

The king and the King

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[0 : 00] Folks, can we again open our Bibles at the passage we read, 1 Kings chapter 10, and let's read again verse 6.

Queen of Sheba, she said to the king, the report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true, but I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes, indeed not even half was told me, in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report, I heard how happy your men or your people must be.

In our own culture, one of the things that people love to do is look into the houses and the lifestyles of the rich and famous, and it's really quite a thing, isn't it? The copies of, is it Hello! magazine and OK? fly off the shelves as people in a kind of purient way want to look behind the velvet curtains of the rich and famous.

Whether they are footballing wives or minor or major royal celebrities, we want to see how they live. Many years ago I was visiting Memphis, Tennessee, and walking around Graceland, you could just imagine the king himself as he lounged there eating his burgers with all his friends, enjoying the millionaire's lifestyle.

Even this week we're told that Prince Harry and Meghan have overnight moved out of Frogmore Cottage to set up a new house in the USA, and as they appear on Zoom, people are obsessed by the furnishings and the various things behind the camera.

[1 : 48] The rich and famous are people whom the wider culture love to know what's happening. And people crowd into Buckingham Palace.

I've never been there, but I read about Buckingham Palace recently and I read this. The staterooms are lavishly furnished with some of the greatest treasures from the Royal Collection.

Paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, Poussin, Canaletto, and Claude. Sculptures by Canova and Chantrey.

Exquisite examples of, is it Cerde, porcelain, and some of the finest English and French furniture in the world. We love to see it.

And this chapter has that sort of feel about it, doesn't it? It's opulent, it's rich, it's lavish. As we read things that we could not even dream of.

[2 : 43] Let me set the scene. This is a royal visit. We have got the Queen of Sheba. Now, where is Sheba? Nobody knows where Sheba is. A leading contender is that it was a pretty small port on the Arabian Peninsula.

And so, if that was the case, I am told that it would have taken two months for the Queen of Sheba with her caravan of camels to make her way right up there to the Kingdom of Israel.

Another contender is Africa, and it would take even longer to come from there. The language suggests that it was a long way. But the Queen of Sheba wanted to come to visit King Solomon.

Now, Solomon is really a name for lavishness and wealth. But the Queen of Sheba did not come in the first instance because she was impressed with Solomon's wealth.

Look at what the passage says. She came because of his relationship to God. You see that in verse 1, in the name of the Lord. And she came, verse 1, also to test him with hard questions.

[3 : 53] Verse 3, Solomon answered all her questions. Verse 4, when the Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, she was amazed. And so, for her, it wasn't just a kind of diplomatic exchange.

Primarily, she was there because she was intellectually curious. She wanted to find questions to the big, deep issues of her life. And Solomon had quite a reputation.

Started, of course, in chapter 3, when he made probably the most famous judgment in a family court ever. The judgment about splitting the child in two.

If you don't know the story, read 1 Kings chapter 3 for yourself. And so, this was a meeting of two seriously wealthy monarchs.

Now, the Queen of Sheba was not exactly poor. Look at verse 2, it says there, she came with camels carrying spices. Look at verse 10. And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices and precious stones.

[5 : 00] This was not a box of after-eats and a bottle of Prosecco from Tesco. This was serious gifts, as she showed her appreciation to King Solomon.

And so, the feel of the chapter, opulent is a word I used. A prominent word is gold. If you go through the passage with a red pen, you'll read the word gold, I think, 10 times.

Look at verse 14. It says there, which we didn't read, the weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents. Check out the shields.

Check out the throne. Verse 21 is quite amusing for me. All the King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the palace were pure gold.

Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value. We don't do silver. That's tacky. Silver is bling. We only do gold.

[6 : 04] And this was a kind of Trumpism before Trump, wasn't it? Gold was a kind of dominant motif in King Solomon's situation. But unlike the good man, King Solomon was known for his wisdom.

So, what we have here, yes, it's a picture of an amazing king, but there's two verses in the Bible, Matthew chapter 12, and another verse that we'll look at later, where Jesus puts a parallel between himself and King Solomon.

The story is, the Queen of Sheba came thousands of miles to hear Solomon's wisdom, and she was amazed. And then he used this word of himself, and one greater than Solomon is here, and you just don't get it.

The Queen of Sheba got it, with so little to go on. And yet the Pharisees, with all their teaching, with all their knowledge, didn't realize who Jesus was.

Now, quite often, you'll find preachers really doing heavy spiritualization, and they'll say, how did they get Jesus out of that? But chapter 10 of 1 Kings is, if I may use the words, one of the easiest passages to see parallels, and sometimes contrasts, with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 34] And so, to the hello generation, who look just at bling, we have here a word to go deeper, just as the Queen of Sheba wanted wisdom, so we also are encouraged to seek after wisdom in our own generation.

