

A Great Contrast

F. B. Hole.

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Of all the men, whose lives are recorded in Old Testament Scripture, Solomon stands out supreme in his intellectual endowments. If we read 1 Kings 4: 29-34, and then glance at the first verse of 1 Kings 10, we shall see that his extraordinary mental powers were given him by God, and that he was not only a literary and poetic genius with great knowledge of all natural history subjects, but that he also had great understanding "concerning the name of the Lord;" and it was the fame spread abroad as to this latter feature, that drew the Queen of Sheba to his presence. He was evidently the wonder of his age.

When we turn to the New Testament, and confine our thoughts to those who were merely men, no individual stands out more strikingly than Saul of Tarsus. Like Solomon, he came of pure Hebrew stock, as he states in Philippians 3: 4-6, and in religious matters he held a foremost place, for he wrote, that he "profited in the Jew's religion above many my equals [i.e. contemporaries] in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1: 14). In him again we find a man of outstanding intellectual powers.

When, however, we consider the spirit that marked them, the course they pursued, and the end to which they came, we find the greatest possible contrast. In our consideration we must of course remember the great difference that existed between the epochs in which they lived. Solomon had to walk in the light of God as He had been made known in the **law** system, ministered through Moses; Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, was brought into the light of God revealed in Christ — in the **grace** of His atoning sufferings and of His risen glory.

We are struck in the first place by the fact that Solomon possessed and enjoyed **all** the good things of this life in superabundant measure, whereas Paul enjoyed **none** of them. We may gain some idea of Solomon's abundance by reading Ecclesiastes 2: 4-10. We turn to Philippians 3: 8, and find Paul saying, "I have suffered the loss of all things." And if we would know what he gained as regards this world, we read 2 Corinthians 11: 23-28. Having done so, the contrast is great in the highest degree.

But now consider the spirit that animated them. Ecclesiastes 2: 10, shows that Solomon threw himself wholeheartedly into "having a good time," as men speak. He pursued everything that came within his reach. His motto must have been, "**Everything I do**," in the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction. And what was the principle on which Paul lived? We find it again in Philippians 3, "This **one thing I do**." And what was the one thing? The things behind him, the things he had lost, he forgot, as he reached forth to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Again the contrast could not be more complete.

The result of this was that Solomon became exceedingly selfish. This too comes out clearly in Ecclesiastes 2. Read the passage again, and note how he puts it, "**I made me. . . I builded me. . . I planted me. . . I got me. . . I gathered me. . . So I was great.**" His life became one of self-gratification, so much so that he might have said, "For me to live is — SELF." And the Apostle Paul? Well, in Philippians again we have his word, "For to me to live is — CHRIST" (Phil. 1: 21). No greater contrast can be found than that between a life lived for **self**, and one lived for **Christ**.

So with Solomon for a season all went well. He prospered in the most amazing fashion, and his fame was noised abroad in all directions; and in that same chapter in Ecclesiastes he was able to write,

"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.**" In his immense worldly success he found his joy.

But when Paul wrote his epistle to the saints at Philippi he was a prisoner in Rome; he was in very unpleasing circumstances, yet he was filled with joy. Here are some of his words, "I therein do **rejoice**, yea, and will rejoice. . . I **joy**, and **rejoice** with you all. . . finally, my brethren, **rejoice** in the Lord. . . rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, **rejoice.**" Is he rejoicing in prosperous surroundings? Not at all, for his surroundings were anything but prosperous. His rejoicing was altogether in the Lord, and this is the rejoicing that lasts. Solomon rejoiced in his own successful achievements: Paul rejoiced in the Lord. Another complete contrast.

Lastly, we notice that when Solomon wrote of his rejoicing he used the past tense: not, "my heart rejoices," but, "my heart rejoiced." We glance at the very next verse, and we find him saying, "**All was vanity and vexation** of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." His disillusionment was complete.

And what of Paul? We turn once more to the Philippian epistle, and in its closing chapter we find him writing, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. . . I **have all, and abound.**" So while the man who had, as men would say, everything that heart could wish, ended with vanity and emptiness the man who **lost** all the good things of life, yet found his sufficiency in God, was **full** "according to His **riches** in glory by Christ Jesus." The contrast in their finish is not less striking than that which marked their course.

Now these things have a very clear and challenging voice to us today. The writer desires to accept the challenge for himself, and to pass it on to his readers. We none of us have the immense wealth and boundless opportunities of a Solomon, but we live in an age far more filled with alluring and fascinating objects and devices. The man of small means can today spend much time listening to the voices of men who speak, or to music played, hundreds of miles away. He can watch scenes that are enacted in the far distance. He can mount his car and career along the roads to his desired destination; or perhaps, sit in an aeroplane and cut through the air at 500 miles an hour. These things are very fascinating, but we have to remember that all these extraordinary human inventions are going at the finish to prove but "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Many of our fellow-Christians are suffering many privations behind the "Curtains," whether "Iron," or "Bamboo." If what we hear of them be true, their joy and effectiveness in the things of God is greater than anything that we English-speaking Christians know. They have but little access to the fascinating things we have alluded to, and so they are not tempted to waste valuable time over them. Though not in a Roman prison like Paul, they do suffer imprisonment of another kind under the strong and domineering hand of Communism, but we are told they openly exhibit much joy and courage, and their numbers have greatly increased.

For at least two centuries we, who are English-speaking Christians, have enjoyed much in the way of spiritual privilege and blessing, but because of this very thing we have to beware lest we become inflated and imagine we are "rich and increased with goods," of a spiritual sort, as did the Laodiceans, of whom we read in Revelation 3. If we estimate things aright, we shall, on the contrary, realize that we are far too much on the lines of Solomon, and too little on the lines of the Apostle Paul; far too much engrossed with the passing possessions and pleasures of time, that end in vanity, and far too little with the abiding realities of eternal life, though these are only known by faith in the power of the Spirit of God.

Let us never forget that solemn word spoken by our Lord — "But many that are first shall be last

and the last shall be first" (Matt. 19: 30). When the day of Christ arrives, and we who are so privileged, stand before His judgment seat, and hear the decision as to our lives and service in this world what will His verdict be?