

A GREATER THAN SOLOMON

"The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." Matthew 12:42.

Jesus is greater than anything or anyone He is ever likened to--He is something far more than the most illustrious in the census of the world. His life is an episode between two eternities--one stretching back before all the worlds, and the other stretching forward forever. Human language falls short of expressing all that He is, even as a thimble lacks capacity to hold Niagara Falls. The Fact of facts, the Bible's theme--He stands alone, august, unique, supreme. All comparisons, all similes, all metaphors but skirt the edges of the glory of His matchless person in whom all sanctities and sufferings unite.

The Scribes and Pharisees, whose cautious creeds Jesus had condemned, whose inexcusable blunders concerning the Sabbath He had reproved, and whose vaunting self-righteousness He had blasted, said, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." Matthew 12:38. Jesus answered: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." Matthew 12:39. And then, following words of warning with the statement that focalized a life-time, He said: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." Matthew 12:42.

The Bible is silent about what they answered Him or did not answer Him. Had their thoughts been put into words, perhaps they would have said something like the following: Solomon, a king's son, was born in a palace; you, a carpenter's son, were born in a barn. Solomon came from great Jerusalem; you came from an obscure and obscene village. Solomon had many servants; you have none. Solomon was on a throne forty years; you, never once. Solomon wore kingly robes; you wear a peasant's garb. Solomon drank from vessels of gold; you ask drink of a Samaritan harlot. Solomon had much money; you have not a penny. Solomon built great cities; you make chairs and plowshares. Solomon hired many; you hire none. Solomon lived in mansions; you wander homeless. Solomon was given rich gifts; who giveth to thee? How, then, can you be greater than Solomon?

We know that human language can never compass Christ's glory and greatness. He is the most remarkable phenomenon that ever crossed the horizon of this world. He is the centerpiece of civilization in character. He is immeasurable by the highest standards. Every comparison--inspired and uninspired, evangelistic and prophetic, apostolic and human, falls short as a spent arrow that misses the mark by a great distance. Jesus is to history's best character as light to darkness, as blessing to cursing, as holiness to sin, as life to death, as music to discordant noise, as heaven to earth.

The world over, architects, striving to build cathedrals worthy of Him, fall short of their high objectives. Painters, vying with painters, lack competency to create figures beautiful enough to adorn His sanctuary walls. A sense of woeful inadequacy falls oppressively upon musicians who try to create music sweet enough for His hymns of praise. Sculptors, searching all quarries, nowhere find marble white enough for His brow. Orators, whose sentences are flights of golden arrows, express only a meager measure of the honor due Him. Writers feel the inadequacy of all words to set Him forth in His beauty. Devout poets, reaching from pole to pole with the wings of their poetic genius, struggle for some metaphor with which to express Him. As no artist can frame a picture large enough to include all sunrise and sunset glories, so no voice can compass, no pen can include the full statement of Christ's character. Text.

I. The Greatness Of Solomon.

1. He was great in wisdom.

"God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much." I Kings 4:29.

"For he was wiser than all men." I Kings 4:31.

2. He was great in riches.
"King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches." I Kings 10:23.
3. He was great in his rule.
"And the Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel." I Chronicles 29:25.

II. In What Respects Was Jesus Greater Than Solomon?

1. He was greater in His birth.
Solomon was born in a chandelier-illuminated palace in Jerusalem. But Jesus, who had glory with God before the world was, was born among cattle in a lantern-lit barn in Bethlehem--"because there was no room for them in the inn." He was born in the saddest hour in the world's history--when "the sceptre was frozen with the tyranny of impeached civilizations," when religion was clasping fingers with idolatry. He was born in a world crisis, when the Jewish race was "sleeping in robes of beautiful prophecies," when Athens was "drunk with the wine of skepticism," when India was dreaming of Buddha, and then Persia was "wearing upon her brow a funeral wreath." But Christ's birth, life and death made little Bethlehem mightier than Caesar's throne, mightier than Plato's school, mightier than Zion's fame." Jesus made Bethlehem greater than Athens, civilizations queen--greater than Rome, the world's capital--greater than Jerusalem, the city of national memories, glorious with a thousand years of history. Jesus was the Light--God-seen, the Word--God-heard, the Life--God-felt. Moreover, this Jesus, whom neither calendars nor clocks nor contemporary historians took note of, has bent the date lines of all nations around His lowly cradle.

The Greeks tried to date time from their Olympiads. The Romans tried to date time from the founding of their imperial city. Justinian tried to date time from his tax levies. LaPlace tried to date time from the conjunctions of certain planets. The French revolutionists tried to date time from the year one of their revolution. And all failed--miserably, woefully. But what the Jews could not do, what the Greeks could not do, what the Romans could not do, what the French could not do in the matter of dating time, Jesus did gloriously. Cradled in a stable, this timeless Christ has Christianized the calendar of the world. But no one dates a letter from Solomon's birth. Truly, "a greater than Solomon is here."

