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Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition – Chapter 5 – “Solomon’s Repentance”

Twice during Solomon's reign the Lord had appeared to him with words of approval and counsel--in the night vision at Gibeon, when the promise of wisdom, riches, and honor was accompanied by an admonition to remain humble and obedient; and after the dedication of the temple, when once more the Lord exhorted him to faithfulness. Plain were the admonitions, wonderful the promises, given to Solomon; yet of him who in circumstances, in character, and in life seemed abundantly fitted to heed the charge and meet the expectation of Heaven, it is recorded: "He kept not that which the Lord commanded." "His heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods." 1 Kings 11:9, 10. And so complete was his apostasy, so hardened his heart in transgression, that his case seemed well-nigh hopeless. {PK 75.1}

From the joy of divine communion, Solomon turned to find satisfaction in the pleasures of sense. Of this experience he says: {PK 76.1}

"I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards: . . . I got me servants and maidens: . . . I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem. . . . {PK 76.2}

"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 labor. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. {PK 76.3}

"And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done. . . . I hated life. . . . Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun." Ecclesiastes 2:4-18. {PK 76.4}

By his own bitter experience, Solomon learned the emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its highest good. He erected altars to heathen gods, only to learn how vain is their promise of rest to the spirit. Gloomy and soul-harassing thoughts troubled him night and day. For him there was no longer any joy of life or peace of mind, and the future was dark with despair. {PK 76.5}

Yet the Lord forsook him not. By messages of reproof and by severe judgments, He sought to arouse the king to a realization of the sinfulness of his course. He removed His protecting care and permitted adversaries to harass and weaken the kingdom. "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. . . . And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon, . . . captain over a band," who "abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria. And Jeroboam, . . . Solomon's servant," "a mighty man of valor," "even he lifted up his hand against the king." 1 Kings 11:14-28. {PK 77.1}

At last the Lord, through a prophet, delivered to Solomon the startling message: "Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son." Verses 11, 12. {PK 77.2}

Awakened as from a dream by this sentence of judgment pronounced against him and his house, Solomon with quickened conscience began to see his folly in its true light. Chastened in spirit, with mind and body enfeebled, he turned wearied and thirsting from earth's broken cisterns, to drink once more at the fountain of life. For him at last the discipline of suffering had accomplished its work. Long had he been harassed by the fear of utter ruin because of inability to turn from folly; but now he discerned in the message given him a ray of hope. God had not utterly cut him off, but stood ready to deliver him from a bondage more cruel than the grave, and from which he had had no power to free himself. {PK 77.3}

In gratitude Solomon acknowledged the power and the loving-kindness of the One who is "higher than the highest" (Ecclesiastes 5:8); in penitence he began to retrace his steps toward the exalted plane of purity and holiness from whence he had fallen so far. He could never hope to escape the blasting results of sin, he could never free his mind from all remembrance of the self-indulgent course he had been pursuing, but he would endeavor earnestly to dissuade others from following after folly. He would humbly confess the error of his ways and lift his voice in warning lest others be lost irretrievably because of the influences for evil he had been setting in operation. {PK 78.1}

The true penitent does not put his past sins from his remembrance. He does not, as soon as he has obtained peace, grow unconcerned in regard to the mistakes he has made. He thinks of those who have been led into evil by his course, and tries in every possible way to lead them back into the true path. The clearer the light that he has entered into, the stronger is his desire to set the feet of others in the right way. He does not gloss over his wayward course, making his wrong a light thing, but lifts the danger signal, that others may take warning. {PK 78.2}

Solomon acknowledged that "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart." Ecclesiastes 9:3. And again he declared, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." Ecclesiastes 8:11-13. {PK 78.3}

By the spirit of inspiration the king recorded for after generations the history of his wasted years with their lessons of warning. And thus, although the seed of his sowing was reaped by his people in harvests of evil, his life-work was not wholly lost. With meekness and lowliness Solomon in his later years "taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs." He "sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished." Ecclesiastes 12:9-12. {PK 79.1}

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter," he wrote: "Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Verses 13, 14. {PK 80.1}

Solomon's later writings reveal that as he realized more and still more the wickedness of his course, he gave special attention to warning the youth against falling into the errors that had led him to squander for nought Heaven's choicest gifts. With sorrow and shame he confessed that in the prime of manhood, when he should have found God his comfort, his support, his life, he turned from the light of Heaven and the wisdom of God, and put idolatry in the place of the worship of Jehovah. And now, having learned through sad experience the folly of such a life, his yearning desire was to save others from entering into the bitter experience through which he had passed. {PK 80.2}

With touching pathos he wrote concerning the privileges and responsibilities before the youth in God's service: {PK 80.3}

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity." Ecclesiastes 11:7-10.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,

While the evil days come not,

Nor the years draw nigh,

When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

"While the sun, Or the light, Or the moon, Or the stars,

Be not darkened, Nor the clouds return after the rain:

"In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,

And the strong men shall bow themselves,

And the grinders cease because they are few,

And those that look out of the windows be darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the streets,

"When the sound of the grinding is low,

And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird,

And all the daughters of music shall be brought low;

"Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high,

And fears shall be in the way,

"And the almond tree shall flourish,

And the grasshopper shall be a burden,

And desire shall fail:

"Because man goeth to his long home,

And the mourners go about the streets:

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed,

Or the golden bowl be broken,

Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,

Or the wheel broken at the cistern.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth

As it was:

And the spirit shall return unto God

Who gave it."

