

## **Sermon 19: 1 Kings 9: Choosing for God**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Internal choices  
External performance

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When you woke up this morning, or every morning this week, did you consecrate yourselves to God? Did you remember that God has bought you at a price, that He is your Father and Lord, that you are here to fulfil His purposes? Did you remember that you are a sinner that battles a sinful heart, and look to God for the strength He provides so that you can do your duty? On our good days we recommit ourselves as living sacrifices to God. On a bad day we just drift into our duties out of habit and without deliberation, on our worst days we sin big. When we are starting off on the Christian journey we are keen and energetic. When we come to the end of the Christian road we are expectant, contemplative and aware. It is the middle part, with the regular passing of miles beneath us that there is a danger of falling asleep at the wheel.

Solomon is in the middle of his reign, He has just finished a major accomplishment in building the temple. God mercifully comes to him after this victory when he might be tempted to rest on his laurels and live in the glow of past accomplishments and reminds him of his duties. This chapter has two parts to it, the first part is God appearing to Solomon calling him to faithfulness and warning him of the consequences of unfaithfulness. And the second part is a summary of events in Solomon's reign, some of the lesser highlights. This chapter is very useful to us because it presents a busy life full of activity, but the emphasis is on our walk with the Lord. In the middle parts busyness can often be mistaken for faithfulness. This chapter points out that Solomon ought to be faithful and then asks us to view his activity to test whether he listened to God when he appeared to him. You are I are not kingdom builders like Solomon, our lives are ordinary and pedestrian compared. But we fight in the same spiritual battle that he did fighting against sin within and Satan without to honour and serve God. Let us evaluate this section testing ourselves to see how we are doing in the middle busy part of our journey.

### **Internal choices**

Let us appreciate the mercy of God in coming and reminding us of our necessary commitment to Him, v1-2, 'As soon as Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build,<sup>2</sup> the LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon.' The word build occurs 9 times in this section revealing Solomon's drive and energetic efforts. After all the hard work had been done and the time for surveying and enjoying came along, God paid Solomon a visit. This is a mission of mercy because the human heart tends to pride, it constantly takes the glory for things that are God's doing. Remember Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 4:28-31, 'All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>29</sup> At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,<sup>30</sup> and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"<sup>31</sup> While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you....' They say the devil is never waiting for you on the mountain top but at the foot of the mountain to tell you how great you are. God comes to Solomon to exhort him.

Have you been confronted by God recently? Has He had to come to you and confront you and remind you about your holiness and mission? Solomon is a warning to those who have this merciful visitation and do not listen.

Verses 3-9 can be divided into its three parts, V3 talks about God's answer to Solomon's prayers at the temple; v4-5 is a confirmation of the promises made to David; and v6-9 are the warnings of judgement if Solomon or the people turn from God.

V3, 'And the LORD said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.' Here we see God answering Solomon's prayers in chapter 8 for God to be a prayer answering God at the temple. Here is a question for us to consider as we look at this statement. If you go to the wailing wall in Jerusalem today, and you, or a Jew or anyone else prays at the wall, if you write down a prayer and slot it into the wall, will God hear that prayer? The answer is no. Does this contradict the statement that God will put His name there forever and His eyes and heart will be there? No. You see the earthly temple was only ever an anticipation of the final temple of God. The temple of stone has been replaced with the temple of living stone, a building has given way to the body of Christ. John 2:19-21, 'Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."<sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"<sup>21</sup> But he was speaking about the temple of his body.' God hears those prayers offered at the living temple. If you are in Christ and come to God in prayer, the Holy God will receive you and answer.

Not only does God confirm the promise to be Israel's God and bless the centralised place of worship. God repeats the promises given to David, v4-5, 'And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules,<sup>5</sup> then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'" There are two ways we need to look at these verses. Firstly, we must see them in their covenantal context. The 'if you...then I' language must be noted as indicating being part of the Mosaic Covenant, and to have a law-based aspect to it. Let me quickly qualify that. Anyone in the OT who ever got saved was saved by grace through faith in the Christ who was to come by the sovereign working of the Spirit as Christ was portrayed in the word be it promise, prophecy, type, shadow, etc. But under the Mosaic economy we see that physical blessings were obtained by obedience. Here we are told that the King's continuance on the throne was also secured by obedience. Now there is a tension here. God promised David a son would always sit on his throne, and here we see that a son will not sit on the throne if they are disobedient. So which is it? Technically it is both. Those sons of David who sinned were removed, but that Son of David who rendered perfect obedience to God was rewarded with the eternal throne at God's right hand. Although many sons of David sinned and were removed, a Son of David (singular) will sit on the throne eternally.

We see in v6-7 an important connection between King and kingdom. If the king sins the whole kingdom is cut off from the land. As goes the King so goes the kingdom. They too sin, v9, but the sin of the king especially brings about punishments. The people of Israel will lose, land, temple and throne for sin. This structure of law and punishment was set up by God to teach us the gospel of grace in Christ. How can the law teach us about grace? Well technically the good news is not that there is no law but that someone fulfils the law in our place. Technically grace is being saved by another's works, the works of Christ. Adam was a vice-regent king in Eden and when he sinned the king and his kingdom were plunged

into sin and punishment. Israel had kings, and when the kings sinned, as went the king so went the kingdom, they were all punished. But these are forerunners and anticipation of the King who would come and would not sin; and instead of winning punishment Christ would win blessing, inheritance and reward. So the first way we need to respond to God's exhortation here is to recognise that Christ as our substitute has done all that is necessary to secure our eternal rest in God. We are not in a position of do or die, but Christ has done. We must see these exhortations in light of the gospel.

