

**Preacher:** Tim Hollenberg-Duffey

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 10:1-10, 23-25

FAO Schwarz is like a kid's dream come true. This grandiose toy store in New York City is filled floor to ceiling with stuff, toys galore: life-size stuffed animals of lions, bears, giraffes; candy containers filled to the brim, Lego sets, electronic games, board games; a floor piano that plays when you step, jump, or dance on the keys; and a virtual-reality roller coaster simulator. A kid's dream.

This week as I read about the stuff that Solomon accumulated during his reign, I pictured FAO Schwarz. Only instead of kids' toys, we have Solomon's toys—musical instruments, fine foods and spices, precious woods and stones, ivory, chariots, animals, and everything made with gold and silver that can be made. It's enough to make your jaw drop.

During the earlier chapters of 1 Kings, this stuff accumulation seems to have purpose. Solomon was embarking on a massive building campaign. He was tasked by God with the construction of the first Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which would require only the finest of building materials and furnishings. After the temple was completed, Solomon constructed his own palace as well, also demanding these fine things. And still not finished, he builds walled cities and retools his armies. And yet by the time the Queen of Sheba comes to Jerusalem in our text for this morning, the rich and lavish gifts are still coming to Solomon. He's still accumulating stuff like a toy store accumulates candy. What is he going to do with all this stuff!?

Annie Leonard created a powerful documentary a few years back titled, "The Story of Stuff." Her purpose was to help the first world understand the layered effects of our massive consumption levels. A review of Leonard's work printed in the *Guardian* gave this summary, "Researching her film *The Story of Stuff*, Annie Leonard discovered that of the materials flowing through the consumer economy, only 1% remain in use six months after sale. Even the goods we might have expected to hold onto are soon condemned to destruction through either planned obsolescence (breaking quickly) or perceived obsolescence (becoming unfashionable). But many of the products we buy, especially for Christmas, cannot become obsolescent. The term implies a loss of utility, but they had no utility in the first place. An electronic drum-machine t-shirt; a Darth Vader talking piggy bank; an ear-shaped iPhone case; an individual beer can chiller; an electronic wine breather; a sonic screwdriver remote control; bacon toothpaste; a dancing dog: no one is expected to use them, or even look at them, after Christmas Day. They are designed to elicit thanks, perhaps a snigger or two, and then be thrown away."<sup>1</sup>

All that says is that we like stuff so much that we make it and give it as gifts knowing full well that the lasting impact of our stuff giving is meaningless. We Brethren, the simple living people that we are, think we know this and so we tend to give food as gifts—casseroles for the sick, cookies and baked goods at Christmas, and meals out for any occasion we can think of. But imagine if King Solomon, instead of accumulating gold, silver, or precious stones, had accumulated plastic knick-knacks and casseroles. What if upon discovering the legendary King Solomon's Mine, we discovered that it was filled with empty casserole containers and rejected Christmas gifts.

Well folks, I think this is the scary truth for how similar we are to King Solomon and his wealth. When the building projects were finished and most importantly the Lords House, the

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.monbiot.com/2012/12/10/the-gift-of-death/?fbclid=IwAR1i83-oP6qaCaAvKmEwQ1KOYA\\_DwEdxnpLhN62soFeXPoujMOzEywKUZmo#.WgA4NptNI58.facebook](https://www.monbiot.com/2012/12/10/the-gift-of-death/?fbclid=IwAR1i83-oP6qaCaAvKmEwQ1KOYA_DwEdxnpLhN62soFeXPoujMOzEywKUZmo#.WgA4NptNI58.facebook)

temple, was finished, Solomon still accumulated stuff that he didn't know what to do with. Just as we, even when we want for nothing still accumulate, and I'm as guilty as the rest of us. Eventually this accumulation for accumulation sake catches up to us.

You see, King Solomon, despite all his grandeur and wisdom, had a downfall directly following our text for this morning. Open your Bibles to 1 Kings 10 on page 315. 1 Kings 10 tells the story of the Queen of Sheba becoming impressed by Solomon's wisdom that she added to his wealth, but then in chapter 11, on the next page, she named the source of his downfall as all of these foreign wives who influenced him into following their tribal Gods. And Solomon built High Places, altars and temples in honor of Gods like Molech and Chemosh. His heart was turned from the one true God and the Lord become angry with him.

This is wise King Solomon, the one who asked God for wisdom above all other material goods. What happened? Many preachers would say—it was the women, those foreign wives, princesses of other nations. And there is no denying that the text clearly states they have a major role in turning his heart. But I want to remind you of a lesson about the Bible that Pastor Audrey told you during her “Getting to know the Bible” lecture at the beginning of this Bible Read Through. She told you that chapter numbers, verse numbers, and chapter headings were all added to the text to help readers locate and find texts like in a reference book. They were not there when the stories were written.

Now, if you still have your Bible open, with this reminder, you'll know that chapter 10 with its grand list of stuff and wealth and the statement that he excelled more than any king in riches—that flows right, directly into the story about Solomon's faithfulness shifting from God. I believe a faithful reading of the whole text would place the blame for Solomon's turning not solely on these foreign women but also upon Solomon's accumulations. Wise old Solomon had wealth, possessions, and women—what did he need out of his relationship with God anymore. God was replaced.

Pastor and author, John Killinger tells a story about when he went to pastor the First Congregationalist Church in Los Angeles, California. The church once had a minister named Dr James Fifield, Jr. who in the mid-1930s, rescued a church that had just accrued a massive debt to construct a cathedral. The debt was crippling but Fifield grabbed power and rescued the church from misfortune by rubbing shoulders with the Los Angeles elite and creating an elitist image for the megachurch of LA. With the rising image of the church, Fifield's ego grew, too. He had a limo and chauffeur which intentionally rolled through the important parts of the city. Christmas Eve worships included the likes of Charleton Heston and Ronald Reagan. Fifield was known for his massive intimidating desk and the way his chair made him rise above the low guest chairs on the other side. John Killinger only lasted a few years in this historic massive church because as he says it required a CEO and not a pastor. It existed not to serve the real spiritual needs of the community, even the wealthy have spiritual needs. But instead it existed to be a pillar of elitism, and a structure of beauty, not to point the world to God.

Wealth and the pursuit of things has a way of making us feel like we belong to a certain group or class of people. For First Congregational Church, they had an elite image to uphold. For King Solomon, he had more stuff than he knew what to do with, so he built altars to foreign Gods.

Unlike some preachers on TV, I do not believe that God wants to make us wealthy. God wants to compel us to be faithful. He could care less about our material possessions. Solomon was wealthy, but his wealth was irrelevant to God even though it was so important to the nations

*October 28, 2018 - King Solomon: Wealth and Wisdom*

that pandered to him and the wives that manipulated him. At the beginning of Solomon's reign, he was wise, and his wisdom led him to obedience to God.

If you want to find God, don't follow wealth, follow wisdom. Be a people of faith who don't accumulate stuff simple for stuff's sake and the impression it leaves on the world. Rather accumulate wisdom; and with what wealth, you have honor the Lord you will realize that you are wealthy in a whole new way. For your Spirit will be full.