

Sermon Brief

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July 9, 2023

Text: 1 Kings 7:1-12

Title: “The House of Solomon”

Subject: Solomon builds the palace complex.

Complement: He spends thirteen years building it.

Textual Idea: Solomon spends thirteen years building the palace complex.

Sermon Idea: God’s house is more important than our house.

Interrogative: Whose “house” am I focused on?

Key Points:

1. **Warning Light #1:** Avoid distraction. Be kingdom focused.
2. **Warning Light #2:** Avoid coveting. Be content.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that it is easy to get caught up in materialism in a consumer culture. We need to avoid getting preoccupied with stuff, compartmentalizing our spiritual life, and coveting the American Dream.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) be kingdom-focused, (2) cap their spending to give more, (3) and keep Jesus and His kingdom as the main thing.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to keep God first in our lives.

“The House of Solomon”

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1 Kings 7:1-12

The **(LCD) American Dream**. People have different definitions of exactly what it is but almost every version of it includes home ownership. I know that was certainly true for me. When I grew up, I had always lived in apartments and, unfortunately, felt embarrassed by that. I never wanted anyone to come over to our place. When Diane and I got married, we received a gift that enabled us to put a small down payment on a condo. It wasn't enough to qualify for a fixed-rate mortgage – we only could qualify for a mortgage that now is illegal in the state of Connecticut. We took it. I finally had the American Dream...but it quickly turned into an American nightmare! I'll tell you what happened at the end of my sermon.

We're continuing in our study of **(LCD) the life of King Solomon**. We've seen him come to power, acquire wisdom from God, and build the long-awaited temple – the house of the Lord. This week, the account of the completion of the house of the Lord is interrupted by another building project: the palace complex, which included the house of Solomon. Last week, we thought about the house of the Lord, this week, we're talking about the house of Solomon. And it is a house that blows away the American Dream...but also warns us of some things we need to avoid as we pursue our own version of the American Dream.

Turn with me to 1 Kings, chapter 7. As you do, let me remind you that in the original Hebrew, there were no chapter divisions. Furthermore, the Hebrew grammar makes it clear that this last verse of chapter 6 and the first verse of chapter 7 were meant to be taken as one, contrasting thought. So, with that in mind, let me start with the last verse of chapter 6, *“In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it. It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace.”* What's the contrast? It took Solomon twice as long to build his palace as it did to build the temple. That is a contrast that the writer of Kings wants you to notice. The question becomes why? There are two schools of thought among the scholars. The majority think that this is another “red flag” of Solomon's subtle compromise. That he's starting to lose his focus on serving the Lord and is preoccupied with building his own house. A few believe that is not the case; that taking longer on his house meant that he prioritized the building of the temple and didn't give the building of his house the same focus, therefore taking longer. I'll come back to this debate later – but suffice it to say, notice that the writer of Kings wants us to pay attention to this contrast.

For now, let's actually read about the building of the palace complex, starting with the most impressive building, verse 2, *“He built the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon a hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high, with four rows of cedar columns supporting trimmed cedar beams. 3 It was roofed with cedar above the beams that rested on the columns—forty-five beams, fifteen to a row. 4 Its windows were placed high in sets of three, facing each other. 5 All the doorways had rectangular frames; they were in the front part in sets of three, facing each other.”* This was a magnificent structure. Note that it had four rows of 45 foot cedar columns roofed with even longer cedar beams. No wonder it was called the Palace of the FOREST of Lebanon! It was like walking through

the Redwood Forest! Tall cedars everywhere! Also, note that in verse 2, we're given the dimensions of this building. It was the same height as the temple we read about last week, but it was four times larger in total. We know that it was an armory of some sorts based on other references, and it probably had many rooms for the nation's administration – like a state legislative house.

Along with this building, there were others in the palace complex; verse 6, *“He made a colonnade fifty cubits long and thirty wide. In front of it was a portico, and in front of that were pillars and an overhanging roof. 7 He built the throne hall, the Hall of Justice, where he was to judge, and he covered it with cedar from floor to ceiling. 8 And the palace in which he was to live, set farther back, was similar in design. Solomon also made a palace like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had married.”* Here is an artist's attempt to **(LCD) render what all this may have looked like**. Here's the House of the Forest of Lebanon followed by the House of Pillars and Hall of Justice where Solomon's immense throne would be. We'll talk more about this throne in chapter 10. To the side were the palaces for both Solomon and his Egyptian wife...maybe his entire harem which we'll also read more about in chapter 10. Altogether, it's larger than the temple complex up on the top of Mount Moriah.

