

THE CHURCH HAS A LOT TO OFFER THE WIDER WORLD
1 Kings 9-10

For All Nations Presbyterian Church, 31 May 2020

Introduction: the church as light to the world

- What is the local church to you? Maybe that sounds like an odd question.
 - What do you appreciate about the local church? What is important in the local church for you?
 - It is too easy to answer those kinds of questions with some sort of selfish answer.
 - Many see the church as the place that they meet their friends, which is comfortable and friendly.
 - It can function as a social club; at least when we can meet in one place!
 - And yes, of course, the community is a major aspect of the church; we want the church to be friendly and comfortable.
 - We need to have friends in the church.
 - Or perhaps the church is seen as a spiritual service provider.
 - You know, as you go to the bank for financial services, to the supermarket for groceries, and to the church for religious services.
 - At church, you get taught about the Bible and how to live a good life, and your children get ministries for them in Sunday School and youth group.
 - Or perhaps the Sunday worship is the highlight.
 - We get to sing together, preferably songs we personally like, and to hear a sermon that helps us personally.
 - All of these descriptions of the church are, frankly, quite selfish.
 - They describe the church as catering for our needs and focussed on the people already there; that view of the people of God is not big enough.
- The church is not all about you; it is about Jesus, the King, the Lord of the church and the whole world.
 - The local church cannot be inward-looking and only be a spiritual service provider.
 - We must not just be a comfortable place that we feel at home in.
 - The church has so much to offer the world around us!
 - We have a world in need.
 - Think about the current virus crisis.
 - So many have lost hope due to unemployment or fear.
 - People need a big picture, a reason, so they grab onto conspiracy theories and strange views about the government.
 - Their way of life is changed, and that is hard to take, and the things they valued so profoundly might be forever changed.
 - Surely the church can give answers in the middle of this mess?
 - We have something to offer a world that lacks hope.
 - We need to lift our eyes to see how we can be a good influence on the world around us.
 - Our passage today emphasises how Solomon's kingdom interacted with the broader world.
 - Understanding this will help us consider the church's impact on our world.
 - Having the blessing of God is not something we should keep to ourselves.

Context and history: a rabble of divided tribes to this!

- For this passage of wealth and plenty to hit home for us, we need to know a little history.
 - A few generations earlier, Israel was very different from Solomon's kingdom.

- At the end of Judges, the tribes fought one another to the extent that Benjamin was almost wiped out altogether.
- Even when David started his reign, there was division between Judah and the other tribes.
- They were divided, fighting each other, tribal and weak.
- Now, in David's son Solomon only one generation later, we have this glorious kingdom!
- We have seen a lot already from Ch 4-7; here, in 9-10, we get a bigger description of the wealth and building projects at that time.
- The writer is showing us that this is what happens when God's people are ruled by God's chosen king.
- This is a picture for us of God's blessing.
- There's a lot in here, but a major theme is the influence of Solomon's kingdom in the broader world.
- We see how he interacted with Tyre, with the Queen of Sheba, with traders, with Egypt.
- This is showing how God's blessed kingdom can influence God's world.

TRANSITION But before we get to the influence on the world, we need a reality check. All of this is based on obedience to God.

1. Whatever we have done, we need to commit to serving God every day (v1-9)

- Our passage today flows on from chapter 8, the grand commissioning of the temple.
 - Solomon's temple was filled with God's presence and officially opened.
 - The king showed great humility and understanding in his prayer, and God's name dwelt among the people.
 - Surely, you can say without a doubt, that God was with his people!
 - They are going well. The temple is finished.
 - Yet, straight after this, God gives Solomon a warning we also need to listen to.

- In v1, we are told that God appeared to Solomon a second time.
 - The first time was when God granted Solomon's prayer for wisdom, which would have now been quite a few years earlier.
 - V3 shows us that God answered Solomon's great prayer of chapter 8.
 - God would dwell in his temple; he would live among his people.
 - God continues in v4-5 to explain that he will keep his promise to David from 2 Samuel 7; Solomon's family will remain on the throne.
 - God faithful and doesn't change his mind.
 - This is a significant theme in Kings that we have seen over and over again.