2. He was greater in wisdom.
Jesus knew afar Nathaniel's character. He penetrated "the secret wonder" of Nicodemus. He knew the impure life of the Samaritan woman. He knew the hidden thoughts of His disciples. He needed not that any should tell Him the unspoken questions and secret plottings of His enemies. He knew the perplexities of the rich publican. He knew the troubles of widows. He knew the sorrows of children. He knew men better than they knew themselves. "He knew that Peter was an insolent coward, that Thomas was a quicksand of skepticism, and that the heart of Judas was a smoldering black flame of treason."

Solomon knew the fowl of the air; but he could not, as could Christ, mark every sparrow's fall, in desert or jungle or garden or city street. Solomon knew much of fishing; but he could not, as could Jesus, as did Jesus, put enough fishes in an all-night empty net to sink two ships (Luke 5:7). Solomon spoke of fishes; but he could not, as could and did Jesus, cause a fish to carry tax money in its mouth and swallow the hook of a penniless apostle (Matthew 17:27). Solomon knew much of navigation; but he could not, as could and did Jesus, walk on the sea. Where Solomon's knowledge was partial and faulty, Jesus' knowledge was perfect and full.

3. He was greater in teaching.
With teachings simple as a meadow-brook, yet with ocean depths the plumb line

of the most brilliant brain cannot fathom, He bridged chasms that yawn between sex and sex, between mass and class. Leaping across conventional chasms, spurning all national boundaries, assaulting all superficialities, He taught as no man ever taught, or ever will, or can. Teaching men how to die unto self and the world and yet master both, He dwells apart in His unrivalled genius. Anticipating every social, political, moral, and religious truth that has been taught in the last nineteen hundred years, He stands among all teachers as a great palm in a desert of mediocrity. Teaching in paradoxes, He is superlatively supreme. You must lose life to find life, hold by letting go, win by losing, multiply by dividing, increase by diminishing, live by dying. So says Christ, whose every doctrine was, and is, a palace of hope. The master minds of the ages --searching, scrutinizing, sifting, studying His teaching, never exhausted it. Every truth uttered by all men in all realms in the last nineteen hundred years --in realms scientific, geological, psychological, theological, sociological, in all realms--is rooted like a rainbow in something Jesus said. Text.

4. He was greater in provisions.

The greatness and abundance of Solomon's provisions are made known to us in the Scriptures. "And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl. For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him." I Kings 4:22-24. But, with all the abundance he had, Solomon could not, as did Jesus, take five loaves and two small fishes and feed five thousand hungry men besides the women and the children. Solomon could not, as did Jesus, change water into wine. Nor could Solomon, as did Jesus, provide things more needful than something to eat and something to drink and something wherewithal to be clothed. Solomon could not reach his king's finger to the eyes of the blind man and touch those sightless orbs and say, "Receive thy sight." But Jesus could and did provide sight for the blind. Solomon could not touch dead ear-drums and make them to be keenly sensitized to every sound--whispers, words, songs, and thunders; but Jesus could and did provide the deaf with hearing. Solomon could not make the dumb to speak; but Jesus could and did loose the frozen fountains of speech until the dumb went away singing aloud the praises of God. Solomon, with all his wealth, could not purify the defiled. But, Jesus could and did. Solomon, with all his power to command, to cast down, to set up, to bring low, to grant favors, could not provide spiritual power for the ignorant and the untaught and the obscure. But, Jesus could and did, thus giving proof by His works that "a greater than Solomon is here."

5. He was greater in gifts received.

Concerning Solomon, it is said: "They brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." I Kings 4:21. "And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year." I Kings 10:25. But people give themselves to Jesus, and serve Him all the days of their lives. And that is the greatest giving and the greatest serving. Sinners, brought out of their shameful sin, gave themselves to Him and served Him. Aristocrats, from pride brought low, give themselves to Christ and serve Him. Harlots, leaving the ranks of the scarlet sisterhood of the streets, give themselves to Christ and serve Him. Outcasts, lifted from depths of ruin, give themselves to Christ and serve Him. A look at the past shows that many have given themselves to Him and served Him. Livingstone, the weaver lad, gave himself to God--to open a highway over which Ethiopia stumbles with outstretched hands toward God. Moody, the bootstore clerk, gave himself to the Lord and rocked two continents toward God. Carey, the cobbler, gave himself to the Lord to claim a continent for Christ. Wesley, one of nineteen children, gave himself to the Lord and rode 250,000 miles on horseback,

and preached 40,000 sermons in fifty years, and thereby marshalled many thousands under Christ's banner. Henry Drummond, the cultured college professor, gave himself to God to be a flaming evangel. Broadus, the great scholar, gave himself to God and rang ten thousand bells in God's gospel tower. Carroll, the one-time wanderer, gave himself to God to tread down iniquities and to found institutions. May it be ours to say by word and deed:

"My life, my love I give to Thee,
Thou Lamb of God who died for me;
Oh, may I ever faithful be,
My Saviour and my God."