chance!"

I think we are fooling ourselves when we think like this and I'll make a case for it later. For now we need to follow the arch of Solomon's story and answer the next question: What did Solomon do with his advantage? After the Lord gave Solomon wisdom and the promise of riches and honor, Solomon got busy.

He was a builder. He built the temple in Jerusalem, the most spectacular building of its time. He built himself a grand palace. He built stables for his many horses and chariots. He built storehouses for his vast riches.

He was a writer. He wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

He was a politician. His first marriage to Pharaoh's daughter secured an alliance with Egypt. His other wives secured alliances with other surrounding nations.

He was shrewd leader. He built a bureaucratic system, dividing Israel into 12 districts and imposing taxes to fund his many programs. He sat as a judge and made clear sense of seemingly complicated situations.

He was an artist. He was a businessman, a passionate lover, a hopeless romantic, an architect, a motivator of men, a shrewd negotiator. Solomon was **the guy** all of you would have gone to when you needed advice. He was the expert in everything.

Stated simply and bluntly, Solomon was better than all of us.

But Solomon also built altars to foreign gods. His harem and wives led him to not only build these altars but to make sacrifices on them.

"So what does this mean to us?" you're probably asking. It's logical and rational to ask yourself this question, "If he was better than me and he failed, what chance do I have of making it?" I'll tell you what the story and life of Solomon teach us: Advantages do not lead to what God is looking for.

God was looking primarily for one thing from Solomon and it's the same thing he wants from us: A pure and undivided heart. After the Lord had rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery he told them: *"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from you heart as long as you live"* (Deuteronomy 4:9).

A successful life was always about the deepest affections of the heart. This was **the** redeeming characteristic of King David—he had a heart that was committed to the Lord. At the heart level Solomon betrayed God with small compromises and it crumbled the foundation of his life and his legacy.

What caused Solomon's downfall? I've been saying that Solomon failed because he gave his heart away. But let's look at the slow progression of compromises he followed because it's relatable for all of us.

First, the Lord told him that his success or failure would depend upon his heart.

"As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.' But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name "(1 Kings 9:4–7).

God is telling Solomon that he will show his heart of integrity by obeying God's commands. Obedience with a dis-engaged heart isn't what God is looking for. That's the equivalent of moralism. God's never been interested in that. But obedience that springs from a loving heart, there's nothing better to God! God also gives the consequences of turning away from him in your heart and then disobeying his commands. He cut Israel off from

his blessing and protection. The choice and consequences were clearly given.

Second, Solomon knew the pitfalls and dangers of the affections of the heart. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight"* (Prov. 3:5–6). *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"* (Prov. 4:23).

These weren't just words for Solomon. They were truths he knew. They were truths given to him by God as the wisest man of all time. As he aged, and had a life filled with small compromises of his heart, he wrote the following: *"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun"* (Ecc. 2:4–11).

He's saying that the only reward for all of his work was the delight of his heart. With all of this wisdom about guarding his heart and the pitfalls of giving his deepest heart affections away, Solomon defied his own wisdom. Given every advantage life could offer, Solomon considered everything he'd achieved and he evaluated it as meaningless, like a leaf blowing in the wind. This was the result of small compromises of his heart with the root cause being identified in 1 Kings 11:4. We're answering the third question, What caused Solomon's downfall? Here it is.

"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."

One verse summarizes the demise of the wisest man in the history of the world. What might seem like a simple indiscretion unraveled all of the advantages Solomon had been given, not because this was unforgivable. Oh, no. God had forgiven this in others. But with Solomon there was a deeper problem. He had given his heart away and there's no record that Solomon cared. When God was angry and confronted him, Solomon didn't repent. He wasn't broken-hearted about his rebellion against God.

The Lord warned him about this. Solomon knew better. And yet he failed. Let's read how the Lord reacted to Solomon and then I'll answer the last question, What does the Lord want us to learn from it all?

“The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the Lord said to Solomon, “Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen” (verses 9–13).

