

Solomon's Wealth

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[0 : 00] So tonight we're continuing our series in Solomon. We're third of the way through. We're at number three of four, looking at Solomon's slide.

We looked at Solomon's wisdom in week one. We then looked at Solomon's worship. And tonight we're going to look at Solomon's wealth.

We're going to be basically mostly in 1 Kings chapter 10. But we might dot around a little bit as well. And let me give you the big story for this evening that gold is good until gold is God. Gold is good until gold is God.

But I wonder, what do you know about gold? I've had a fascinating couple of weeks reading up about gold. So I thought we'd have a little quiz. And I've got some prizes which are actually gold bars.

[1 : 02] The edible version more than the expensive version. So we'll do it like in school. Put your hand up. First one to put their hand up and get the question right can get a prize.

We'll try and limit it to one per person. Because we don't want to be responsible for gluttony on a night looking at Solomon's wealth. Question one. What is the chemical symbol for gold?

Fiona. Alistair, I need your help. You need to distribute the prizes or else somebody might get a gold bar in the eye. I'll give you some.

Okay. A-U. That's correct. Question two. What is the atomic number for gold? We'll have a few guesses the closest one can win.

Anybody? 63. Higher, lower? Dave? 72. One more? 14.

[2 : 06] Dave Wright wins. The number is 79. Is that? Yeah. Okay. What is the approximate value of one gram of gold?

Roughly. 140 dollars. 140 dollars. Any other guesses? Anybody?

This is not really the most interactive quiz I'd ever imagined. As everyone just sits there going.

Okay. Okay. It's 31 pounds 40.

So I think Fiona's probably the closest. But she'll have to give it to Alistair. Because it's only one per person. Should I bring... Okay. Next question. What is the name of the speculative science that tries to turn base metal into gold?

David Reimer. Alchemy. Great Al. Good. We're warming up. Who was the king for whom everything he touched turned to gold?

[3 : 13] Neil McAllister? King Midas? Super? Better at quizzes than catching.

Which new romantics band had a 1983 chart-topping hit called Gold? Derek? Spando Ballet. Spando Ballet.

Great Al. Okay. What do you call someone who's obsessed with gold? A Christophillist.

It's good you turned up tonight. What is the name of the largest gold depository in the world? Fort Knox.

Super? Two more questions. In which chapter is gold first mentioned in the Bible? Chapter?

[4 : 26] Chapter. Chapter 2. John Thompson. Chapter 2. Verse 11. Last question.

In which chapter is gold last mentioned in the Bible? Neil? Revelation 21. Revelation 21. You'll have to nominate someone because you can't eat it.

Luca. There you go. Super. Well, what do we... What? 21 verse 27. That's right. It's actually 21 verse 21.

I don't know where that came from. Did you know, in fact, gold is mentioned in chapter 2 verse 11 and chapter 21 verse 21. It's actually mentioned around 400 times in the Bible.

Gold is mentioned. And about one-tenth of them are in 1 Kings 1 to 1 Kings 11. About a tenth of all references to gold in the Bible surround Solomon and his reign.

[5 : 31] That is a remarkable number of references. And I think we'll see that Solomon could quite feasibly be seen as the wealthiest man to have ever lived.

The sums of money detailed in these chapters are astronomical. And the wealth that he displays to the world, almost unimaginable.

So Solomon is not only potentially the wisest man who has ever lived. He's also probably the wealthiest. And this is great for his subjects.

There's little verses throughout the story of Solomon's life that say things like this. The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

They ate, they drank, and they were happy. Such was Solomon's reign that his people were happy. A little bit later on.

[6 : 34] During Solomon's lifetime, Judah and Israel from Dan to Beersheba lived in safety. Everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree.

Which is a Hebrew idiom to say that everything was right with the world. Such was Solomon's giftedness and wisdom. As we looked at with David in week one in chapter 10.

The queen of Sheba 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 people must be.

How happy your officials who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom. Solomon, wise, wealthy, and the blessing seems to be trickling out into the people.

[7 : 36] This wise king seemed to bring blessing to his people. They were happy. They all lived under their own fig tree. However, as we've seen throughout this series.

That despite many great things displayed by Solomon. There are some unnerving breadcrumbs that go throughout the story. Far from good guy gone bad.

It's more complex guy turned catastrophic. And I think as we get to wealth this week and wives next week. We see that we're really on the downward slump.

There are unnerving signs of unfaithfulness to the Lord. Littered throughout these passages. There is a real warning I think for us in tonight's subject.

That gold is good until gold is God. And I think you can make the claim that gold becomes a real idol in Solomon's life.

[8 : 39] So let me give you some insight to start with about the scale and scope of Solomon's wealth. As we look at his shiny kingdom. Just turn back with me to 1 Kings chapter 4.

And verses 22 and 23. 1 Kings chapter 4 verses 22 to 23.

