WHEN LESS IS MORE

King Solomon was the wisest man to have ever lived. King Solomon's reign was the pinnacle of the Golden Age of Israel. There was complete peace in the land, Israel were in the Promised land, the Temple was completed, they obeyed the Lord and their prosperity was not like it before or thereafter. This lasted 40 years.

The LORD appeared to Solomon at the beginning of his reign and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

Solomon asked for wisdom and this pleased the LORD. He gave him a wise and understanding heart. God said there was none like Solomon before or after him. In fact, as I pondered this wisdom, he was quite wise in the first place to ask for it. It was not a selfish choice as opposed to asking for riches or long life etc… You can read the whole account in 1 Kings 3.

Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs and we are going to look at 3 of them this morning. So, as we look into these verses, keep in mind that the wisdom Solomon shares is the wisdom God gave him. We should pay very close attention.

OPEN IN PRAYER

Please open and turn in your Bibles to **Proverbs 15:16-17.**

As we read verses 16 and 17 it would seem, at a simple reading, that we should be less concerned with what one has and more focused on the intangible things of God.

If we look to **Verse 27** it also appears to go along with verses 16 & 17 but in a different way, another angle if you will.

What we see happening in the first two verses is a contrast of the little and basic which are tangible, coupled with the intangible being a godly heart/attitude contrasted against material wealth, possessions and lifestyle.

However, **Verse 27** tells us the type of person, what they do and the outcome of it. Then it tells us of the contrasting person what they do and the outcome of it.

What we want to do now is dig in and explore what wonderful Wisdom Solomon has written for us, remembering that God endowed this Wisdom to Solomon.

VERSE 16

We will commence by dissecting **verse 16.**

Better – Good but in the widest sense. (BIC pen versus NASA Pen)

Little – Almost some, few, small

Fear – A dreadful, exceeding reverence

Great – Abundant, exceedingly Full

Treasure – Storehouse or armoury

Trouble - Tumult or confusion, vexation, disquietude – like anxiety or unease

If you have a storehouse that is full of treasure you have amassed; you will be consumed with thinking about it. You will likely have the following thoughts constantly running through your mind. Like that dripping tap in the middle of the night.

- How do I make sure no one gets to my treasure?
- How do I get more?
- Who is a genuine friend and who want to use me?

The beginning of the verse says it is so much better on the grandest of scales for our focus to be on the Lord. More than just a focus but a dreadful reverence with fear for He is the Almighty, the giver and taker of life but who also knows when the sparrow falls and the very hairs of our heads are numbered.

Even with little or few or some, all our needs can be met. However, this world is so materialistic, and we are forever upgrading and looking for the next self-esteem boost from material items.

How many people shop for the euphoria and once the novelty wears off, we go look again, shop again? Look at the modern home they are overfilled with stuff, novelties, maybe even "junk" that eventually all gets tossed anyway.

Satan has been very clever to create a highly effective throw away society. Our phones, computers, cars, Tv's, software and subscriptions for just about everything. No doubt the new green wave of cars will be next; don't replace the battery just toss the car. This type of society has created self-absorbing people obsessed with the next better thing to get.

We know that Solomon is the author of this chapter and he indulged every desire he ever wanted. At the end of his life, he said it was all vanity. All a waste, no meaning, hollow and wanting for more.

Look with me at what Solomon actually said in **Ecclesiastes 2:10-11**.

10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

So, yes of course we need to work so as to live, eat, be housed and clothed. However, the message here is to shift our focus from pursing after more and more gain and stop letting that consume us. Rather we ought to be content that our needs are met.

We need to move that desire to obtain "stuff" to desiring a reverential close fellowship with God Almighty.

For it will be the biggest shame of your life, my life, when we stand before Christ to receive our rewards/crowns and there is nothing. All you've done and achieved and amassed on Earth for yourself, will have zero bearing before Christ.

As we stand at the Judgement Seat of Christ with no reward and our head slung low, we will probably think, why oh why did I waste my energy and time on that which I could not bring with me.

Consider this, as believers of the Lord Jesus Christ are we not to be the Soldiers of Christ? A Soldier is to keep their Post, keep watch, hold the line and fight for the souls of lost men to win them to Christ.

