



## THE STORY



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**Speaker:** Matthew Eckert-Executive Lead Pastor  
**Scripture:** The Story – Chapter 13 - Solomon

Before I begin, let's just pause and let's just pray. Heavenly Father, we are here. Everyone here has chosen to come for some reason and that's a good thing. And Lord, You have provided me, I believe, through my study, with some thoughts to share tonight and I am just here as Your servant to do that. So Lord, as the words come out, Holy Spirit do what only You can do. God, may our hearts be willing to accept Your voice. God, may we accept words of encouragement if that's what You have for us. May we accept a word of challenge if that's what You have for us. In all these things, we know You are working. Help us to accept the work that You are doing in our lives. I commit this time now to You, in the Name of Jesus our Saviour, Amen.

Well, welcome to North Park. It is good to be here and Happy New Year. Excited to kick off 2018 here with you. Pastor Paul has been away at school all last week. I think he made it home and so he'll be back next week to continue on our journey here of *The Story*.

Before I jump into the message, I want to thank you for your ongoing commitment to the work here we are doing and last December we were sharing with you our financial situation, our needs, and just trying to be open and honest with where we are taking things. We had some great goals and targets we set in December to bring in, and I want you to know that so many of you were faithful and you are just excited as to what is going on here and we hit and exceeded those goals. And so thank you for your commitment to that and it's been great, and we are looking forward to what God has for us in 2018

as we could finish strong in 2017 from a financial perspective. That was amazing.

Now to bring everybody up to speed, and if you've been around all fall you know exactly where we are, but maybe you are newer here and you just joined us the last couple of months. So let me just kind of tell you where we have been going and where we are headed.

We have been going on this beautiful 32-week journey called *The Story*. We began in September. We are doing this look through the entire Bible from the very first book Genesis to the very last book Revelation, and we are trying to understand, what is God's upper story? What is the beauty of that? And we are trying to get this sense, so what we are using, actually, is a resource called *The Story*. It was put together by a pastor in the U.S. and it is Scripture. He kind of took a lot of passages of Scripture and put them in chronological order so they are all here. You can still buy them. We have them available. You can pick these up at the Welcome Kiosk for ten dollars. I know we sold over 1,100 of these last fall, so many of you have jumped right in and said 'let's do this. Let's learn together'. And so it's an amazing – there is actually – the neat thing about this is our Kid's Ministry is going through this, our Youth Ministry, so the entire church we are on this journey. And so we did the first 12 weeks in the fall and now we are into Chapter 13 today.

Now best way is to read the chapter before you come here so you already have a sense as to what's taking place. And then listen to the message and

kind of take some notes and see what's going on. Once again, we have our app that there's a place for taking notes. You can use your phone or your tablet and there's text boxes you can take notes and then you can e-mail yourself a pdf of that, those notes that you take. And then hopefully you will engage then in a conversation with some other Christians, with some other people around you to say 'okay, what did you hear?' 'What is God saying to you?' And 'here's what God is saying to me'. And so this journey of read it first, come here and engage the content and then engage with other people around you – the best way you will find to really have it go deep and understand what's taking place. So that is available. We are going to enjoy that journey together.

And so today, we are on Chapter 13. Now, if you are not totally familiar with the story, just give me one minute to kind of bring us to this point because we are going to talk about the third king of Israel – Solomon.

To recall, in the very beginning, God wanted to create this nation so not just for themselves but He wanted to demonstrate what does it look like for a nation of people to really serve God and be connected to Him – the beauty of that – and that they would then not just be among themselves but would bless all nations. And so He went to a guy named Abraham, if you recall, and He said 'I want to make a great nation out of you' and Abraham believed. He said, 'okay, I am in'. Abraham has a son Isaac, and Isaac has a son Jacob, and Jacob has these twelve sons and they end up going into Egypt and they grow to be this great nation. However, in Egypt, they are actually also oppressed and are in slavery for almost four hundred years.

Well, then God raises up a guy named Moses and he leads them out of Egypt, and then the leadership is handed off to a guy named Joshua and he leads them into the promised land, and things begin to grow and this nation begins to take shape.

Well, there's a bunch of bumbling years during there. They have these judges that step in at certain times to rule them, and finally, they say 'God, just give us a king to rule us like other nations'. It wasn't God's perfect plan, but He said, 'okay, I will give you a king and we'll do it this way'. And so the first king was King Saul. Unfortunately, Saul didn't work out that well. He kind of did not trust God up front so God said, you know what, I cannot have the kingdom and the reign of this kingdom continue through your family. And so He cuts that one off. Saul is still allowed to rule through his life but then the next person anointed is King David, a well-known king. Whether you attend church a lot or not, he seems to be a well-known character throughout the world.