- But God also restates his conditions in v6-9, not only his promises.
 - Let's be clear: there is nothing new here.
 - Although v6-9 are harsh, they are restatements of conditions and curses from earlier in the Bible.
 - These are the same curses from the end of Deuteronomy and the warning that was in 2 Samuel 7 as well.
 - Solomon was told that if he turned away to worship other gods, God's judgement would come on him most dramatically and terribly.
 - Look at v6.
 - There are two elements to this turning away; it involves turning aside from following the true God, and then going and serving other gods.
 - What is being described is not a one-off kind of event.
 - It is a process. God is warning Solomon that turning away is a series of small decisions, a lack of commitment followed by chasing of other gods.
 - The judgement would be horrible if that were to happen.
 - It includes the removal of covenant blessings that God had given them.
 - No land, no temple, the removal of God's presence, and even this newly opened glorious temple being a heap of ruins.

- Instead of an excellent reputation and blessing among the nations, they would be a byword and proverb among the peoples.
- That term 'byword' is a little strange, so let me explain.
 - Some places have such strong connections in our minds that just mentioning the name would make you shudder.
 - Let me give you some examples.
 - Chernobyl; you cannot help but think 'nuclear disaster'.
 - Hiroshima; you cannot help but think 'atomic bomb'.
 - God is saying that if his people leave to follow other gods, the name Israel and Jerusalem will conjure up these terrible images in people's minds.
- Why would people be astonished at this? The reason for it will be evident in v9.
 - The only way this will happen is if God punishes them for their rebellion.
 - God has been so good and gracious to them, freeing them from slavery, giving them such blessing; if they turn away, this judgement is deserved.
- All of this was said to Solomon at the peak of his glory and power.
 - The message is: 'Don't lose your way'.
 - Don't rest on what you have done already.
 - What you have done is good, but keep on being faithful. Don't stop now.
 - Just because Solomon has been godly, mainly, to this point doesn't guarantee he will remain that way.
- There's a sobering warning in there for us, isn't there?
 - Maybe you have been a faithful Christian for a long time; that is wonderful if that is you.
 - You have a long history of Christian service and generosity, of worship and commitment.
 - That is a great thing, but don't relax and stop doing that.
 - As the commentator Philip Ryken says, what we did for God yesterday will not answer the demand he places on us today.
 - Each day, we need to commit to serving Jesus.
 - Each day, we are tempted again to serve ourselves first, to chase money first, to love our families first. And we need to choose to serve God first instead.
 - Faithfulness is not making the big decision once in your life.
 - Faithfulness is an ongoing process; it is a series of small decisions made every day.
 - It is deciding to read your Bible, to call other people in the church to check on them, to pray with your kids, to be generous with your money; little things done over and over.
 - Failing to do the fundamental things, getting complacent and lazy in your Christian life, can lead to disaster in the long run.
- Be honest: the allure of idolatry is always there.
 - As you progress through life, you likely have more money and comfort than you did earlier on.
 - You are tempted more by greed; your things matter more to you.
 - You used to be happy with less, and now you are not; be careful that money and comfort don't start mattering more to you than God does.
 - It is too easy for your priorities to shift somewhat.
 - Think back to when you were a young Christian, or just a young adult perhaps.
 - Your passion for the things of God was so great; is that true now?
 - Do you make decisions with serving God at the forefront?
 - God remains faithful; will you? Even when life is good and comfortable?
 - If this challenges you, take time to repent and think this through today.
- There is also an encouragement to you if you are struggling and not going so well.
 - Maybe you have wandered off from God somewhat; you can see your commitment to worship and prayer is less, and your service is not great.

