

## **“THE ONLY’S”**

Proper 15B August 16, 2009  
1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14; Psalm 111:10;  
Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

### **Introduction:**

If only, if only, if only. If only I had been over 6’ tall in high school I would have received a football scholarship to one of the state schools. If only the stock market had not collapsed during the past year I would have a lot more money in my retirement account. If only the families with children would all agree to attend Holy Cross for six straight weeks we would have an active children’s ministry at the end of that time. If only I had know how to spell “onlys”, I would be open to less criticism this morning.

So many disappointing events and regretful things in life are expressed with the phrase – “If only”. That’s why I was taken back when I saw in our lesson from 1 Kings the “only” word. Did it mean that God regretted something, or that Solomon was acting in a regretful way?

### **Historic Background:**

In today’s lesson, King David dies and his son with Bathsheba, Solomon, becomes the new king. David had many sons from several wives and concubines. He seemingly loved all his children. However, there is something special in the character of Solomon, and in

David's feelings for him.

Perhaps it goes back to his guilt regarding his sin with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. Anyway, our lesson says that: "*Solomon loved the Lord, walked in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.*" Did you catch that?

Solomon loved the Lord, and takes everything seriously that his father David taught him about God, and Godly living. Solomon is a good, God-fearing, honorable human being. He is not one of those typical heirs to the throne who has been pampered and filled with hot air all his life. He is not one of those immature, childish young men who believe they are so much more important to the universe than they really are – sort of like too many young athletes today, who have been told so many times how great they are, that they start to actually believe it. I don't mean, "great" in their athletic skill set. I mean, they think THEY are Great Human Beings, and everyone else ought to feel privileged to be in the same room with them. They are missing perspective and humility.

Solomon seems to have a good quality of humility. Perhaps it came from being raised by a mother who knew the "rest of the story", as Paul Harvey used to say. Bathsheba was aware of the sin that resulted in her

being David's wife, and Solomon being born. She was humbled by it all and was able to impart to her son humility before God that would serve him well.

It was humility before God, and the task of becoming a new king, that prevented him from asking God for selfish, material, stuff. Instead, Solomon asked God for *"an understanding mind to govern God's people, and the ability to discern between good and evil."* That humble spirit and humble request got God's attention. It pleased God that Solomon had not focused on his earthly life, or riches, or the lives of enemies. Instead Solomon asked for "understanding to discern what is right" – that is, wisdom. So, God promised to give him a *"wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."* In addition to a wise mind, God also promised Solomon what he did not ask for: riches and honor all his life.

Everything was set up for Solomon to be one of the greatest kings in the history of human rule; and, he was – except.... Something went wrong. Towards the end of his life Solomon was not the same man or king he had been earlier in his career. Solomon had let 'other gods' into his house and his country. He no longer had the same fervor for Almighty God. He became the victim

of his own success. He had too many wives, too much adulation, and too much wealth. So,

**Where Did Solomon's Downfall Begin?**

We read about it in today's lesson. It's all encapsulated in that tiny, almost insignificant word, ONLY. *Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; ONLY he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.* There was a flaw in Solomon that emerged at the very beginning. It was on all the high places in Israel that the pagans used to worship their false idols, and make sacrifices to demon spirits. God detested that the practice of worshipping at the various high places had crept into Israel's religious life. It drew them away from true worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Now, it is reflected in the King himself, who grew up in a culture that thought making sacrifices to God on the former pagan high places was acceptable practice. It is not unlike our culture. Trying to raise God-fearing children in our current culture of moral relativism, and acceptance of all religions as equal makes it hard to convince Children that Christ is unique of all the world's religious figures.

I think it is so neat. The Word of God is so

complete. Just one word, “only” tucked away in a verse, opens a window of understanding into why, at Solomon’s death, there was so much corruption in Israel that the kingdom was split into two, competing countries – Israel in the north, and Judea in the south.

Solomon’s religious flaw can serve as a powerful reminder to us to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us our own flaws of character and habit. Because, in them is the seed of our destruction also.

Like Solomon, our flaws start out as seemingly innocent “quirks” in our personality. However, these flaws are flaws in our character or of our habits, or both. They are points of vulnerability in our personality, targets the Devil aims at to cause us to sin.

Sometimes, they lay latent, unobtrusive in our lives for years or decades. Friends, family, co-workers are aware of them even before we are. They just chalk them up to personality quirks, after all, everyone has them, ya know? Inevitably, though they are doors into our souls through which temptation enters for the purpose of injuring or destroying us and others.

The seed of flaw in Solomon’s character was exploited by all his foreign wives. They each set up idols in different high places and there made offering and

sacrifices to the gods of their native countries. These subtle intrusions became an infection that affected Solomon's personal relationship with God and his ability to hold Israel to the standard of worshipping only one God – Yahweh.

In all his wisdom, Solomon forgot one of the principals taught by his father, David. From today's Psalm, verse 10: *“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; those who act accordingly have a good understanding; ...*

In our pluralistic culture, we are rapidly losing the fear of the Lord. Yet, to us St. Paul writes today: *“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”* How do we maintain our Godly perspective. Paul says: *“Be filled with the Spirit”*. That's why we are studying the person and work of the Holy Spirit on Wednesday nights; so all of us can be filled with the Spirit and be empowered to live wise and Godly lives.

**Call To Action:**

So, how do we make a difference? Is it enough to offer people a religious experience? It is a start. God can work through a religious service to touch someone's soul or spirit, but ultimately it is not enough. If being

religious were all it took to go to heaven then a devout Muslim or Buddhist would probably have a better chance than a religious Christian.

No one was more religious than the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Yet, it was precisely their religion that was their fatal flaw. It was their "if only". If only Jesus had been more religious – like they were- then they would have believed and followed him. Yet, Jesus called them hypocrites, snakes, tombs full of dead men's bones.

To their claims of religious superiority he offered them bread to eat. Not any bread, but the bread of Holy Communion: "... *the bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh.*" The bread of Christ's flesh was broken on a Cross for us. The blood that makes forgiveness possible was poured out at Calvary.

Today, I extend Jesus' offer to participate in His flesh and blood. He offered his body to be broken for us. He allowed his life's blood to flow out for us. Now, he offers us this opportunity to give him our only's. In turn, he will forgive us, heal us, and offer us eternal life through relationship with him.

What have you got to lose – a bunch of only's? You really don't want to stand before God on Judgment Day with this regret: "If only I have given my life to Christ

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then I could have gone to heaven too!” Don't let that be your legacy.