And then David rules, and David brings them to this amazing point. It's, I think, in many ways the pinnacle, the upper piece of the entire Israel nation. And then he hands it off to his son Solomon, and there's a beautiful season but as Pastor Paul's going to connect in with next week, from that point on it seems that that's the best it ever got, and it starts to go downhill from there.

So we want to look at this life of this guy Solomon and see where it takes us today. You know, in Greek mythology, there is a character called Achilles. Achilles is a young lad and apparently he is a sickly lad and may not do very well. He's weak and his mother Thetis is concerned and wants him to grow up to be strong and she apparently knows that if you wash in the river Styx you will become strong. And so she takes her son Achilles – and here's an artistic rendition of what's taking place [*artwork shown on screen*] – she takes her son and she takes him to the river Styx and she holds him by the heel and dips him in the water and he becomes completely wet except for his heel where she is holding him. And she takes him out and, amazingly, Achilles grows up to be strong. The river Styx did what it's supposed to do and he goes out into battle.

He's this great guy, but in one battle he is hit with an arrow. Now if he was hit anywhere on his body,

perhaps he could have healed and would have been okay, but the arrow pierced him in his heel and he dies because his heel never got dipped in the river Styx. And since as I looked at history, since around the mid-eighteen hundreds, apparently, we've been using this phrase 'what is your Achilles' heel?' What is your Achilles' heel? What is your weak spot? What is that thing that can take you down?

We are going to find out from this beautiful story of Solomon that so much beauty and amazingness he did, yet Solomon had an Achilles' heel that took an entire nation down.

So let's begin this journey of this life and let's go back to, actually, his own father handing off the kingdom to him. Many of you bring your books and we encourage you to do that if you want to take notes as you go.

1 Kings 2:1-4, or page 176

*When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon, his son. "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to Him, and keep His decrees and commands, His laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep His promise to me: when He said to me 'if your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before Me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel'.*

I tried to picture what's going on. Here's David, the King, he's lying in his bed. He was pretty much too old and sick by now to really get around. I can just see his son Solomon just sitting on the edge of his bed and they are having this father-son chat. And David first begins by giving his son a picture of the big story. He is saying, Solomon, there is something

massive going on here that we get to be a huge part of. God is doing something amazing, so Solomon may you step into what God is doing. Obey His decrees, His commands. Do this because then you will prosper. He is saying Solomon, if you align your story with God's story, it will be an amazing story. And there's this beautiful thing going on about the upper story and he wants to make sure his son does not forget he's part of something bigger than himself. And if he ever forgets that, he'll just create his own little story that connects to no beautiful story, and then it will just be a lesser story.

But there's also the sense here that he's sending his son, he's blessing his son Solomon. It's almost like you can hear him saying 'you can do this. God is going to be with you. Follow Him, son. I believe in you. You can take this on'.

And there's this whole theme in Scripture about a parental blessing on the kids. It's a beautiful thing that takes place all throughout Scripture. I think of Jesus Himself and we just celebrated His birth, and for the first, I don't know, thirty or so years of His life, we don't know much about Jesus. But then he launches into what we call, His ministry years and the first thing He does He's baptized by John the Baptist, and when He comes out of the water, Scripture says something like a dove settles on Him and God the Father Himself, what does He say? 'This is My Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him'. It's the blessing of God the Father on the Son, and there's this beautiful theme throughout Scripture that says bless your kids and send them off.

I have been having these fascinating conversations with a few guys about blessing your kids and they were sharing with me how they never were blessed by their parents, particularly their dads. And one, to his dying day sitting beside his father, almost trying to coax something out and he never knew, he never understood that his father was ever proud of him or ever blessed him on his way. And I kept asking him questions. I thought 'you've got to be kidding. Like does this really happen? Is this going on?' This guy

I respect so highly, did this take place? And these guys I am talking with they really want to make sure that they break that chain and they want to bless their kids. There's this great book they put me on called *The Blessing* by John Trent and Gary Smalley. It was put out in 1986, updated in 2011 but it looks through all of Scripture, looks at all the parental blessings that were given to kids and encourages parents bless your kids, send them on their way.