And we'll look at Solomon's food. Solomon's daily provisions were 30 cores of the finest flour. And 60 cores of meal.

10 head of stool fed cattle. 20 of pasture fed cattle. And 100 sheep and goats. As well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl.

Daily provisions. That amount of food. Even reading that amount of food makes me feel really full. And so I did some rudimentary maths this week.

[9 : 42] And I took the weight of this food and tried to tot it up. Where it doesn't say exactly how many gazelles he ate. I just took five. Because any good king would have at least five gazelles.

As his daily portion. If you tot up the amount of food listed in 1 Kings chapter 4. You get 61,181 kilograms of food per day.

Which just to put it into perspective is the weight of 31 Range Rovers. Per day. That is a lot. If you bought it at Tesco.

The plastic bag cost simply to get it home. Would cost you 2,726 pounds 25. That is a ridiculous amount of food.

And even though he will have lots of courtiers. And lots of servants. And loads of people always round. That does seem like quite an excessive amount of grub.

[10 : 46] Under Solomon. This really is a golden era. But you could make the case that it's also perhaps a gluttonous era. As there is so much going on.

And of course we know it in our own lives. That the royal family need paid for. And we get it. The first chapter after Solomon has died. We get Rehoboam.

And Solomon's advisors say to Rehoboam. Under Solomon people were taxed heavily. They had a heavy yoke upon them. It was quite burdensome to keep up Solomon's way of life.

It should just go a bit easy. But of course Rehoboam's younger consorts. Say to him. Oh no. You need to go even harder. You need to leverage even more money.

And so consumption was a real cost. To the subjects of the kingdom. Well if that's his food. Let's have a look at his goal. Please turn to 1 Kings chapter 10.

[11:50] And we'll read 14 to 17. And then 21 to 25. The weight of gold. The weight of the gold. That Solomon received yearly. Was 666 talents.

Not including. The revenues from merchants and traders. And from all the Arabian kings. And the governors. Of the territories. King Solomon made 200 large shields.

Of hammered gold. 600 shekels of gold. Went into each shield. He also made 300 small shields. Of hammered gold. With three miners of gold.

In each shield. The king put them in the palace. Of the fortress. Of Lebanon. And now drop down to verse 21. All King Solomon's goblets. Were gold.

And all the household articles. In the palace. Of the fortress of Lebanon. Were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver. Because silver was considered. Of little value. In Solomon's days.

[12:47] The king had a fleet. Of trading ships. At sea. Along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years. It returned. Carrying gold. Silver. And ivory.

And apes. And baboons. King Solomon. Was great in riches. And wisdom. Was greater in riches. And wisdom. Than all the other kings. Of the earth.

The whole world. Soared audience. With Solomon. To hear the wisdom. God had put in his heart. Year after year. Everyone who came. Bought a gift.

Articles of silver. And gold. Robes. Weapons. And spices. And horses. And mules. There is a lot of gold.

Going on. In Solomon's. Palace. Under Solomon. This really was. A golden era. For Israel. United.

[13:40] Prosperous. Governed with wisdom. And gaining. A global reputation. As a great nation. It's also a golden era. Because seemingly. Everything surrounding Solomon.

Was made of gold. There seems to be gold. Absolutely everywhere. In just chapter 10. Verses 14. To 29.

Gold is mentioned. 10 times. If you look at the weights of gold. There is mentioned in this chapter. And the surrounding passages. It is. Mind boggling.

Chapter 10. Verse 14. 666 talents of gold. As his staple income. Not including. The trade with merchants. And Arabian kings.

Chapter 10. Verse 10. The queen of Sheba. Gives the king. 120 talents. Of gold. Chapter 9. Verse 28. The ship sailing back from Orpha.

[14:37] 420. Talents of gold. If you total up just these three figures. Which isn't anything near the total amount of gold that Solomon owned. You get 41 tons of gold.

Which for your information at 48.2 million pounds a ton. Comes to a total combined value of just under 2 billion pounds. And quite a lot of that is coming in year after year.

And people keep turning up to the palace. Bringing gold. And silver. Horses. And mules. What do you do if you have 2 billion pounds?

Well if you're Solomon you make some ornamental shields. About 500. Two different sizes. 500 golden shields in verse 16.

He taugth up the total value invested in these ornaments. 70,780,742 pounds and 80 pence. Or about the equivalent of one really good Premier League footballer.

[15:54] See as well what the chronicler says about silver 21B. Nothing was made of silver. Because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days.

Verse 27. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones. And cedar as plentiful as sycamore fig trees in the foothills.

The family silver is worthless in Solomon's kingdom. The second hand cutlery market. The bottom has fallen out of it.