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7. {PK 80.4}

Not only to the youth, but to those of mature years, and to those who are descending the hill of life and facing the western sun, the life of Solomon is full of warning. We see and hear of unsteadiness in youth, the young wavering between right and wrong, and the current of evil passions proving too strong for them. In those of maturer years, we do not look for this unsteadiness and unfaithfulness; we expect the character to be established, the principles firmly rooted. But this is not always so. When Solomon should have been in character as a sturdy oak, he fell from his steadfastness under the power of temptation. When his strength should have been the firmest, he was found to be the weakest. {PK 82.1}

From such examples we should learn that in watchfulness and prayer is the only safety for both young and old. Security does not lie in exalted position and great privileges. One may for many years have enjoyed a genuine Christian experience, but he is still exposed to Satan's attacks. In the battle with inward sin and outward temptation, even the wise and powerful Solomon was vanquished. His failure teaches us that, whatever a man's intellectual qualities may be, and however faithfully he may have served God in the past, he can never with safety trust in his own wisdom and integrity. {PK 82.2}

In every generation and in every land the true foundation and pattern for character building have been the same. The divine law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . and thy neighbor as thyself," the great principle made manifest in the character and life of our Saviour, is the only secure foundation, the only sure guide. Luke 10:27. "Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation," the wisdom and knowledge which God's word alone can impart. Isaiah 33:6. {PK 82.3}

It is as true now as when the words were spoken to Israel of obedience to His commandments: "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations." Deuteronomy 4:6. Here is the only safeguard for individual integrity, for the purity of the home, the well-being of society, or the stability of the nation. Amidst all life's perplexities and dangers and conflicting claims, the one safe and sure rule is to do what God says. "The statutes of the Lord are right," and "he that doeth these things shall never be moved." Psalm 19:8; 15:5. {PK 83.1}

Those who heed the warning of Solomon's apostasy will shun the first approach of those sins that overcame him. Only obedience to the requirements of Heaven will keep man from apostasy. God has bestowed upon man great light and many blessings; but unless this light and these blessings are accepted, they are no security against disobedience and apostasy. When those whom God has exalted to positions of high trust turn from Him to human wisdom, their light becomes darkness. Their entrusted capabilities become a snare. {PK 83.2}

Till the conflict is ended, there will be those who will depart from God. Satan will so shape circumstances that unless we are kept by divine power, they will almost imperceptibly weaken the fortifications of the soul. We need to inquire at every step, "Is this the way of the Lord?" So long as life shall last, there will be need of guarding the affections and the passions with a firm purpose. Not one moment can we be secure except as we rely upon God, the life hidden with Christ. Watchfulness and prayer are the safeguards of purity. {PK 83.3}

All who enter the City of God will enter through the strait gate--by agonizing effort; for "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." Revelation 21:27. But none who have fallen need give up to despair. Aged men, once honored of God, may have defiled their souls, sacrificing virtue on the altar of lust; but if they repent, forsake sin, and turn to God, there is still hope for them. He who declares, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," also gives the invitation, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Revelation 2:10; Isaiah 55:7. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. "I will heal their backsliding," He declares; "I will love them freely." Hosea 14:4. {PK 84.1}

Solomon's repentance was sincere; but the harm that his example of evil-doing had wrought could not be undone. During his apostasy there were in the kingdom men who remained true to their trust, maintaining their purity and loyalty. But many were led astray; and the forces of evil set in operation by the introduction of idolatry and worldly practices could not easily be stayed by the penitent king. His influence for good was greatly weakened. Many hesitated to place full confidence in his leadership. Though the king confessed his sin and wrote out for the benefit of after generations a record of his folly and repentance, he could never hope entirely to destroy the baleful influence of his wrong deeds. Emboldened by his apostasy, many continued to do evil, and evil only. And in the downward course of many of the rulers who followed him may be traced the sad influence of the prostitution of his God-given powers. {PK 84.2}

In the anguish of bitter reflection on the evil of his course, Solomon was constrained to declare, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good." "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: folly is set in great dignity." {PK 85.1}

"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor." Ecclesiastes 9:18; 10:5, 6, 1. {PK 85.2}

Among the many lessons taught by Solomon's life, none is more strongly emphasized than the power of influence for good or for ill. However contracted may be our sphere, we still exert an influence for weal or woe. Beyond our knowledge or control, it tells upon others in blessing or cursing. It may be heavy with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of some cherished sin; or it may be charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage, and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of love. But potent for good or for ill it will surely be. {PK 85.3}

That our influence should be a savor of death unto death is a fearful thought, yet it is possible. One soul misled, forfeiting eternal bliss--who can estimate the loss! And yet one rash act, one thoughtless word, on our part may exert so deep an influence on the life of another that it will prove the ruin of his soul. One blemish on the character may turn many away from Christ. {PK 86.1}

As the seed sown produces a harvest, and this in turn is sown, the harvest is multiplied. In our relation to others, this law holds true. Every act, every word, is a seed that will bear fruit. Every deed of thoughtful kindness, of obedience, of self-denial, will reproduce itself in others, and through them in still others. So every act of envy, malice, or dissension is a seed that will spring up in a "root of bitterness" whereby many shall be defiled. Hebrews 12:15. And how much larger number will the "many" poison! Thus the sowing of good and evil goes on for time and for eternity. {PK 86.2}

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