I was with my parents just last fall. We went out for lunch. I went to visit them. We just helped them move into a seniors' complex and I was very much aware of this, and I was sitting there and we were chatting and my Dad looks at me, like he has often done, and he says, 'Matt, I just want you to know we're proud of you. We're proud of you. Whatever you need for us to help you out let us know. We want you to succeed'. And it hit me in a deeper way because of these conversations that I have had. I thought I have been so blessed with what I've grown up with and I fully recognize that many of you in this room have this pain because you have never been blessed by your parents. Some of you your parents died just way too young and you wish they were here, but some of you have just never known this but you can begin a new journey.

As I thought about this, I thought I just want to talk to parents and if you're not a parent you can be an uncle or an aunt and you can still have an influence on the next generation, but first of all, are you passing on the beauty of the bigger story. One of the reasons we are doing this is we are giving you the tools that you need to understand the overarching story of Scripture. Your kids are going through it. There are books that you can take. The Grade 1 to 5 and the Preschool are getting trading cards. You can walk the story. You can give your kids 'here's the story'. We want to live into the beauty of the story because when our story aligns with God's story, it creates an amazing story.

But the opposite is true, isn't it? You see, if our story does not align with God's story, it always

creates a lesser story for us, but also those around us. You see, we do not live our lives independently, and if you choose to live a lesser story, you are actually infusing a lesser story into those around you, as well. And David wants his son to know, Solomon, there's a bigger story.

But secondly, parents, are you blessing your kids? Do your kids know that you are proud of them and they can do it and you are there to support them and go, take it on? And you may have not had that for yourself, but will you hand it off to the next generation as David here is with his son Solomon - 'Solomon, you can do this. You can do this.'

I Kings 3:4-5

*The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want Me to give you".*

Now that's an odd statement, isn't it? Did you ever think of that? The God of the universe, the One who created all things, the One who is orchestrating the story actually goes to Solomon and says 'oh, by the way, ask for whatever you want Me to give you'. Why is God letting Solomon dictate what he wants?

I've been spinning that around all week thinking why does God do this, it's His story. I just simply came up with two things. These are just my ponderings on this. I think one reason why - He wants to know what's in Solomon's heart. Now He knows. Obviously, He's God but I think He wants Solomon to declare what's in his heart. You see, what we ask for reveals our heart, doesn't it? Reveals who we are on the inside. I've been praying with a bunch of guys here at North Park every Monday morning at 7 a.m. for the last thirteen years and some of the guys have been with me for thirteen years. If you pray with someone for that long you get to know someone's heart. You hear them pray

for their kids and their grandkids and their spouses and issues around the world and all kinds of stuff. You hear them praise God. And I think the guys I have been praying with I know who they are because I know their heart because they have been praying it out for all these years. And I think God wanted Solomon to declare ‘this is my heart’ as he asked God.

But secondly, I think God is inviting him into the story. You know, from the very beginning in Genesis when God created and He had Adam, what did He have Adam right away do? He said, ‘Adam, why don’t you go name the animals. It’s not just Me. Do this story together’. And I think He is in many ways inviting Solomon and ‘come on, let’s do this’. ‘What do you need, Solomon? Tell Me what you need and let’s write the beauty of this story’.

It’s the amazing thing of Christianity, isn’t it? God coming down. You see, every religion I know of you are chasing after god. God is up there. You are trying to appease him, pray enough. You are never really sure. It’s god at a distance. And that’s why, I guess for me, I can’t call Christianity a religion. It’s simply a relationship. God always coming down. We’ve already seen a bunch of those examples in the stories the first twelve chapters of the book. And here, once again, God comes down to Solomon – ‘what do you want, Solomon?’

The most beautiful example, right, is Jesus Christ Himself. We just celebrated at Christmas God Himself comes down in the most humble way to be among us. He is always chasing after us. He’s chasing after you. He’s not a distant God. He’s a very present God, and I think it’s no coincidence that this story lands on the first weekend of January. And, in many ways, I guess it’s just another week in our lives, but psychologically for us, right, when we start a new year it’s almost like ‘okay, that chapter is gone.’ Every year seems like a whole new chapter. And I think I want to assume that God is standing before us today and He is looking at you and you, He’s looking at you and He’s saying to you, ‘in 2018, what do you want Me to give you?’