- There is time; change things now.
- Faithfulness is an ongoing decision; yesterday wasn't great, so commit to today being better.
- Have you not been reading your Bible? Don't just feel guilty, get back into it.
- Your past doesn't determine your future.
- Make today the start of a new era of faithfulness and obedience.

TRANSITION Despite the warning, we get a picture of the peak of Solomon's kingdom. If you thought the temple was the peak of the riches, you haven't seen anything yet.

2. The riches of God's kingdom are unimaginable

- Solomon was a trader and a builder, as we are told in great detail in 1 Kings 9 and 10.
 - The word "build" is repeated nine times here in chapter 9: in v1, 3, 10, 15, 17 and more.
 - Of course, we have looked at the grand temple that Solomon built, but that was only the beginning of his building programme.
 - He built the temple, his own palace, the Millo in v15 (which was likely some kind of magnificent terrace), and he didn't stop there.
 - He rebuilt cities like in v17.
 - He built store cities for his treasure and grain, and chariot cities, and as v19 says, whatever he desired to build.
 - He had a passion for building, unlimited resources, and he used them to build things.
- We had seen passing mentions of forced labour in chapter 4; here, in chapter 9, we see an explanation of what that meant.
 - It's in v20-22.
 - The slaves were not Israelites; they were the remnants of the Canaanites who used to live in the land.
 - Solomon had a large slave workforce, like many in the ancient world, including Egypt; this was key to building things quickly.
 - This should concern us for several reasons.
 - Slavery should not in the people of God; all people are made in God's image, and they need to be treated with respect.
 - The Canaanites were not supposed to be made into slaves; they were supposed to be destroyed by Israel. This is also disobedience.
 - And, with their own history of slavery in Egypt, you would think any king of Israel would reject the use of slaves.
 - Once more, this is a big sign that Solomon is not perfect; this is disobedience on a few levels.
- So the labour came mainly from slavery; what about the building materials?
- They generally came from a variety of business ventures.
 - Solomon did a lot with his key ally, Hiram king of Tyre.
 - He had a joint fleet of ships with Hiram, as we see in v26-28.
 - He became a key player in international trade.
 - The numbers in v28 are unimaginable; 14 tonnes of gold.
 - The kingdom was so wealthy that when the Queen of Sheba, someone very wealthy herself, came, it took her breath away as we read in 10:5.
 - It's not just cedar and gold; Solomon had more exotic things too.
 - Almuq wood in v11 is unknown now, but he had masses of it.
 - The weight of gold in 10:14 is immense, gained from trade, tribute, gifts and tax.
- Solomon had so much wealth he didn't know what to do with it all.
 - It was truly 'an embarrassment of riches'.
 - From the one of a kind ivory throne, to the fact that there was so much gold that silver was worthless, this is a show of incredible wealth.
 - He made a massive number of ceremonial shields from gold; these would be no good for battle.