What are the parallels, then, this evening, between King Jesus and King Solomon? Well, what do we learn in this passage that teaches us about one who was greater than Solomon?

Three things, I think. The first thing is, we've got a reputation of greatness. A reputation of greatness. Jesus is great.

He's not just a man, as the musical said. He's a man. He's just a man. No! He is one with a reputation. Look at verse 1.

The reputation there, the fame of Solomon spread abroad. And the fame was linked to his relationship with God. Now, four times, I think, you see that the relationship with God is mentioned.

[8 : 48] Verse 1, verse 5, and twice in verse 9. It's his image, it's his fame that's spread abroad. Now, that takes us here, that that's exactly how the kingdom grows.

The kingdom grows because of the fame of Jesus. And I, you know, I love this church. I love this congregation. I want to see this congregation grow.

I want it to become famous, in the best sense of the word, in Aberdeen. Not just famous for the building. Not just famous for certain elements of it, what it does.

But famous because, if anything else goes, these are the folk who are utterly obsessed by Jesus. And Jesus is so famous, that famous men and women, erudite people, they write books to dismiss him.

He's still there. I'm a great fan of desert island discs. You know, as you get older, you move up the radio stations in life, don't you?

[9 : 57] You know, in your 20s, you were Radio 1, and then you moved on to Radio 2. Well, I'm now at Radio 4. I'm not quite Classic FM. Not quite there yet. There are a few years to go.

But it's interesting, if you listen to desert island discs, which I thoroughly recommend, because it interviews interesting people, fascinating people, of all different complexions, there is rarely an

interview that does not mention faith in some way.

And very few of them dismiss the offer of the Bible at the end, along with the works of Shakespeare and one other book of their choice to take on to the desert. What am I saying?

The fame of Jesus is spreading. And he is the only one who changes cultures for the better. When I was thinking this, the fame of Jesus and Jesus changing cultures for the better.

I began to read and I thought, is there any culture in the world that has been affected by Christianity and has changed that culture?

[11 : 04] The dominant kind of narrative out there in secular history is missionaries are bad. You know, missionaries went to various places and they repressed the local culture.

They took away everyone. They minimized the joy. So wrong. Perhaps there's some areas, unfortunately, that wasn't the element of truth there, but mostly it was not.

So I came across this people called the Yali people. And the Yali people lived in West Papua, in Indonesia. Now, the Yali people were cannibals.

The Yali people were always involved in fighting with one another. Here's a bit of homework for you. When you go home, the two of you who are maybe interested in this, look up Google Yali, Y-A-L-Y, and look up the Wikipedia entry for the Yali people.

And in the Wikipedia entry, which, of course, is a great academic source, it says there that it was the missionaries who literally stopped these people eating one another and fighting with one another.

[12 : 17] Why? Because they'd heard about Jesus. They'd heard about one who was great. His fame spread abroad.

And when the fame of Jesus spreads abroad, people want to hear more about him. Again, recently in a Desert Island disc, someone was speaking about their upbringing, and it was a religious upbringing, and it put them off God.

And I felt like saying, no, no, no, no. If I could introduce you to Jesus, if you could only meet the Jesus of the Bible, not the Jesus of religion, not the Jesus of mere folklore, but actually Jesus of Nazareth, as seen from Genesis to Revelation, you would find him a compelling person.

He has this reputation. And it is through the preaching and proclamation of Jesus that the gospel spreads. Now, negatively, that doesn't mean that we promote our side issues.

Even in church here in Bon Accord, when we preach, it's not free life coaching. Hopefully there'll be elements in it that will be helpful for us, but we want to proclaim the message of Jesus.

[13 : 40] And so, people are in no doubt that the person and work of Jesus are of the utmost importance. Now, as the fame of Jesus spreads, the Queen of Sheba got it and was drawn towards it.

Jesus is edgy, he's interesting, and when people hear this story, they find him quite intriguing and in many ways quite compelling.

That's how you will be an effective witness. You will be an effective witness not because you're taught to witness. You can't teach people to witness totally.

Folk who are most effective as Christians, telling other people, Christians, are folk who are naturally consumed about Jesus. I think we only read in the Bible of two professional evangelists, only two.

The Bible and the message was spread by folk like us. Now, imagine you're an enthusiast about something. I don't know. People are enthusiastic about anything.

[14 : 44] You maybe go and visit someone and you eat a scone. Okay, something as mundane as that. And the scone is light. It kind of almost flies away.

You'll say, give me the recipe. Or you see someone wearing something and you'll say, where did you get that?

I want that. Or have you been in holiday somewhere and you come back and you're saying, you've really got to go. I don't know. It could be anywhere. I don't know if you've ever been to Collins A.

I've never been to Collins A in my entire life. But you may come back from holiday and say, I've been to Collins A. It is amazing. The beaches are so long. The water is like the Caribbean.

