

1 Kings 9:1-28

Looks Can Be Deceiving

In virtually every sport, the most dangerous part of the game for a team follows success. Whether a player makes a powerful dunk, strikes out two batters in six pitches, take a comfortable lead entering the fourth quarter, dribbled past five players and scored a cracking goal, or ran for ninety yards for a first and goal, success runs the risk of exposure. When players and teams celebrate or grow complacent, they run the danger of being exposed.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. 1 Kings 8 is, without a doubt, an incredible moment in Israel's history. It is also the climax of Solomon's leadership. He sits enthroned at a beautiful palace overlooking a glorious Temple. Israel is well led, and their God is dwelling in their midst. If Solomon is not careful, he will take his eyes off the proverbial ball.

The chapter opens with Solomon given another choice. God appears to the king a second time. At the first encounter, Solomon asked for wisdom and was then crowned as king. Now, God appears again following another monumental event. The Temple and Palace are complete. God knows that though Solomon seems to be doing well, he is vulnerable. God begins by assuring Solomon that he has heard his prayers from chapter 8 and will dwell with his people.

Starting in verse 4, however, we discover there is a catch. Although we like to think of love as unconditional (and it is), most relationships are conditional. If I run a business, my relationship with customers is conditional. If they do not pay or if I do not deliver, then our relationship will suffer. If I'm an employee and I fail to do my job, then my relationship with the staff and leadership will change. Even in marriage, unconditional love is built on the condition of selflessness. After all, selfish love is an oxymoron. That is why it is unconditional. When one party violates the marriage vows, for example, then the marriage is seriously harmed. This is the warning God gives Solomon. Aware of his vulnerabilities, he offers a clear warning.

Solomon is first asked to choose **loyalty** (vs. 4-5). The Lord begins by calling Solomon to obey him. The blessing that follows in vs. 5 is conditioned on Solomon's obedience. Solomon must choose faithfulness. This is followed by choosing love (vs. 6-7) Faithfulness and loyalty are undergirded by love. Think of all the things you do simply because you love someone. Even if you would otherwise not be interested in them, you go because you love them. Love undergirds loyalty.

Unlike the first encounter, we are not told what Solomon's answer is. For the rest of the Solomon narrative, his answer is given by what he does, not by what he says. Initially, we are given the impression that Solomon, the wisest of wise kings, chose wisely. Consider the evidence in verses 10-28.

First, he demonstrates his political shrewdness (vs. 10-14). At the 1980 NBA draft, the Celtics made a deal with the Golden State Warriors. The Celtics gave their 2 first round picks in the draft (the #1, #13 picks) to the Warriors who then gave the Celtics their #3 pick and their center Robert Parish. The Celtics chose Kevin McHale out of Minnesota. In a single trade, the Celtics recruited 2/3 of their "Big Three" as they would join Larry Bird to win the five NBA titles in 1981, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987. The Warriors chose Joe Barry Carroll and Ricky Brown (who?).

What Solomon managed to make a favorable deal with the King of Tyre. Tyre had supplied Solomon with supplies for the palace and temple including 120 talents of gold. In exchange, Tyre received 20 cities in Galilee. Sounds like a good deal until Hiram surveyed the land.

Solomon also extended his military power. Security is a top priority for any political leader. He expanded the wall of Jerusalem, strengthened Hazor and Megiddo (vs. 15), rebuilt Gezer which Pharaoh had destroyed (vs. 16), and added chariots and horsemen to his army (vs. 19). Most surprising, Solomon added a Jewish navy (vs. 26-28). Historically, Jews associated the sea with chaos and death, but under Solomon, Israel took to the seas.

Finally, Solomon looks to be religiously faithful (vs. 25-28). In the ancient world, religion and politics were often overlapped. The king's religious fidelity would be reflected in the religious practices of his people. Solomon is seen marching to the Temple to offer burnt and peace offerings as a worshiper, not as a priest or even as a king.

If we were to look at the work of Solomon, one would conclude that things were going well. Solomon wisely chose both loyalty and love. But the author is warning the reader. Read below the surface. There are hints that things are beginning to unravel. See, for example, 1 Kings 3:1 where Solomon marries an Egyptian princess. She is always introduced as "Pharaoh's daughter," and never "Solomon's wife." (see also 1 Kings 7:8, 9:24). He also enslaved Gentiles in clear violation of Scripture (see 1 Kings 5:13, 9:15). Furthermore, he spent more time and wealth building his own palace than he did the Temple (1 Kings 6:38-7:1). Although everything looked fine on the outside, Solomon was slowly turning away from the Lord. He started off well but did not finish well. The writer is warning us.

In my hometown, there is a dangerous road that GPS kept sending semi-trucks down. They would become inevitably stuck and had to be rescued. There is now a giant sign that reads, "Sharp turns on KY 845. Trucks use alternative route. GPS routing not advised." Most know where the story of Solomon goes. Despite all his accomplishments and achievements, he failed to finish well. The signs were there, but he was blinded by success to see them. Chapter 9 begins that slow process of decline. We are being warned.