You see a soldier is not taken hostage by the distraction of the day to day. If he is then he's out of the battle and extremely vulnerable as his guard will be down. A distracted Soldier is ineffective.

If the Soldier is not active, he'll be unaware of an incoming attack and he'll also be unable to see or have a desire to reach those that need rescuing/protection.

Look with me at what **II Timothy 2:3-4** says:

3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. **4** No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

We are to be a good Soldier of Jesus Christ. This word good means valuable or virtuous and Soldier here is a WARRIOR. All Warriors are Soldiers but not all Soldiers are Warriors.....

The passage here goes on to tell us that we are to endure hardness which is to suffer trouble, hardship and affliction.

A Soldier becomes a Warrior by being in the battle. They become valuable and virtuous by being in the battle and the battle brings hardness, which the Soldier learns to endure and yet fights on for lost souls. Not for themselves or their own glory but rather for Christ.

The Soldier of Jesus Christ does not become this Warrior by watching others.

If we look to verse **4** No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

It's telling us that the soldier doesn't weave himself into the affairs or transactions of our lives and livelihood – WHY??? So that we may please Christ.

Think of this life we live like a deployment, just like when a Soldier is deployed to the battle front. Likewise, we as the Soldiers of Christ are deployed to this lost world to spread the good news of the Gospel not to spend our time on self-gain and promotion.

It is important to remind ourselves that eternal rest and reward is to come. But of course we are a fickle bunch, us saved sinners. If we are not vigilant, we will be tempted to want the rewards of life now, the pleasures of life now, that easy road, more money or maybe it's position and power or to create a legacy for yourself. We see this with wealthy folk.

But we cannot forget what happens at the Judgement seat of Christ; where our works are tried by fire to reveal of what sort it is. (1 Cor 3:13-15) Pursing this life's interests to the determinate of being a Soldier for Christ will result in a loss of eternal reward.

The more we focus on the eternal things for Christ, the less we'll desire or covet the here and now.

Of course we need to work, have a home, buy/sell and enjoy what God has given and afforded us in this life. But of course this whole discussion, this comparison of serving Christ or serving self is about our perspective, our true hearts intent. That intent of the heart that others don't see but you know it and God knows it.

The Gospels tell us, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Matt 6:21 and Luke 12:34

Soldiers can also desert their post and their brothers in arms. We see an example of this with Demas in **2 Timothy 4:10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica…** here he leaves Paul, having loved this present world. He gave up the fight, it was too hard and the lure of the world overcame him.

In the earlier portion of this chapter in Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy to fight the good fight, endure afflictions and watch discreetly because people will not want to hear the truth or sound doctrine. Now despite the opposition do the work and be an evangelist which is – a bringer of good news!

There will be crowns that the Lord will give; so, let's fight the good fight and not be as Demas who forsook Christ and embraced the world; he loved it.

VERSE 17

As we turn our attention back to **Proverbs 15:17** we see this principle of less with godliness verses more and worldliness, it is obviously important because Solomon reinforces verse 16 by repeating the same message but with an alternative example or comparison.

We see it talks about a dinner of herbs. This is by its very description is a simple earthly meal. It would have consisted of vegetables and herbs. These items are cheap, are flavoursome and easy to prepare. Yes, it is a plain meal but pleasant.

So, this meal is prepared by the host where love abounds. The guests are of the same love and because of the abounding love i.e. care and kindness, Solomon is telling us that this plain, earthy meal with love is better than the contrast or exact opposite which is the stalled Ox.

Now let's take a moment to appreciate the Stalled Ox. It wasn't a matter of running to the shop and buying a dressed, sliced and diced roast ready to go. Oh no the preparation for a Stalled Ox is exhaustive. This Ox has been Stalled so that it becomes fatted to guarantee that it will be juicy and super tasty. It takes years to get the Ox to this point.

This is the type of animal that would be used for grand entertainment. What we know is that meat was highly desired so there would be much preparation by the host for their guests.

But alas there is a catch with this stalled ox, if there is hatred therewith. The verse says Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. So, if there is hatred within the host or the guests it will only serve to stir emotions and strife or it could promote a scorning eye, a sharp word or an out of place retort.