The people are so nice. You've got to go there. Sometimes folks speak of these things with such passion and authenticity that if anything else, you will at least Google Airbnb Collins A and think of that.

[15 : 44] So it is about Jesus. If we just act naturally and speak about our faith and what Jesus has done to us and for us and in us and through us.

And you see this all through the Bible in Psalm 72. I love it because it's a great missionary psalm. Isn't it? It speaks there, Psalm 72, Long may he live. May gold from Sheba be given to him. May people ever pray for him. Praise be to his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory. Branding fascinates me. I'm really interested in how brands take on. Coca-Cola, of course, is the most recognizable brand in the entire world. Its fame is literally worldwide. So also we see here, Sheba has a queen at the very end of the known earth and she hears of King Psalm and says, I want to go there. [16:44] I want to find out. And so there is a worldwide surge towards Zion. Gentiles coming all the way to Jerusalem to find out about God.

That's grace. For the Christian faith is compelling. The Christian faith is interesting. And preachers who are consumed by Jesus and by the Bible are by and large with one or two exceptions. Me perhaps being the greatest exception. Most of them are great preachers and they communicate well. Why? Because they've heard of Jesus and they're drawn towards him. So that's what we see then, first of all, that he had a reputation of greatness. The second thing we see here is not just a reputation of greatness, but an eager and enthusiastic questioning. If you find someone who is asking questions, you're halfway there. The queen was skeptical. She was attracted by his wisdom. Now, what sort of questions did these people ask? [17:57] Well, you get a little hint in the book of Proverbs, chapter 30. Proverbs, chapter 30, you've got a character there called a agor or agor.

And Proverbs 30, the sayings of agor, he comes and he's asking questions. Proverbs 34, who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up in the waters of the clock? Who has he established all the ends of the earth? What is his name in the name of his son? Tell me if you know. Tell me. And that is typical of the kind of questions that people ask. People are asking big questions today. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do people who are awful get off with so many bad things? Why is there so much unfairness in the world? Questions. And the one thing about the queen of Sheba, she came and Solomon asked her all her questions. [19:02] Verse 3, nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. She was attracted by his wisdom. Now, get this.

We in the church must recognize that people out there have got genuine questions. and we've got to respect that. So, that means, I think, when we're preaching, when we're speaking, we don't treat folk as idiots. We treat people as with absolute respect. So, you're preaching for Joshua and you find there Joshua is told to destroy the city of Jericho and everybody's to be destroyed. Men, women, children. God says, destroy them all. If I just walked off the street and I heard that, I'd say, oh, hold on, there's something wrong there. Asking questions. Folk who ask questions, generally speaking, are not asking them out of malice. There is a subgroup of people who ask questions and they have no interest in the answers. [20:08] They just don't want God. That's why it's so important to stop sometimes and just address the legitimate doubts that people have in their minds.

Now, the evidence suggests that she was a genuine seeker. She came a long way. I wonder what she was looking for. Let me go out on a little limb here. I think verse 5 gives us a hint. Verse 5 says that one of the things that she noticed was, yes, the attending servants in their robes, that was a kind of royal thing, the cup bearers and the burnt offerings. He made the temple of the Lord. When she heard that, she was overwhelmed. I find that quite intriguing and I wonder, well, I don't wonder, I know that the Queen of Sheba asked Solomon, why the burnt offerings? Why sacrifice? What's the deal there? Every nation had its idea of sacrifice. How could the gods be appeased? [21:18] But the sacrifices of the temple were of a different order. The sacrifices of the temple were only temporary. And they spoke of a forgiveness with a different quality about it.

They were sacrifices that seemed to point towards a final sacrifice. These were sacrifices that dealt with the human condition with guilt and their relationship with God.

And the Queen would say, yeah, but what about these sacrifices? What do they mean? Why does blood have to be shed? The center of the gospel, beloved, there's the cross.

A lot of folk, even within evangelicalism, just now we're talking about the kingdom, they're saying the gospel is the proclamation of the king. The king has come. Absolutely. Absolutely. Sure. But have you noticed increasingly, we are hearing proclamations about the gospel that don't mention the cross, don't mention sacrifice.

What is the dominant symbol of the Christian faith? It is the cross. And a Christianity without the cross, a gospel without the cross, is not good news.

[22 : 35] He's our savior. And so she was intrigued, wasn't she, verse 5, about the burnt offerings. At the end of the day, she was a seeker after truth.

And she came to Solomon and she sought the wisdom of Solomon. Again, it said there, the fame of the Lord. She knew that Solomon was very, very wise.

Verse 4, when the queen saw all the wisdom of Solomon, she was overwhelmed. What is the wisdom of Solomon?

Read Proverbs. Read the book of Proverbs. And if you read the first nine chapters of Proverbs, the dominant theme is wisdom. Wisdom in Proverbs is not a thing, it's a person.