It's also very costly as the last few verses tell us, verse 9, *“All these structures, from the outside to the great courtyard and from foundation to eaves, were made of blocks of high-grade stone cut to size and smoothed on their inner and outer faces. 10 The foundations were laid with large stones of good quality, some measuring ten cubits and some eight. 11 Above were high-grade stones, cut to size, and cedar beams. 12 The great courtyard was surrounded by a wall of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams, as was the inner courtyard of the temple of the Lord with its portico.”* The entire structure was built with high-grade or costly stone smoothed out at the quarries and brought here to be assembled. These stones were huge; like the stones you **(LCD) see here** from the ruins of Herod's temple. These would have been incredibly expensive to both carve just right and transport. Needless to say, no expense was spared on either the house of the Lord or the house of Solomon.

And that brings us back to our question this morning about why the writer of Kings wanted us to contrast the 7 years it took to build the house of the Lord with the 13 years it took to build the house of Solomon. Was it a reflection of compromise or commitment? There are points to be made on **(LCD) both sides**.

Compromised	Committed
More time means more invested	More time means less invested
Own buildings larger	Built temple first
Lavish spending	King's palace s/b lavish
Excessive cedar and stone	No gold is mentioned
Arrogant to be near the temple	Humble to be near the temple

While there is no clear indication of which perspective is right, the vast majority see this as an intentional red flag sent up by the writer of Kings. Or better yet, **(LCD) a dashboard warning light**. When you see any of these, you know that even though the car is working right now, something is not right. Something is out of kilter and needs addressing pretty quickly. This interruption of the story of the building of the long-awaited house of the Lord with the story of the building of Solomon's palace is meant to get our attention. Just like last week when in the middle of describing the building of the temple, there was an interruption from God telling Solomon to make sure that he keeps walking faithfully before Him. These are warning lights. Be careful!

I see two warning lights in this story. **(LCD) Warning Light #1: avoid distraction. Be kingdom focused**. I'd like to suggest that the most natural way of reading the contrast between 7 and 13 years of building is that the 13 years shows greater investment. I could be wrong, and you can disagree, but in light of what we know is coming later in Solomon's story, this is most likely a warning light to avoid distractions. God has placed us here to be His ambassadors, not to be on vacation. Getting distracted from what God wants us to do is so easy. That was certainly the situation with my house story. Diane and I were newly married and just getting started when we bought that condo with that ridiculous mortgage. Long story short – we were in way over our heads. So much for the American Dream, I would have happily gone back to an apartment! Finally, after humbling ourselves and seeking God's mercy in prayer, we got out of that situation with only minimal debt. I can assure you that I was very distracted from kingdom work during this time. It's hard to focus on anything else when you're drowning financially.

A few years later, we had saved up a downpayment, and determined to buy a house with a legitimate mortgage. We also had been reading a book called **(LCD) Walden and the Whirlwind** which encouraged us to make decisions with the kingdom of God as our central focus. The author quoted Henry David Thoreau's thoughts on what to consider when building a home. Among them were to make sure that your home was not...a Workhouse – hard to take care of; a Museum – focus on things, not people; an Almshouse – seriously indebted; or a Prison – isolated from people. With that in mind, we prayed to find a house that fit those criteria and we did. Did we find our dream house? No, it was a fixer upper. But we've spent almost 30 years now in that place and it has more than adequately taken care of us while enabling us to pursue God's kingdom.

Actually, that really came home years later after we bought the house. We decided to quality for our mortgage on my salary alone even though with both our salaries we could have bought a much nicer house. I was working at Travelers at the time and making a modest salary. Four years later in 1998, when the Wintonbury pastor opportunity opened up, I was offered the exact amount, to the dollar, that I had been making when we bought the house. Had we bought a house on both our salaries I would not have been able to pursue the pastor opportunity as Diane was home with a baby at that time. Avoid distraction. Be kingdom focused.

The second warning light I see is **(LCD) avoid coveting; be content**. Again, we aren't seeing this yet in Solomon's life, but we will...and even now you can see the potential for it. Solomon is rich and powerful. He can have what his eyes desire. And for the most part, so can we here in America. Do not covet is the last of the Ten Commandments. In the catechism I've been going through, it's worded this way by Tim Keller, **(LCD)**

“Tenth, that we are content, not envying anyone or resenting what God has given them or us.” Coveting is a way of life in America! We’re constantly comparing ourselves to others and falling short.

Actually, in Ephesians, Paul calls greed, which is at the heart of coveting, idolatry. In the catechism, idolatry is defined this way, **(LCD) “Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.”** Man is that convicting. This is based on what Paul says in Romans, “They (humanity) exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.” We commit idolatry when anything is more important than God, when we trust in created things for our hope and happiness, significance and security. As one commentator put it, **(LCD) “God desires all of our devotion, not just most of it. Careers, relationships, sports, and family life are all good things that can compete for our loyalty to God. We should strive to honor God in those pursuits rather than let them detract from our faithfully following the Lord.”** Avoid idolatry, avoid coveting; be content in the Lord.