This sort of setting will lead to unpleasantness during the gathering and the meal. You've heard the expression, "The tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife". This is precisely the sensation you would expect when hatred is within.

Although this sumptuous feast is much to be desired it is in fact not about the meal. Rather the point is the love and godly attitude of those in attendance.

Again, we see that a perspective founded on the things of God, rather than the temporal desires of the flesh, this is the attitude God wants us striving for.

We ought to be content with less and simplicity and being filled with the love of God. That love should emanate to those around us.

VERSE 27

We now look toward our final **verse 27** in which we see a similarity to verses 16 & 17 but in a different way.

The principle of allowing our mindset to be overcome with material gain or with obtaining more by any means, it will produce negative outcomes. There is always a price to pay with this mindset.

This verse is quite specific in naming the sin that takes place i.e. greed. But we need to dig a little deeper again so we can understand the richness of what Solomon is telling us.

"**Greedy of gain**" this word greedy really has the sense to plunder or gain by violence. This person if very given to covetousness, they have a strong desire to want more and they are just never quite satisfied.

"Gain" is dealing with profit but by unjust means; it's dishonest gain.

"Troubleth" is to stir up like one would roil water. To make a liquid cloudy or muddy by agitating it.

"House" can be your family or employees.

It is overtly clear from this verse that this person's mindset or disposition is to want more, no matter the cost or by whatever means. Or perhaps it's someone who is presented with a shady opportunity and takes it. These are greedy of gain.

Ultimately, it is telling us here that trouble or hurt will come to you and not just you but those around you.

If we look at the contrasting second half of the verse it says, but he that **hateth gifts** shall live. This hate is just like you think, to hate, odious or a strong dislike.

What's interesting in this part of the verse is the word gifts. It has the thought of bribes and of course if you're given something (gift) in exchange for doing wrong then it is sinful.

The giving of gifts, not bribes, is of course not sinful, just look at the gifts the wise men brough to baby Jesus.

When the gift is an inducement for that which is wrong we must reject it.

"Shall live" means exactly what it says but it also means to nourish up, be whole.

It has been said that the life of a criminal leaves them always looking over their shoulder, waiting for that knock on the door by the Police. Or a rival criminal looking to take them out.

Whereas the one whose mindset rejects this greed of gain, dishonest dealings will live peaceably and be nourished. They will not have that unsettled, anxious feeling that they are about to be caught out and always on guard.

If we remember back to Achen when he took of the accursed thing in **Joshua 7:21**.

When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

What did Achen do? He saw and coveted which is precisely the "greedy of gain" that we read in verse 27. Ultimately, Achen and all his household were stoned and burnt with fire.

Is this not what Solomon was warning us of in verse 27 that greedy of gain would trouble your own house.

God is not against wealth, using our money to invest or having a successful business. What God is most concerned with is the condition of your heart. God tells us in 1 Timothy 6:10 (which is so often quoted incorrectly) that it is the **LOVE** of money that is the root of all evil. Money of itself is not evil! It's the love of it.

Abraham was extremely wealthy but his heart and walk with God was so close that he was called the friend of God. In fact, there are not many people throughout the Bible that possessed large material wealth and walked uprightly with God.

Most people probably can't handle a lot of money. One of the pitfalls is that we tend to become more reliant on ourselves and our money rather than seeking out the Lord and relying on Him.

Solomon was the wisest man to ever live and he held back nothing from himself. He was beyond the wealth of anyone in his time and do you know what he said? Ecclesiastes 2:11.

*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was **vanity** and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*

As we reflect on this wisdom in these 3 verses that God gave Solomon, we should quietly ponder the state of our heart. Let's really be honest with ourselves.

- Do I have a reverential fear of the Lord? If yes, are you an active Solider for Christ?
- Am I content with my lot in life; with what God has given me? Or is my primary focus getting more and doing the bare minimum for God?

- Does God's love come through to your family and friends? Or is there trouble and hardness in you because you are putting yourself in front of God?

James 4:14 *says Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*

Let us keep the reality in mind that life is short, but eternity has no end.

May God call us his friend, as he did Abraham who was righteous.

Let's get busy serving the Lord first.