What do you want?’ How would you answer that question? If God is standing right here before you today, what do you want Me to give you in 2018? What’s your answer? I encourage you this week sit down with someone, take out a journal, begin the prayer, ‘God, if this is true, I want You to give me *this*’. I can tell you one thing, it’s going to reveal your heart. It’s going to reveal your heart. What do you want God to give you in 2018? Well, Solomon responds in verse 6.

I Kings 4:6-9 (part)

*He says, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to You and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?”*

And Solomon reveals his heart. He says, ‘God, I can’t do this. I can’t do this. I need You to give me what I need to do this. I humbly come before You’.

If you heard Pastor Shane’s message last week – and if you didn’t, go online and listen to it – Pastor Shane shares his journey of faith and, at one point, he finally comes to the point where he just gives in to God finally and he says to God, ‘God, I don’t have much but if You want to take what I have here it is’. And he heard God say ‘Shane, I don’t want anything you have. I simply want you and that I will give you whatever you need to accomplish whatever task I am going to set before you. I simply want you to humbly come before Me’. And this is Solomon – ‘God, I can’t do it. I need wisdom. I need wisdom’.

And God delivers. God gives him wisdom beyond wisdom. Look at what it says in,

*1 Kings 4:32-35*

*He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.*

God delivered. And you have a sense here this is what God wanted to do all along. See, He did not bring this nation together to be inward. He wanted to bless all people through the nation, and what's happening right now? They are being blessed by the wisdom that God gave Solomon. All the nations are now coming could you tell us and the wisdom is going out and God begins to bless all nations. This is the purpose what God had designed in the beginning for all this to take place. It's a beautiful, beautiful time.

I've tried to picture what this time would have been like for the Israelite nation. It was the pinnacle of all they had. It says in Scripture that they didn't even count or consider silver worth anything because it just was everywhere. It was just everywhere. The wealth and prosperity and the beauty and the God-centeredness of what they had there was such an amazing time. It would have been great to live during that period.

Solomon continues. He builds this temple and it's an amazing piece of architecture. Just an artistic rendition, a cross-section [*photo on screen*]. It was this beautiful piece and everything about it was designed to point people to God. Everything about it, all the places around it, people visiting it – it became part of the rhythms of their life so that their story would stay connected with God's story and so they could live an amazing story. It was an ongoing reminder 'this will keep us connected'.

Now the temple was for then, but as I thought about it, for me this represents the rhythms of our faith

right now, does it not? What are the rhythms of your faith? Are you stepping into those regular routines so you do not forget who God was/is, so you stay connected so your story is aligned with God's story and so you are living an amazing story? Do you have rhythms that do that for you? Do you have a regular rhythm of just being here on the weekends just to be part of the service, so your kids are connecting, to sing songs to point us to God, to hear some great teaching, to remind yourself to begin your week every single week 'I am going to serve God and I am going to grow an inch this week and keep moving myself forward'.

This Going Deeper guide, I just read the whole thing through last night again. I almost cried. There's such amazing things going on. No one here has an excuse to say 'how do I grow?' It's here. Like it's beautiful, it's broad-sweeping. We do whatever we can to build whatever structures we can here to help you with whatever rhythms you need so you can stay connected because when your story is aligned with God's story you'll live an amazing story. But you've got to choose; you've got to choose.

What are your personal rhythms like? Do you engage in Scripture regularly? Pastor Paul, again, is going to lead his session – it's in the Going Deeper guide – on how to have a daily quiet time. Hundreds of you have been through it and he just shares just a simply method he's been using for years. It may not end up being your preferred method, but it might spark something, say 'okay, I get that. Now I am going to adjust it because my personality is so and so'. That's okay. The reality is, is Scripture continually feeding you? Are you growing in prayer? The rhythms you need.

Do you have a small group rhythm? Are you gathering with other believers to challenge each other, to care for each other, to pray for each other? Are they in your life or not? Do you have a rhythm of serving? Reaching the outside of your own comfort areas to kind of connect with those who perhaps don't look like you, act like you, talk like

you but in essence they still need. We need each other.

Well, this temple that was built, it was dedicated and after the years of being built, Solomon brings the nation around the temple and he has this amazing pastoral kingly prayer in 2 Chronicles 7 that I can't read but I encourage you to read that. It's this beautiful thing, the king himself pouring out his heart to God on behalf of his people.