And yet if you remember what we read in Deuteronomy 17. Verse 17b. God says explicitly. The king must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

It's important to remember that God said he would give Solomon riches. When he prays for wisdom God says I'll give you what you haven't asked for. I will give you riches as well.

[17:00] And yet how much wealth is too much wealth? How many golden shields are too many golden shields? Well I don't know but I dare say it's somewhere between one and five hundred.

Scarcily in the Bible the only place with a similar density of references to gold.

Is when God is laying down how the tabernacle is to be built. The gold is also what is overlaid all around the tabernacle.

As something worthy to represent God's dwelling on earth. And scarcily it seems that Solomon is overlaying his quarters.

With a similar amount of gold. To try and suggest that perhaps he's trying to compete. Perhaps he's having ideas above his station.

[18:01] We've already noted two weeks ago that Solomon spends nearly twice as long building his house. As he does building the temple. Is there something going on in Solomon's life?

That as wealth increases gold ceases to be good. And gold starts to be God's. There is enough in these chapters to suggest that as Shakespeare comments in Romeo and Juliet.

That gold has poisoned Solomon's heart. Next let's have a look at his throne. Oh I did some maths for you all.

The throne. 1 Kings 10 verses 18 to 20. Then the king made a great throne covered with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.

The throne had six steps and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps.

[19:11] One at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. Ivory overlaid with gold seems very decadent.

This makes the throne room at Buckingham Palace look like Ikea flat pack. Lions everywhere.

Upper six step. Elevation. Grandiose. Ostentatious. This is almost the furniture of legend. And in fact Solomon's throne enters into legend.

This ornate furniture. This is certainly Solomon grandstanding before a watching and visiting world. Here is a painting by the 19th century painter Edward Poynter.

Which tries to imagine what this looks like. How grand. How marvellous. How high. How golden. And yet back in Deuteronomy 17.

[20:19] When he takes the throne of his kingdom. He is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law. Taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him and he is to read all the days of his life.

So that he may learn to revere the Lord his God. And follow carefully all the words of this law and decrees. And not consider himself better than his fellow enemies.

Israelites. And not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites. He is to be one like them. And yet there is nothing about a huge golden throne of ivory overlaid with gold that suggests that he thinks he is anything like any of his subjects.

Surely this throne is built in order that he might be considered better. Higher. Higher. Higher revered. By all those that he governs under his kingdom.

This is Solomon pedestalling Solomon. He wants to be the king of his castle. And then finally to get an idea of his wealth.

[21:28] Look at his weapons. Chapter 10 verse 26. Solomon accumulated chariots and horses. He had 1400 chariots and 12,000 horses which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones and cedar as plentiful as sycamore fig trees in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kew.

The royal merchants purchased them from Kew at the current price. They imported a chariot from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver and a horse for 150.

They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans. Solomon to further his wealth becomes an arms dealer.

He buys horses and chariots low and he sells them high. He imports them from Egypt. He exports them to the Hittites and the Arameans.

[22:31] He takes them from the place that God says don't go back there. And he sells them to all the historic enemies of God's people. That seems like a great idea. This again is in direct contravention of God's law.

Deuteronomy 17, 16. The king moreover must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them. For the Lord has told you not to go back that way again. So we ask what is he doing in chapter 10? Doing great arms deals with all the people that God says don't do that. He's told to read God's law every day to keep it with them. And here he's just trespassing it, transgressing it. Each and every day is a major economic policy in his kingdom. This whole overview of Solomon's wealth strikes of a nouveau riche king accumulating, exhibiting his wealth, glorifying himself. A king for whom gold seems to have become a god. [23 : 46] Solomon certainly seems to be turning more towards the treasury than he is towards the temple. Such is the opulence he's living in and the deals that he's doing.

And as I've been thinking about this this week, it just leaves you with sadness. It leaves you with sadness that this king who was greatly gifted seems to turn in on himself and start becoming a self-worshipper, a self-glorifier who does exactly the opposite of what God says the king is supposed to do in Deuteronomy 17.

And so Solomon's kingdom is a shiny kingdom. But it also leaves you feeling like it's an incredibly empty kingdom. That the gold doesn't seem to satisfy. And he sets his heart on more and more and more. Exuberant excess. But incredible emptiness. And this whole display, this whole kingdom, this whole promotion of the king himself, just leaves us yearning for a better king.

A king who doesn't just get for himself, who doesn't just glorify himself, who isn't just self-serving in his life. And thankfully, as we read on in our Bibles, the unfolding story of God, we find such a person who is a king who's not just accumulating for himself, but a king who had absolutely everything and gave it all for us.

[25 : 27] Who lived in the opulence road room of heaven and yet came down in the most humble circumstances. A king who didn't use his high position to gain, but a king who gave up his high position to give.