Isn't it? Wisdom walks in the street. Wisdom is personified. And so that Hebrew view of wisdom is taken on by the Greeks and they had that idea of the logos of God, the thing that keeps the world going.

[23 : 48] And so we find here when Solomon is talking about wisdom personified, Proverbs 1 to 9, he's talking about Jesus. He's talking about wisdom made flesh.

He is talking about Jesus Christ. Now, this is important. Everything's important. Jesus, to say that Jesus is a famous person, that Jesus is the greatest of the prophets, to say that Jesus is the ultimate rabbi is not enough.

wisdom, Jesus' wisdom, the logos, is the principle around which or who the whole universe revolves.

He's not just a good man. He's everything. And as Solomon spoke about wisdom, he spoke about Jesus, 1 Corinthians 1, Christ, the wisdom of God, the blueprint for the whole of reality.

He makes sense of everything. What are your questions? Bring them to God. Bring them to Jesus.

[25 : 08] Bring them to the Bible. Whatever mess, however hard, bring them to him. There may be answers.

You see, the problem with a lot of the answers and the problem with our dissatisfaction with the answers is often not because we don't understand.

It's because we don't like. What are your questions? Jonathan Sachs, the late chief rabbi who died two weeks ago.

Wonderful thinker. Sad that he was looking for the Messiah who'd already come. But Jonathan Sachs says the meaning of the universe lies outside of the universe.

Are you serious about God? Folk watching on TV, are you serious about God? Someone listening to this week's month on the net and some recording, are you really serious about God?

[26 : 17] This is not a game. The Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth and Jesus is saying he's looking at folks straight in the eye and saying one greater than Solomon is here.

Luke 11 31. Finally, a response of lavish praise. That's what we see here, a response of lavish praise. The Queen received answers and she responds verse 10 onwards.

She gave 120 talents of gold, spices, precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir and there they brought great cargoes of almogwood, etc.

And she said the half was never told and she expressed her satisfaction with the answers by pouring out all these things, all these good, beautiful things.

Now one of the best commentators in the Old Testament is a man called Dale Ralph Davis. He's got a great little book on First Kings. He was a minister somewhere in Mississippi for years.

[27 : 35] I think he's one of the most competent, interesting teachers of the Old Testament I know. So reading Ralph Davis in First Kings 10, he makes a very interesting point here.

He's basically saying that here is a celebration of good things. Chapter 10 is full of really good things. Is there something in Scottish Calvinism that's kind of embarrassed or guilty about good things?

Dale Ralph Davis makes the point, read First Kings chapter 10. Now, this is not prosperity teaching at all. But here we're seeing that God is giving all these gifts and they're celebrated as from him and they are adored.

And he tells the story of Don McClure. Don McClure is a missionary amongst the newer people in Sudan. And the newer people believe that milk is just for women and children.

Real men don't drink milk. Just for the women, just for the children. One day, one of the men took some milk and he realized, this is quite good.

[29 : 03] Bit of a waste, giving it just to the women and children. But they said that they had to spoil it because to enjoy it would be wrong.

And so they used to get, this is not too gross, cow's urine, I read it in Dale Ralph's book, so it must be worthy, and they used to contaminate the milk with it because they thought we must spoil it to make it good.

We can't enjoy it unless we ruin it. Are we like that sometimes with good things? We feel that we've got to ruin it, to enjoy it, we've got to be tentative.

There is a sin of materialism, but there's also the fact that we must see good things from God and we must enjoy them. And this is a chapter where Sheba and Solomon enjoy these good things.

The blessing of the Lord brings wealth and he adds no trouble to it. I'm not going down the prosperity gospel route, that's a blasphemy. But if you have a good thing, bless God for it.

[30 : 27] look at verse 8, in conclusion here, verse 8, how happy your men must be who stand before you and hear your wisdom.

Sometimes it's people outside the kingdom. This is a Gentile woman and yet she's looking into the followers of Jesus, she's looking into the followers of Yahweh, and she's saying, you folk are blessed.

You've got a friend who says, I wish I had your faith. Maybe looks at a Christian home and the Christian church and maybe values it more than we do ourselves.

Your people must be blessed. Familiarity sometimes breeds content. So what have we seen this evening?

We've seen the story of two kings, one with a small K, one with a large K, the queen of Sheba sees King Solomon and is amazed.

[31 : 32] One greater than Solomon is among us and is proclaimed as an enjoyed. Let's speak of him. Let's be enthralled with him and let's spread the fame of Jesus from here to there and to the furthestmost parts of the earth.

Let's pray. Father, we bow in your presence. Again, we praise you for who you are and what you have done. You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Meet with us this evening and help us to be amazed and to worship the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

forgive our sins. We ask this in your name. Amen.