- It is as if he has no idea what useful thing to use the gold for!
 - Solomon had apes and peacocks, as v22 says, and was continually given tribute and presents by all who came to him.
 - His armed forces were massive as v26 points out; a chariot was the ancient equivalent of a tank.
 - Here is impressiveness. The detail here should blow us away.
 - None of us has seen anything like this, even in a museum.
- As we've seen already, this kingdom is wonderful, but it is not perfect.
 - There were slaves involved who should not have been.
 - Solomon seems to treat Hiram, his ally, very badly in chapter 9.
 - The large number of chariots was banned in the law, as was the close association in Egypt, which comes up again in this chapter.
 - The fact that Solomon was prepared to give up some of the promised land to Hiram in 9:11, even if it was dodgy, should make us worried as well.
 - Solomon had problems, as did his kingdom.
 - This is magnificent, but it is not perfect.
- This points us forward once more to the better kingdom we experience now under King Jesus.
 - Better, you might say? Better how? I don't have a house coated in gold or peacocks in my garden!
 - We have so much wealth due to what Jesus has done for us.
 - Do you think about that often?
 - Jesus died for all who believe, paying our debt, and leading to us having peace with God.
 - This is full of all kinds of blessings we can experience right now.
 - If you want, read Ephesians 1 later on for a good list of them.
 - They include peace with God, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, being chosen, being holy and blameless in God's sight.
 - We also have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and we have had the mystery of God's plan for the world revealed to us.
 - If you trust in Jesus, you are rich beyond measure! Even when you are poor in financial terms.
 - And this is wealth that no-one can break in and steal, and which moth and rust cannot destroy. It is permanent and secure.
 - All of this is due to Jesus' work for us; it is not our doing.
- And what we have now, as remarkable as it is, is not the end!
 - In eternity, we will experience the fullness of being one of God's people.
 - Contentment, community, praise, no pain or suffering, it will all be ours.
 - We are indeed the most blessed of all people.
- There is an old joke about a man who had recently died asking at the gates of heaven if he could take something with him.
 - The angel looked into his bag and saw a lot of gold bars in there, the result of the man's work for his life.
 - The angel said to the man, why would you want to bring paving stones with you?
 - See, what we think is of greatest value now, in eternity is worth nothing.
 - Like in Solomon's kingdom, where silver was worthless because it was so abundant, our physical wealth will not be worth anything.
 - What will have value is our status as children of God, saved by Jesus.
- So how should we think about wealth today?
- You probably don't have an ivory throne in your living room; you probably do not even have a small gold shield on display. Yet if you trust Jesus, you are rich.
 - Or perhaps you are rich in other ways.
 - Perhaps you are wealthy in the eyes of the world.

- But even if you have an expensive house, a large investment portfolio, and a high paying job, that is not where your wealth truly lies.
- It lies in Jesus.
- Don't spend all your effort chasing what you cannot keep after you die, while putting little thought or thanks into the vast riches Jesus has won for you.
- All of this should make us think about the incredible riches we have as a church.
 - There is immense value in the people of God and the kingdom that lasts forever.
 - Compared to the world; the virus has shown some things to be empty.
 - If you are a Christian, you are rich beyond the wildest dreams of many.
 - You can have real peace and contentment.
 - You can have confidence because you know your Father who loves you.
 - You look to the future differently, anticipating better blessings in the future.
 - And all of this is due to Jesus.
 - Don't take this for granted.
 - Take time today to thank God for the riches we have in Jesus.
 - You think Solomon's riches look impressive; one greater than Solomon has given us blessings even Solomon could not dream of.

TRANSITION *The kingdom was wealthy beyond imagining, but a focus here is on how this kingdom related to the broader world:*

<h3>3. The people of God should be attractive to the broader world</h3>

- Was back, a long time before Solomon, God made promises to his ancestor, Abraham.
 - And one of them was that Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to the broader world.
 - We see Solomon's kingdom, and we are reminded that it was the kingdom of Israel, one nation among many.
 - But 1 Kings 9 and 10 unpacks how this nation interacted with the rest of the world.
 - It is a help for us to consider the influence of the kingdom of God on the world today.
- There are passing references through this passage to relationships Solomon had with other rulers.
 - Hiram of Tyre turns up a few times.
 - They were great trading partners.
 - It does seem from chapter 9 that Solomon mistreated his ally at times, short-changing him, but it was productive for both of them.
 - Pharaoh of Egypt, to whom Solomon was allied by marriage, also worked together with Solomon in the city of Gezer in 9:16 and in horse and chariot supply in 10:28.
 - In fact, you could call Solomon a Middle Eastern arms dealer based on 10:28-29; he is helping to arm neighbouring countries for a profit.
 - Solomon is prepared to deal with other countries for his benefit; those relationships seem mutually helpful.
- But for now, let's look at the main foreign relationship we are told more detail about at the start of chapter 10: the Queen of Sheba.
 - Scholars are not 100% sure where Sheba was, but the general thinking is that it was about 1000km away down the Arabian peninsula, probably near modern-day Yemen.
 - In a world with no fast international travel, no-one would know much about such a faraway place.
 - Notably, the Queen of Sheba came herself to see Solomon and his kingdom.
 - Usually, you would send some kind of diplomat; it is a very long way to come.
 - But she honours Solomon with her own presence.
 - Here is a rich woman; the spices and gold in v10 are incredible on their own.
 - She came because of Solomon's wisdom, and he did not disappoint.
 - She had all her questions answered.

- On top of this, the wealth she saw amazed her.
 - She had no more breath in her upon seeing all of it, as v5 says.
 - She brought incredible gifts, yet she returned with more than she came with.
- She was not alone in coming to Solomon. She is listed as one example among many, as we see in verses like v24.
 - Leaders came from afar, giving of their wealth, drawn by the wisdom and wealth found in this incredible kingdom.
 - They are attracted to the kingdom of God.
- Let's think about that a moment; we know that the kingdom of Solomon points forward to the kingdom of God, the church.
 - As we have seen, we in the church have incredible riches, and we can be counted as more blessed than the rest of the world because of that.
 - Is the church attractive to the world?
 - Do they understand that we have something to offer, wisdom and wealth that they do not have, that intrigue them and draw them in?
 - I fear that often the church has repelled people as they see the sin of people, and terrible issues like child abuse have turned people away.
 - The greed of various parts of the church doesn't help either, to see the artwork in Vatican City while so many are in poverty is a disaster.
 - We can do better than that. We do genuinely have things to offer the world, and we need to strive to show others what we have.
- The local church should be a model of a community, what community really looks like.
 - I think, especially in this time of crisis, the church is different from others.
 - People are staying connected, caring for one another.
 - We are a family, even when we cannot meet.
 - Most people in our world don't have a community like that; it should be attractive.
 - On top of that, we have the gospel, a message of real hope, a secure future, a purpose to life, and a God who loves us.
 - We can offer purpose and meaning to lives that don't have those things.
- The church has things to offer the world.
 - We need to do all we can to show the world what really matters, and to live in ways that intrigue and attract people.
 - When people come into contact with Christians, or the church family, they should leave thinking that these people are different.
 - They are so blessed, so secure, so connected.
- If you are watching this and you are not a Christian, I am glad you are interested enough to watch this far.
 - Look deeper. Come to Jesus, read the Bible, much as the Queen of Sheba put in the effort to find out more, to see if it is all true.
 - Don't take the word of others, read more.
 - If you need help, and would like someone to explain things to you or read the Bible with you, let me know, and we can help you with that.
 - Don't be a little interested and then walk away.
 - Jesus gave a warning to people about this in Matthew 12.
 - The Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, and now Jesus, the one greater than Solomon is here.
 - Don't stay as you are and be interested in Jesus; go all in and find out more.
- This also has an obvious application to evangelism and what matters to us about the church.
 - We are so blessed and rich because of Jesus.

- This means that the church is a place that Christians love to be; it contains our community, the focus of our worship together in Jesus, and more.
 - Yet we cannot keep these riches to ourselves!
 - That's the logic of evangelism.
 - If we know where meaning and purpose and true riches are to be found, and we don't tell anyone else, that's pretty selfish.
 - We have a world out there that needs what we have.
 - Some might think they are OK, like the Queen of Sheba; they have a lot of physical wealth, but they know they lack something important.
 - Some might have no idea of the wonder we know.
 - Evangelism is not some optional extra for Christians; we need to influence the world around us.
 - Our families and friends, our neighbourhoods, our workplaces, our schools; we should live attractive lives and actively pray and try to reach others.
 - Our church needs to be outward-looking, not just a comfortable place to enjoy what Jesus has given us.
- Church is so much more than a spiritual service provider.
 - It is the focus of God's work in the world.
 - It is where we grow and learn, where we encourage and serve, and where we would love those who don't know Jesus yet to join.
 - Today, thank God for King Jesus.
 - And consider how you can help introduce him to other people.