Secondly, we need to see that although we are not in the same Covenant as Solomon we do serve the same God. He hates sin in His children as much as He does in the unbeliever. He may not act to remove land or rain, but that does not mean that there are not serious spiritual consequences that we will still suffer. So we can appropriate the appropriateness of serving God with 'integrity of heart and uprightness'. We do not do this to secure salvation but because Christ has secured it for us. This statement refers to inner holiness as well as outward holiness. We can affirm as well that we ought to keep all the commands of God. We recognise that Christ's obedience is the only obedience which will merit anything, but we still see our obedience as a key way to express our love and witness to God. We do not pick and choose among God's commands to decide which ones suite our budget, our convenience, our personality types, or agree with our cultures. And when we obey should we expect blessings? Yes. We do not expect the political, agricultural, military and physical blessings promised under the OT. However, we do expect spiritual blessings in the form of answered prayer, character growth, conversions when we faithfully preach, and the positive cause and effect consequences of walking in the Creator's ways.

But we would also have to affirm that there are negative consequences that follow our disobedience. If we step outside of God's will and walk in sin we should expect in the first place the natural consequences of our actions. Sin also follows the basic law of cause and effect. Since we have been made to walk in God's ways and all we are and our engagement with our environment will function in an optimal way when we do. We should expect negative consequences when we are not walking in holiness and truth. God talks about our sins resulting in unanswered prayer, Ps. 66:17, 'If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.' We would suffer the effects of a hardened heart, which is a terrible condition which compounds itself and leads to greater hardness often necessitating amputation and extreme measures and interventions from God. Not to mention the slander that would be brought on God's name.

This would involve that daily commitment we started talking about. Daily prayer, daily bible reading, daily putting sin to death, not growing complacent. Not thinking that how many years of being a Christian you can now stop striving and putting in effort. You might think you need warnings when you are young and vulnerable in the faith, or when you are sinning, but who thinks they need warnings when they have just accomplished such great things for God and have been congratulated publicly for being such a great believer? We all need to remember that sin can take us at any point and we cannot let down our guards. This is the mercy of God in giving such a warning. The path to backsliding and hell is often not paved with big sins but lots of little ones. C. S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Screwtape Letters* about the letters from a major demon who was well experienced in tempting souls writing to his young nephew demon who was just starting out. The book is attempting to help Christians think more deeply about the nature of sin and the Christian life. Listen to what the older uncle says to his nephew: 'You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy [God]. It does not matter how small the sins

are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.’ (p60-61).

## **External performance**

The middle years of Solomon’s reign start with this warning, we are then invited to survey several events in Solomon’s reign and the thing you should be asking yourself is this: did he make that choice to serve God? We know that he did not. Verses 10-28 have a variety of different daily types of kingdom things, but there are many of them which anticipate the greater falling away later.

V10-13 deal with international relations with Hiram of Tyre. Hiram you will remember had helped Solomon with building materials and expertise for his building projects. Solomon and Hiram were in a partnership. We are told of the mutual giving of gifts which must have made up part of the agreement between them. Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities in Galilee, the land of Ashur, and Hiram gave Solomon 120 talents/4,080 kg of Gold. Hiram thought he was getting a raw deal. The worrying part of this agreement is not that Solomon seemed to be the dominant partner in a lucrative business relationship, but rather that he was selling off parts of God’s land to Gentiles. Outwardly, this looked like smart politics as the trade corridor was controlled by these two major powers. Unfortunately, fundamental compromises were being made for such progress.

V15-19 tells us of Solomon’s many building projects. V15, ‘And this is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the LORD and his own house and the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer.’ During those 20 years of building we see that Solomon was doing many things. The Millo is likely a terrace for his bride Pharaoh’s daughters, defensive walls around Jerusalem. Other projects include rebuilding places Pharaoh had given as a dowry and major fortifications along trade routes. Some have thought that this investment in military protection is not in keeping with God’s call for Israel. The increase of chariots and horses was something forbidden by God they were to trust in Him.

V20-23 clarifies that the forced labour were not Jews but the remaining Canaanites in the land. Apart from the fact that many projects became a major tax burden on the people the idea of slavery for riches does not sit well. What would have been occasional became organised and economised.

V24 Interestingly, on the heels of the Canaanite workers is the mention of a big wedding, a royal wedding, but to an idolater, Pharaoh’s daughter.

Do not think that during this time was not religious, he was. V25, ‘Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar that he built to the LORD, making offerings with it before the LORD. So he finished the house.’ While all these things are going on Solomon is going to church. Once again listen to the advice of the older demon to the younger about a young convert who has made bad friends but has not abandoned his practice of going to church: ‘He must not be allowed to suspect that he is now, however slowly, heading right away from the sun on a line which will carry him into the cold and dark of utmost space. For this reason I am almost glad to hear that he is still a churchgoer and a communicant. I know there are dangers in this; but anything is better than that he should realise the break he has made with the first months of his Christian life. As long as he retains externally the habits of a Christian he can still be made to think of

himself as one who has adopted a few new friends and amusements but whose spiritual state is much the same as it was six weeks ago.' (p57-58). Not going to church is a sign of spiritual backsliding, Prov. 18:1, 'Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.' But this does not mean that we are safe if we go to church. The practice of religion can make us feel secure against the encroaching effects of sin. This heartless practice of religion turns what ought to be the cure into a catalyst for the problem.

Here is the hard part, all the while Solomon is drifting from God internally he is prospering outwardly, v26-28 talks about how Solomon received 420 talents/14,280 kg of Gold.

We know how it will turn out for Solomon but how is it with you? Are you in the middle miles, in the heartless habits, with only external and not internal commitment to God? Let this call for Solomon to guard himself be a call for us to be sober and guard ourselves from sin and commit ourselves to God.