#### *2 Chronicles 7:1-3*

*When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good. He is good, and His love endures forever".*

And there's this other theme throughout the Bible that when God appears in these kind of amazing, miraculous ways people's only response is to physically fall down. And here the Israelites just kneel on the ground, faces to the ground but they are not afraid. They are just so enamored with who God is. He is good; His love endures forever and this moment is such an amazing moment. It's like – I think that moment right there is the pinnacle of the entire journey of the Israelite nation. It never got better than that, I don't think, from a beauty perspective, from an emotional heart-tugging perspective. I think that was the top, and I think people would love to have lived in that moment their entire life because it was so amazing, so amazing.

And after that was all over, God appears to Solomon again. Again, in, He says this.

#### *2 Chronicles 7:17-18*

*As for you, Solomon, if you walk before Me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe My decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.'*

Solomon, align your story with My story and you are going to live an amazing story, a throne that will last forever.

Solomon had an Achilles' heel. And Solomon did not do what was necessary to protect the weakness of his life. And after all the beauty of this and all the wisdom and after the temple and all the great things going on and all the nations coming to him to learn from him everything was going right and the story was trending in this massively beautiful direction, we read in,

#### *1 Kings 11:1-6*

*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after other stories that aren't My story". Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.*

And he removed his story from God's story.

You see, when our story does not align with our God's story it always leads to a lesser story, not just for us but for everybody around us. And in Solomon's case, he ruled an entire nation and so his lesser story ends up taking an entire nation down.

What is your Achilles' heel? What is your Achilles' heel? What is that piece, those pieces that are going to take you down? As beautiful as the story that God is calling you to live, it's that thing. It's that thing. Maybe it's just a crazy sin like Solomon had. Maybe it's sexual distraction, someone else at work that you are kind of getting close to. Maybe the pornography monster is just owning you, and I know in this room, there are many of you, that it owns you and day by day, week by week, month by month. It's taking you down and you are not aligned with God's story and you are living a lesser story and it's impacting all your relationships around you. Maybe it's financial greed. You have a scarcity mentality. Pride, itself. I don't know, we can go on, couldn't we?

Maybe it's something that just seems neutral but it owns you. See, do you own technology or does technology own you? Did you know that the Waldorf School in Silicon Valley is a school that the kids have no computers, no laptops, no phones? Its paper and pencils, crayons. It's playing outside. It's talking to each other. Did you also know that three-quarters of the students who attend the Waldorf School in Silicon Valley are the kids of the executives that run the companies in Silicon Valley that create all the technology? But they know that technology can become an Achilles' heel and so they want their kids to actually grow up and learn and develop and grow so they make sure their kids are sent to a place where they will not be distracted by the very thing they are creating.

Maybe it's binge watching. Maybe it's exercise. You can find two hours to exercise but you can't find two hours to hang out with your spouse. I don't know. Examples.

Maybe you need to sit down with someone who knows you well and, with your mouth closed and no judgement, just simply say 'tell me what my Achilles' heel is' and let them simply tell you what they see in your life that's distracting you from aligning your story with God's story, that your rhythms of faith just do not exist.

You see, when our stories align with God's story, it leads to an amazing story. But when our stories do not align with God's story, it always leads to a lesser story, not just for us but for everybody around us.

We are in 2018. God is asking 'What do you want Me to do for you? What do you want Me to do for you this year?' What would your heart reveal you would like God to do? But then, what is your Achilles' heel that will take you down unless you put in place whatever you need so your story will always align with the beauty of God's grand upper story?. What will 2018 look like in your life and our lives?

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, just thank You for the beauty of this passage. And Lord, while Solomon, a life so well lived...and yet. And Lord, his decisions took down a nation. God, our decisions could take down a marriage, a family. It could take down a business, a neighbourhood. Jesus, we confess where we are flippant about connecting with You and we just don't put the time in. We don't understand the beauty of who You are. Jesus, may we be a community that decides we are going to follow God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We will align to His story because we want to live amazing stories for the entire City of London and beyond this place. Reveal to us, Lord; give us courage to step into these moments. Amen.



## **Points to Ponder**

### ***THE STORY- Chapter 13***

#### **Solomon: The King Who Had It All**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. What are you thankful for as you think about 2017?
2. What are you looking forward to in 2018?
3. What can you do to “bless your family” in 2018 that would put “wind in their sails”?
4. What do you want to ask God to do for you in 2018? What do your requests reveal about your heart condition?
5. Where do you believe you need to begin to align your “Lower Story” with God’s “Upper Story”? What are your next steps in this?
6. What is your Achilles’ heel? What distracts you from fully entering into God’s Upper Story?

#### **Prayer and Action Item**

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed.