

SERMON NOTES  
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**EVEN THE BEST OF US DESERVE THE ANGER OF GOD**  
**1 Kings 11, Phil 2:1-11**

For All Nations Presbyterian Church, 7 June 2020

**Intro: the example of a famous Christian fall from grace**

- We know that sinking, disappointed feeling in the pit of our stomachs.
  - That feeling when we read the news about another church leader somewhere who has fallen spectacularly into sin.
  - I wish I could say that this is an unusual, incredibly rare thing.
  - But in recent years, it has been all too common.
  - When I was at uni, Mark Driscoll was the up and coming pastor in the US who was brash and to the point and said some helpful things.
    - He built a church in Seattle, in a neighbourhood and among people who were not commonly reached with the gospel.
    - Yet a few years ago it was revealed that he had misused church funds, he had a long history of bullying staff, and his church split.
  - Or perhaps you think of Bill Hybels, the pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, the author of many best-selling books.
    - He accelerated his retirement by six months and faced discipline and charges for sexual misconduct.
    - When he finally confessed before his congregation after repeated denials, there were groans and cries from among them.
  - Or in even more recent times, Joshua Harris, the author of “I kissed dating goodbye”, announced firstly that he was separating from his wife, and then that he was no longer a Christian.
  - When you hear these accounts, how do they make you feel?
  - Hurt? Disappointed? Angry?
  - I hope all of those things. It is a terrible witness to the watching world.
  - But maybe you start to ask how this could possibly happen.
  - How could someone who knows the gospel, who teaches so well, who has a good track record, fall into sin? How does that happen?
- Today’s passage is the ultimate fall from grace story, the fall of King Solomon into sin.
  - Yes, we have seen hints that not all was well with Solomon, but overall the impression we have from 1 Kings to this point is glowing.
  - Here is the wisest man in the world, blessed by God with incredible riches, with a great international reputation, who values godliness, and yet he ends his reign with sin and worse.
  - Today’s passage, and sermon, are sobering.
  - This can happen to anyone if it happens to Solomon.
  - This is a passage we need to listen carefully to. A passage that we need to take notice of.
- Let me be clear about something before we look at this chapter.
  - We have seen incredible excess in Solomon’s kingdom, decadence, masses of golden shields and ivory thrones and apes and peacocks.
  - We tend to judge those things negatively as we value good stewardship and frugality.
  - But that’s not Solomon’s problem. That didn’t lead to his downfall.
  - He didn’t fall into sin because of his wealth and excess.
  - No, it was deeper than that. It was his heart.
  - And then he used his considerable resources to serve his passions.
  - We cannot take away easy conclusions based on our modern issues; we need to see what we are being told here.

- 1 Kings 11 shows a markedly different tone to the chapters before it.
  - The writer is not just telling the account of what happened; he is interpreting, showing why and how it happened.
  - This was written after Solomon's time. It is answering the question of what went so wrong.
  - How could the golden kingdom of chapters 9-10 end up, a few short years later, to be divided, degraded, and eventually destroyed and defeated?
  - Let's find out. And as we do, let's heed the warning God has for us here.

### 1. It matters where your heart is (v1-8)

- 1 Kings 11 starts with a problem we have not been told about in this depth until now.
  - Solomon loved many foreign women.
  - We already knew about Pharaoh's daughter; we have had our attention drawn to this over and over in chapters 2-10.
  - But now we find out that Solomon also loved women from many other places, all countries that were neighbours of Israel.
  - V3 calls his wives 'princesses', which emphasises that these marriages were political.
  - As with Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon strengthened his relationships with other countries by marrying into other royal families.
  - Now, I have made the point earlier that when we think of royal marriages in the ancient world, we need to think about politics and not love.
  - These are arranged marriages, not romantic marriages.
- But that's not the whole story, as v1 makes clear.
  - Solomon loved many foreign women.
  - Not just married; loved.
  - That is important. That word for 'love' doesn't turn up often in 1 Kings.
  - The last time we saw it was back in chapter 3:3 when Solomon was said to love the LORD.
  - These marriages might have started off as a political thing, but Solomon really loved these women.
  - 'Love' doesn't mean that he was just attracted to them, or that he enjoyed their company, or that they had mutual interests.
  - Love is a sign of passion, of devotion; you end up doing things to serve the one you love.
  - Solomon was like that. As the end of v2 says, he clung to these in love.
  - The word "to cling" is the same word that describes marriage in Gen 2:24, and is used about how we should cling to God in Deut 10:20.
  - Solomon made decisions and acted based on his love for his wives.
- Now, you might think, why is it wrong to love your wife?
  - It's not, of course! If you are married, I do pray that you dearly love your wife or husband!
  - But the problem is one of priority; Solomon could not be said to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength.
  - As v4 says, "his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God."
  - His loves were divided. And worse than that, his love for his wives overrode his love for God.
  - That's the progression by v9: "his heart had turned away from the LORD."
  - It is all to do with where his heart is focussed.
  - Where once he loved God, now his love was focussed on his wives.
- I don't know if you noticed as the passage was being read, but the word "heart" is the main word that kept being repeated in these verses.
  - It's in v2 in the warning from Deuteronomy; and at the end of v3 as a summary of what happened: "his wives turned away his heart."
  - It's repeated in v4, and again in v9.
  - The core issue here is not that he built temples to other gods; the core issue is that his heart turned away from God.
  - Now, in the ancient world, they didn't use 'heart' the way we do.

- We tend to contrast our head and our heart, as if our head is where we think and make logical decisions, and our heart is all about emotions or feelings.
  - No, that's not what's meant here.
  - The ancient world saw the heart as where thinking and emotions happen; it is your inner person, what you want, what you think about, the core of who you are.
  - So it's not as if Solomon was swept away with the emotion of it all; he also thought about it, planned it, acted in accordance with his heart.
  - What he loved most was no longer God.
- Of course, with Solomon, everything is bigger than with most people.
    - He wasn't led astray by one wife, but by 300 wives and 700 concubines.
    - A concubine was a member of the king's harem, an official mistress if you like; he would sleep with them, but they had less formal status.
    - Like all believers, Solomon was called to be faithful to no more than one woman; instead, he loved a great many women.
    - The numbers are staggering; just the scheduling alone is enough to amaze us!
    - But what led to his downfall? It wasn't ultimately the sex.
- V2 shows us one aspect of it; the law of Moses was very clear on foreign marriages.
    - If you married people who were not from the people of God, they would lead your heart astray to other gods.
    - Solomon knew this. Yet he did it anyway, and the warning came true in his life.
    - As v3 says, his wives turned away his heart.
    - He loved them more than God, and he started to worship their gods.
    - As they came from other countries with their own gods, they continued with this worship.
    - Solomon joined them.
    - He worshipped these gods, building shrines on high places, even building a temple to Chemosh and Molech on the Mount of Olives opposite Jerusalem in v7.
    - So within sight of the great golden temple of the LORD, you can worship foreign gods at a shrine built by the king.
    - These were built for his wives to worship at, but v5-6 also make it clear that he was involved in this too.
    - He ended up with syncretism, which is the worship of many gods at once, the true God and other foreign gods.
    - The true God, a jealous God, will not tolerate rivals.
    - The end result is a bad assessment in v6; here is a king labelled as unfaithful, as doing what is evil. Despite all his good work.
- We skip over the names of the foreign gods, but some are listed here: Ashtoreth, a fertility goddess, often worshipped by prostitution.
    - If that's not bad enough, the others are horrific.
    - You can feel the anger of the writer here in the repeated use of the word "abomination"; these are not foreign gods; they are abominations.
    - Milcom and Molech were famous for being worshipped by child sacrifice; yes, people worshipped these gods by killing their children in sacrifice.
    - That's how far Solomon fell; not to permitting some foreign worship, but even to permitting terrible things that shouldn't even be spoken about.
- There's a lot in here for us; let's make sure we don't just get horrified by history, but that we draw lessons for our own Christian lives.
- The obvious application here is the issue of marrying someone who is not a believer.
    - It is often referred to as an unequal yoke, based on the warning in 1 Corinthians.
    - It is a temptation in all ages and places.
    - If you are single and looking to be married someday in Perth, I know that the amount of Christians to choose from in church is not always that many.

- It is tempting to find a nice girl or guy who is not a Christian; surely it's not that big a deal?
  - Maybe I can evangelise them, you think. Perhaps all those warnings in the Bible are overblown.
  - The advice I have for you is simple: don't do it.
  - Christians have wildly different values to others who don't trust Jesus.
  - Over time, you will make compromises. You will lose your passion.
  - You will have differing ideas on money and on time, on church and on the future, and it will drag you away from your first love.
  - If that's you, don't do it.
  - It is better to remain single and serving God that way than marrying a non-Christian.
- But the bigger warning here can be summed up in one question: what captivates your heart?
    - What do you talk about, dream about, spend money on?
    - Has this time of confinement made that clearer?
      - Perhaps you find yourself constantly searching for something on the internet: new clothes, possible holiday destinations, music videos.
      - Or maybe with all your free time lately, your mind tends to wander a little.
      - You dream of investment options, or career choices, or that new house, or you lust after a boyfriend or girlfriend you wish you had.
      - Some have been devastated by the isolation that stopped them doing what they love most, be it travel, eating out, or partying.
    - We are called to love God first. If God and God's people and God's word have not been a big part of this time of confinement, that should be a big flashing warning light for you.
      - Don't lose your first love. Don't start to turn from God.
      - Repent today before it is too late; don't drift off to other things that are worth less.
- Notice something else from our passage.
    - It's in v4. When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart.
    - Solomon was so full of promise, yet in his old age, he turned to other gods.
    - Solomon, of all people!
    - What is being described here is not the result of one wrong decision; it is the result of many choices made over time.
    - You don't start abandoning God when you build a shrine to Molech on the Mount of Olives; Solomon's heart was slowly, over time, heading from God.
    - The shrine to Molech was the end of a long road.
- You and I need to hear this. It's not the big sin that we start with; it's the little ones.
    - You don't end up having an affair or sleeping with someone you are not married to straight away.
      - It starts with becoming more comfortable with dreaming of these things.
      - It continues with watching movies and TV you should not, with clicking to places on the internet you know are wrong.
      - Over time, you keep overriding your conscience, and you move further along the road.
      - Until one day you do something you would have thought impossible sometime earlier.
    - It's not just sex, though; the same is true of all sin.
      - No-one intends to become greedy or an alcoholic or obsessed with work.
      - But that constant dreaming of investment returns, that increased volume of beer after work, those few extra hours of work at night instead of switching off: they build over time.
      - Sin eats away at you and changes you.
      - Don't think that it's not that bad; it changes your heart, it moves you from God, and the end result is something horrific.
      - If you are stuck in sin now, if you have been watching porn or obsessing over money or something, stop it now. Even if in the big scale of things it is not so bad.
      - Stop it now, while you can.

**TRANSITION** *We need to think more deeply about Solomon's sin; there is a danger that we don't learn the lessons we should:*

## 2. Terrible sin is always your fault; don't blame others or explain it away

- Have you ever seen those ads on TV, the ones with the public health warnings?
  - You see them for smoking, for drugs, for speed, for drinking and driving.
  - There are statistics about how much more damage a car does when going 5km/hr faster.
  - There are warnings from doctors about the impact of smoking on your lungs, or from medical scientists about how alcohol kills brain cells.
  - We've seen so many of these.
  - Yet, when someone chooses to smoke or speed, do you think that they really don't understand the consequences?
  - Of course, they do. They know them, and yet they still do them.
  - Our problem is not just a lack of information; sin is a deeper problem than that.
- The truth is that it is easy to rationalise our sin, to explain it away.
  - We can tell ourselves that other people do worse things, that it is not illegal, that no-one is getting hurt.
    - We often do this because we know it's wrong, but we want to feel better about ourselves.
  - I'm sure Solomon was the same.
    - Out of love for his wives, he is building shrines to make them feel at home when they are away from their homeland.
    - His motivation might be right. Yet the truth was it was sin and worse than all that.
  - In the end, Solomon cannot just blame other people.
    - Sure, his wives are involved, but he actually sinned.
    - He wandered from God. He built those shrines.
    - It is not someone else's fault.
- One of the real benefits of this passage is that it breaks down so much of what we assume today about the human condition.
  - Solomon did not sin because he did not know better.
    - Look at v2.
    - That's a quote from Deut 7:3. We know that Solomon knew this.
    - He quoted Deuteronomy extensively in his prayer in chapter 8.
    - God warned him directly not to turn away on several occasions as well.
    - He knew it was wrong, he knew where it would lead, and he did it anyway.
- Since the Enlightenment, there has been an assumption that if we only educate people more, there will be fewer problems in the world.
  - Education is the answer.
  - Yet there are still wars, and injustices, and all kinds of evil in the world.
  - Education helps, yes, but the human condition is worse than that.
  - We are sinful people. We do things that God hates not because we don't know better, but because, in the moment, we choose to.
  - It's not a lack of information that's the problem.
  - It is that we want to do what we want and not what God wants.
- Oh, you might say, but if you have some special experience of God, that will mean you won't stray from God. Once you know how good God is, you won't turn away.
  - But look at v9.
  - God appeared to Solomon twice, as he did with prophets; once when Solomon asked for wisdom and once after the temple was dedicated.
  - Not many people can claim that kind of religious experience.
  - The Almighty God spoke to him directly! Twice!
  - And yet his heart turned away.

- Or perhaps we can say that he didn't know better because of a lack of role models.
  - Yet his father David, for all his faults, wholly followed God as we read in v6.
  - It's not a lack of information, a lack of religious experience, or a lack of role models.
  - Solomon was a sinner who chose to disobey God and do what he wanted.
  - In that, he is just like you. And just like me.
  
- I want you to be honest. When it comes to sin, be honest with yourself, even if you haven't spoken to anyone else about it.
  - There is a difference between explaining how something came about and claiming responsibility for it.
  - For example, it is easy to tell yourself lies when it comes to your sin, often based on your past.
    - You might say that you have an inappropriate relationship with women because you grew up without a father figure.
    - Or you can say that your difficult childhood led you to drink.
    - Now, there might be some truth to the backstory you have making certain sins a big temptation for you.
    - But when you sin, that's a choice. You are making a choice.
    - And you are responsible for that choice.
    - You cannot blame your past for the sinful choice you make today.
    - Be honest. You are a sinner. You deserve the judgement of God.
    - It is not just someone else's fault.
  
- If there is one big takeaway message today, it is that you and I are bigger sinners than we admit to ourselves.
  - Those little sins add up.
  - Those chasings after power or money, those passions we encourage when we should kill, they mean that down to our core, our heart, we are sinful.
  - We are not good people with a few problems.
  - We are bad people, who despite what we know, our role models, and our experiences, we actively choose to sin over and over again.
  - We are no better than Solomon was.
  - Those little sins are like the build-up of rust on a car.
  - It happens slowly, quietly, often no-one else sees.
  - Until one day, the car is worn through, and a tragedy happens.
  
- You are a sinner. Yes, you.
  - Your life will not be one where you overwhelmingly follow God.
  - You will fail, and you will be guilty yourself.
  - It's not the end of the story, but it is a chapter we need to understand.
  - Which leads us to what happened as a result of Solomon's sin.

### 3. Sin always leads to anger and judgement (v9-40)

- God's response to Solomon's sin in v9 is anger.
  - That is something that is often not spoken about in modern churches.
  - God is angry with Solomon's sin, like he is angry with all sin.
  - The old word we see in other places is wrath, burning anger; God is not a little bit unhappy with sin, but he is furious.
  - This is no impassive accumulating debt, but a God who cannot stand sin.
  - God is pure, and he hates sin with all his heart.
  - When we sin, it hurts God, it makes God angry, and he is right to be angry.
  - He made the world, including us, and that gives God the right to outline how we are to live and respond to him.
  - Yet everyone sins. Everyone chooses, in some way or other, to live in a way as if God wasn't there or if God's rules don't really matter.
  - To have the almighty God angry with us is a terrible thing.

- God's anger, by the way, is not just a negative thing.
  - I think we all want a world that is just, where evil is punished, where things balance out in the end.
  - God's anger at sin means justice will be done; God doesn't ignore sin but reacts to it and deals with it.
  - We want a God to be angry with sin in an abstract sense; what we struggle to cope with is a God who is angry with our sin in particular.
  
- God always does what he says he will do. God warned Solomon what would happen if he strayed away from God.
  - And that is what God does.
  - The rest of 1 Kings 11 outlines three different people God raised up to be adversaries, enemies of God.
  - But in short, the judgement from God was what was promised.
  - Enemies would make the kingdom weaker and less peaceful, and in the end, the kingdom would be lost as v11 says.
  - But even amid this well-deserved punishment, there is grace.
  - It would not happen in Solomon's lifetime.
  - And not all the tribes would be lost to his family line.
  - The promise to David would still stand. But the kingdom would never be what it was under Solomon.
  
- God raised up three adversaries for Solomon.
  - The first was Hadad the Edomite, who we read about from v14-22.
    - There was history there; Hadad was a survivor of a massacre of his people who was given asylum in Egypt.
    - In an ironic twist, a man who grew up in Pharaoh's court led a people to his own land, despite the misgivings of Pharaoh.
  - The second adversary was Rezon, the son of Eliada, who we read about in v23-25.
    - He reigned over Syria and led raids against Israel, guerrilla tactics against the stronger enemy.
    - Again, in an ironic twist, Rezon is doing what David did when he was being hunted by Saul.
  - And the third and most significant adversary was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.
    - I won't spend much time on Jeroboam now, but we will get to know him well when we return to 1 Kings.
    - Here is a man with no impressive family who rose up the ranks of the public service due to his abilities.
    - This is the servant who would end up taking the kingdom.
    - The prophet Ahijah acted out a prophecy to Jeroboam, tearing his new cloak into 12 pieces and handing 10 to Jeroboam.
    - Despite Solomon's trying to kill him, Jeroboam was certain to be the next king.
    - The same command applies to him, though, as we see in v38.
    - He needed to be faithful. He needed to walk in God's ways.
  
- God's judgement on sin involves impacts in this life.
  - As we fall into sin, that so often has consequences for us now.
  - That chasing after money means we get estranged from our families.
  - That porn obsession means we view women in terrible ways.
  - Sin always has consequences. Always. Every time.
  - But the biggest problem of sin is not the immediate, natural consequences.
  - One day, all of us will face God's anger at our sin if nothing is done about it.
  - It is an anger we will not stand in, and one that will lead to us being cast eternally into the punishment of God.
  - That's what we all deserve.
  
- That's where we need the gospel.
  - The good news of Christianity is that although we are bad, there is hope.
  - Despite all our education, our experiences, and our role models, we are sinners who deserve God's anger.

- But God provided a way for his anger to be satisfied.
  - God sent Jesus to die for us in our place.
  - As Romans 3 unpacks, God's anger was poured out on Jesus in our place.
  - It is the great exchange.
  - God takes his anger out on Jesus, and we get the blessing Jesus deserves.
  - We deserve death and get life; Jesus deserved life and got death.
  - We worship a God who knows what we are like, who knows that despite all the reasons we have to serve him well, we will muck it up.
  - And in Jesus, we don't need to suffer God's anger. Instead, Jesus' death turns God's anger to us into God's favour.
  - Instead of being God's enemies whom he hates, we become God's friends whom he loves, even his children whom he adopts.
  - Isn't that incredible?
  - That's a great comfort for us when we fall short.
  - God is gracious beyond what we deserve.
- It also gives us assurance.
    - Maybe all this discussion of Solomon falling short makes you wonder if you can do it.
    - Can anyone persevere to the end?
    - We're not as wise as Solomon; maybe we will muck it up too?
    - That's where there is also good news to be found in Jesus.
    - Jesus' death on the cross is enough for your sins, past, present and future.
    - It is sufficient for all our sins.
    - By his Spirit, Jesus is present in our hearts, pointing us to Jesus.
    - When we feel we are unworthy, there is something true about that. We are.
    - But we are also saved, deeply loved, and face God's welcome and not his anger because of Jesus.
    - If you tend to feel your sin deeply, remember that.
    - If you trust in Jesus, you are saved. Right now. Forever.
- That doesn't mean you should take sin lightly.
    - Why would you want to do something that hurts God and makes him angry, when he has done so much for you?
    - The advice I gave earlier still stands.
    - Stop sin while it is small. Don't dwell on it, encourage it, let it build.
    - As the saying from the Puritans goes, be killing sin or it will be killing you.
    - Strive to live a life that honours God wholeheartedly.
    - Learn the lessons from Solomon.
    - But be confident in the love of God who shows you grace, even when you fall.

<b>Postscript</b>
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- Did Solomon repent? Did he end up right with God? The writer here doesn't say.
  - Perhaps the book of Ecclesiastes shows he learnt his lesson.
  - But for all his glory and great achievements, Solomon fell down.
  - He wasn't good enough. He couldn't maintain faithfulness.
  - He points us to the one who could, the great King Jesus, his greater son who would reign forever.
- Friends, take sin seriously. Don't mess with it.
  - It can ruin the best of us.
  - The church leaders that fall are not worse than you or I; we are all sinners, and we can all fall into terrible actions and thoughts.
  - God is gracious. Let's do all we can to walk wholeheartedly in God's ways.