A king who didn't consume exorbitant amounts of food, but a king who miraculously provided exorbitant amounts of food. A king who didn't place a heavy burden on his subjects, but a king who says, come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. A king who, though he owned everything, humbled himself, becoming a servant in his earthly life, just about owned the clothes on his back and nothing more.

He went told, can I follow you, says the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. He didn't even have a pop-up tent for one, let alone a palace laden with gold.

A king who wasn't coronated by sitting on a resplendent throne six steps up, but a king who was crowned on a cruel Roman cross, outside a city the subject of scorn and shame.

[26 : 55] One who didn't stockpile weapons to ensure his own security, but one who laid down his life that we might be secure forever.

One who didn't turn his heart away from God's law, but one who obeyed, even when it cost him absolutely everything.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, rich beyond Solomon's wildest dreams, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

That is the glorious good news of this servant king, king Jesus. And you see the permanence of Jesus' kingdom, a kingdom that will last forever and ever.

And when you place it alongside Solomon's kingdom, we see that Solomon's kingdom is a slippery kingdom. Because if we flick over a couple of pages to 1 Kings 14 verses 25 and 26, we read this.

[28 : 05] After Solomon dies, Rehoboam his son takes over. The kingdom splits. And it says this. And then verse 27, He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made.

And then verse 27, Rehoboam tries to do a face-serving exercise. So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assign these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace.

See how fleeting it was. The treasury was full. But as soon as it was filled, it was emptied by Shishak, the king of Egypt.

Solomon, the wealthiest and potentially the wisest man who has ever lived, becomes the epitome of the rich fool in Luke's gospel. The one who thought, I've got it all.

Let me just eat, drink and be merry. But in the end, it could do nothing for him. In an instant, his incredible wealth is carted away as the kingdom of his son is spoiled and ransacked.

[29 : 22] The treasure stored on earth certainly did fall foul of the thieves that really did break in and steal. Woody Allen picks up a similar sentiment with his comment, I'm very proud of my gold pocket watch.

My grandfather on his deathbed sold me this watch. Solomon's wealth was ultimately worthless in the economy of heaven. He even picks it up in Ecclesiastes, I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish. Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil, into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun.

This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. His son came after him. He was certainly not as wise as Solomon and all too quickly.

It was gone. At the end of the day, all the chess pieces go back in the same box, whether you're a king or a pawn. And whether we've been rich towards God or not will be ultimately all that is valuable.

[30 : 35] And sitting here tonight, it would be easy to be overwhelmed with Solomon's wealth and the shininess of gold. But the New Testament will give us four things that it explicitly says are more valuable than all the gold in the world.

In Proverbs, it says, how much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver. Wisdom, more valuable than gold. Somebody says, you can have all this gold if you give up your God-given wisdom.

Don't give up your wisdom, because you're being shortchanged. Psalm 119. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

A little bit later on in, I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold. Do we honestly believe this is more precious than all the gold that Solomon had?

Because the psalmist says it is. And if we honestly believe that, that'll help to orientate our lives and make sure that gold never becomes God. But always is a good gift from God to be used for his glory.

[31 : 52] 1 Peter, For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish.

Something more precious than gold, God paid in order that we can be his forever. And if we keep that at the forefront of our mind, that'll stop us chasing after wind and pursuing meaningless.

And what about your faith? 1 Peter 1.7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Your faith in Jesus, Your saving faith in Jesus is of greater, infinite more value than a gold overlaid ivory throne with lions everywhere six steps up.

Don't swap it. And if we keep that in mind, we'll stop gold being God in our lives as Solomon seems to have done. Surely seeing these of infinite worth will prevent us spending our whole lives accumulating what will ultimately only be moths and rust.

[33 : 19] And so you read a little bit further down in Matthew 6. And we get a reference to Solomon and his splendour. And it says this, Are you not much more valuable than they?

Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin.

Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith?

So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. What do we see on our high streets?

[34 : 46] Food shops? Coffee shops? Clothes shops? If Matthew had been written a little later, mobile phone shops? And God says, Don't worry what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear, what you will access Facebook on.

Because God knows what you need. But if you seek his kingdom and his righteousness, all these things will be given to you. I want to finish by reading a quote from Spurgeon in his great little book, which is free on the internet, The Saint and the Saviour.

This is what he writes, Men know not the gold which lies in the mind of Christ Jesus, or surely they were digging it night and day.

They have not yet discovered the pearl of great price, or they would have sold their altar by the field wherein it lies. The person of Christ strikes eloquent dumb when it would describe him.

It paralyzes the artist's arm when with fair colours he would portray him. It would overwhelm the sculptor to carve his image, even were it possible to chisel it in a massive block of diamond.

[35 : 57] There is naught in nature to compare to him. Before his radiance, the brilliance of the sun is dimmed. Yes, nothing can compete with him.

Say, oh, heaven itself blushes at its own paleness of countenance when his altogether lovely person is beheld. Let's pray together.