Here's the great tragedy of Solomon's life. He's been sliding for years and now his heart is “turned away,” *Qal Perfect*, meaning the action is perfectly complete; wholly done. What does God want us to learn from it all? What seems to be the clear and simple answer is the wrong answer. Let me explain. It seems that Solomon's failure teaches us the dangers of letting our heart be led astray. So, we tell ourselves, “Don't be like Solomon. Guard your heart. Build walls of protection around your heart. Get in relationships that will hold you accountable.”

But it will never work. Before you disagree with me, let me further explain. All of that is wise. You should do it. God said to do it. But if that's all you do, it will never work.

How can I say that? Solomon wrote about **all** of those behaviors and it didn't work for him. Solomon was wiser than you and it didn't work for him. Solomon was better than all of us, at everything, and his heart drifted.

Instead, I offer for your consideration this as the lesson we are to learn from Solomon's failure. Our hearts are designed to give themselves away to something or someone. Our hearts will always give themselves to the greatest thing before them. We can't stop it any more than we can stop the rushing flow of water. Guarding a heart with the mindset of building walls of protection around it won't work because the heart won't stop searching to give its affections away. This is why Jesus never taught moralism. It won't work.

So the lesson for us this: give our hearts away, fully, freely and recklessly to the ultimate thing, Jesus. When we do this, we protect and guard our heart because it is fully consumed by the One who can fully satisfy our deepest affections. That is the only remedy and protection for a wandering heart.

Tim Keller writes: “The human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts define them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them.”

In essence, we worship **it** and **it** becomes an idol. That's where Solomon made his misstep. And his own words from Ecclesiastes say it. C.S. Lewis said: “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

What then is an idol of our heart? It's anything more important to you than God. It's anything that you want with all your heart. It's anything you can't stop thinking about. It's anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. It's anything you seek to give you what only God can give.

We are fools when we give our hearts away to something that's not even worth it. God alone deserves our deepest affections.

So we learn this sobering lesson from Solomon's demise: What can you do to prevent yourself from making the same mistake? Is there any hope for us?

Yes, we start by acknowledging that idols cannot simply be removed. If you try to uproot them, they grow back. Or they grow back as a new idol. Another trouble with removing idols is that most of our idols really are good things that we've allowed to take on undue importance. We don't want to cast away these good things! If we have made idols of work and family, we don't want to stop loving our work and family. Rather, we want to love Christ so much more that we aren't enslaved by our attachments.

The next step is protecting yourself from repeating Solomon's mistake—to love Jesus with more of your heart than anything else. The solution is not to love good things less, but to love the best thing more! When we do this, we give our hearts away to something greater. We give them to Jesus, the idol-breaker. Jesus himself gave instruction on this when asked what the greatest commandment was. He said to **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind”** (Matt. 22:37).

Why did he say this? Because it's the right thing to do. Because the holiness of God rightly justifies it. Because it's the only way to prevent our hearts from chasing the empty idols of the world. This is the only way to protect ourselves from repeating Solomon's mistake. We turn to Jesus and direct the deepest affections of our heart toward him. He can fulfill you. He can satisfy you. He can forgive you.

No one here wants to repeat the mistake of Solomon because nobody here wants their life to amount to failure. Nobody wants to give their hearts away and afterward to conclude that it was all meaningless.

So let's have an encounter with Jesus right now. Right where you sit, go ahead and close your eyes. I'm going to guide a dialogue with you and Jesus. The things you're going to be saying are private, so communicate to him in your thoughts.

What are you idolizing today? Acknowledge it to Jesus. Don't try to ignore it; he already knows. Don't try to downplay a potential idol. If you think it might be one, just acknowledge it.

Is there anything more important to you than God?

Is there anything you can't stop thinking about, other than God?

Is there anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God?

Is there anything you're seeking after to give you what only God can give?

After you've acknowledged these, ask Jesus to fan the affections of your heart to supersede the love you've given to these idols. Through faith and repentance Jesus will uproot the idols of your heart. As you turn to him and the resurrection power of the cross, nothing is impossible.

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