But here’s the rub...we know Solomon’s whole story and can see the danger in all this extravagance...but what about Solomon? I find that coveting, idolatry, greed, these things creep in subtly, slowly, like the frog in the kettle. You think you’re walking with God and then, you find your heart had slowly slipped away. We need to ask ourselves some hard questions like these **(LCD) “The juxtaposition of temple and palace brings to the reader today a reminder of the questions and tensions that arise living in a world that is far from what God intends. How does trust in God influence ‘standards of living’ and questions as to what is ‘appropriate’ for ‘my position in society?’”**

That is a real challenge living here in America. The American Dream is what we live for: a house, then a bigger house; a car, then two cars; a job, then a promotion. More and more and it’s never enough. Another more subtle, simpler example is **(LCD) fast fashion** which refers to the mass production of cheap, stylish clothes due to low overseas production costs. What it’s done is increased our wardrobes. Did you know that in 1960, Americans bought an average of 25 pieces of clothing a year while today, the average American buys 70 pieces of clothing a year? And we buy all this up knowing that it’s happening at the hands of exploited workers and ever bulging garbage fills!

This is the way of consumerism. The question is are we any different as the people of Christ? Is our standard of living constantly going up with the rest of the culture around us? Have we subtly bought into the idolatry of materialism like Solomon will? The great preacher **(LCD) John Wesley** set his income at 30 pounds a year and didn’t change it once. By the end of his life, when he was making 1400 pounds, but he was living at the same level of 30 pounds - giving 80% of his income away. He was quoted as saying, **(LCD) “What should rise is not the Christian’s standard of living, but his standard of giving.”** That’s pretty convicting in our culture. I’m not saying we all have to give 80%, but we can certainly work on capping our income and giving more to God’s work. That is being content, kingdom focused.

So where are we with the American Dream? Are we letting it distract us from putting God’s kingdom first? Are we content with having enough? One of our elders, Chris

O'Neil wrote up an experience he had years ago about these issues. He gave me permission to read his story. As I read it, be thinking about your own heart.

"In 2000 I was 40 years old and Karen and I were expecting our 3rd son. The estimate to add a bedroom to our house was over \$100,000 and since I had a very good job we thought it would be nice instead to build a house in a field next to our good friends in Granby. We designed a dream home, complete with a library, entertainment room, and even an inground pool... and we were surprised that the bank said we could actually afford to do it! So we contracted with a builder, put our house up for sale, and set about picking out tile and cabinets. We were surprised how quickly we sold our house and the person was willing to hold off closing for a few months until our new house was ready.

And then things started to happen: Our baby was diagnosed at 20 weeks in utero with severe deformities and a low likelihood of survival, I lost my job after 9/11 because most of our customers were in the Twin Towers and 90% of the business evaporated, and I could not find a job. The buyer for our old house backed out shortly before closing, and the builder for the new house would not let us out of the contract even though they had not broken ground on building it. In a scramble to rein in our expenses, the builder did allow us to make changes, so we eliminated the pool, entertainment room, and the library taking 1,300 feet out of the building. We downgraded everything including the appliances and floor coverings to what they called "builder's grade" (think: cheap), and left part of the 2nd floor unfinished.

By God's grace, literally, we survived, and so did our 3rd son! People at Wintonbury gave me work to do to keep food on the table, Karen went back to work, I did odd jobs building decks and finishing basements evenings and weekends, and somehow we got by. During the two years of no regular job, not one single need went unmet, but we used up almost every cent of our savings and learned how to live frugally.

About 5 years later, I had started my own business which was off to a good but slow start. We still had no extra money but somehow we always had what we really needed for our family. One evening after supper I was sitting outside looking at our house full of people and happy sounds, and I thought: "this turned out to be a good home for our family, we are happy here" ... Shortly followed by a stunning vision of what that house almost looked like if I wasn't forced to change the original plan: It would not have been a home to raise our family, but a shrine to me and my success. I was embarrassed by my pride and what that almost led me to do, and grateful for the adversity that reigned me in and forced me to trust in God and others for what I needed.

I don't wish those five years on anyone, it really was stressful never knowing for sure we could pay our bills! But as agonizing as that was, I highly recommend it and looking back, I would not change a thing!"

God has a way of humbling His people when we get off track building shrines and palaces to ourselves. The true dream is living a life that honors God and brings Him glory. Let's focus on that as Jesus encouraged us, **(LCD) "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."**

Close with **(LCD) "The Main Thing"** song.