

**Bethel**

**Pulpit**

**Hard Questions**

Sermon Number 453

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day evening, 6th May, 2018**

**Text:** *“And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not” (2 Chronicles 9. 1, 2).*

This was a most interesting occasion in the life of King Solomon. The Queen of Sheba, hearing of the fame of Solomon, and as it is emphasised, the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord (see 1 Kings 10. 1), she was attracted, and she came. It was a long journey, but she ventured, and she was not disappointed; she did not come in vain. I just mention for the sake of the young ones, different divines hold different views where Sheba was. Some think it was in Arabia, somewhere like Iran or Iraq. Others think it was in Africa. But of course, that is not anything of great importance.

Now I do not intend to speak of this word only in a spiritual sense this evening, but there are some vital lessons, vital points here. I will make just one or two remarks. Solomon is brought before us in a typical sense, perhaps more than any other character in Scripture. We need only think of Psalm 45 and Psalm 72, and the whole of the Song of Solomon – so many things which are mentioned about King Solomon that could never just belong to him personally, that do look forward to Christ. We must remember on one occasion our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ referred to this very chapter, this very event, the coming of the Queen of Sheba to visit Solomon. You remember what the Lord's comment was: “Behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

So how it rests on my spirit this evening: these hard things, these hard questions – we do not know the answer; we cannot deal with them. Some are spiritual, some providential, but “a greater than Solomon” does understand them, and He does know the answer, the answer to the hard questions, and how to deal with the hard things.

Perhaps we should just mention this: that different characters in the Word of God seem to be renowned for something special. In the case of Solomon, it was his wisdom. You see the wonderful wisdom of our God and Saviour. He knows; He understands. There is no problem that He cannot solve. There is no case He does not know how to deal with. I think on one occasion J.C. Philpot said that he felt of all the attributes of God – things like His sovereignty, His power, His mercy, His compassion – he felt perhaps His wisdom was the one least appreciated by the people of God. Never forget we have an all-wise God in all His dealings with us, when we come to Him in prayer, in everything.

So having said these things, with the Lord's help let us try to look at some of these things here, and may they be made profitable to us. The Word of God says, "To edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

"And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came." I remember as a young believer I read a magnificent sermon in pamphlet form by Joseph Irons, and the title of it was "The Fame of Jesus." If I remember aright, the text was, "And the fame of Him sent out into every place." As a young believer, I found that attractive, and I think I still do, and I think some of you do. The fame of Jesus.

"When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came." Why did she come? Because she could see something in Solomon she needed. She had things to deal with which she could not deal with herself. She had things she could not understand. She knew Solomon would understand them, and so when she heard of his fame, she came. It must have been a difficult journey, a long journey, but she came. She could not stay away. Neither will you stay away, when you have that sense of your soul's need and also your problems in your home and life and family and circumstances. When you hear of Jesus, the fame of Jesus, there will be an attraction and you will come. You will be compelled to come – the compulsion of grace. "My people shall be willing in the day of My power."

So when she "heard of the fame of Solomon, she came," and she was not disappointed. "Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not." But there seems to be an emphasis, both here and in the equivalent passage in the first book of Kings, that she had some hard things and they were too hard for her. She could not manage them. In that far country she could not manage them. She was a

great woman, she was a wealthy woman, but she could not manage them. But when she heard of Solomon, she came, and she came bringing all these hard things with her. In a sense, she was helpless before him; she was needy before him; she was submissive before him. It was vital. It was close. She wanted to commune with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon did not reject her, neither will “a greater than Solomon” reject you.

Now if your religion is real, you will have some things that are too hard for you, and I am sure a lot of you in chapel this evening have a number of things that are too hard for you. Well, spiritual things – your soul, your sins, eternity. O that is a hard thing when a living soul is quickened into life. Your pilgrimage, your profession, as you go on, so many hard things. You have them in your home; you have them in your family; you have them concerning your health; you have them concerning those you love; you have them concerning old age; you have them concerning the unknown way. You do not need me this evening to try and outline all kinds of hard things, things which are too hard for you. That is a good word: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?”

So what about these hard things, things in your life, things that weigh heavily on you, things that are too hard for you? You cannot manage them. You do not know the answer. You do not know how to deal with them. Have you heard of the fame of Jesus? Have you heard of the things He did in the days of His flesh? Tell me, have you ever heard of that beautiful word – may it be a word in season to more than one of you here this evening: “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” That has been a good word to me for many, many years, and it is *T* and *P*, tried and proved, but it is not worn out yet. You have these hard things, and there is “a greater than Solomon,” and He is sitting on a better throne than this wonderful throne of ivory. It is a throne of grace, and He welcomes poor sinners, and He welcomes those who have hard things tonight. He says, “The cause” – whatever it is, great or small, providence or grace – “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me” – it is not too hard for the Lord. “Bring it unto Me, and I will hear it,” just as Solomon heard the Queen of Sheba’s hard things.

Of course, the implication here is a clear promise that He will not only hear it, but He will answer it. You might have an eminent person and you have a hard thing, and he says, Bring it to me; I will listen to it. But he cannot promise that he will deal with it. He might be very willing, but he

cannot promise. Now the Lord promises beforehand that He will hear it and answer it and deal with it. It does not matter how hard it is. He can “break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” He is not only all-wise, but He is almighty, and He is not only almighty, but He is full of compassion, and He understands all these things, all these disorders. “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.”

So when she “heard of the fame of Solomon, she came ... with hard questions ... she communed with him of all that was in her heart.” Don’t we sing of it:

“He kindly listens while we tell  
The bitter pangs we feel within.”

But we are told these were hard questions. In the life of God’s people, there will always be hard questions. I wonder how many of you know that verse of John Kent:

“Bring all your hard questions, as one did of old,  
And ask Him the sum of them all to unfold.  
His oath and His promise He cannot deny,  
To all your hard cases He’ll speak by and by.”

He goes on:

“Your doubts may be many, your fears may be more,  
Your sins far exceeding the sands on the shore.  
Yet mighty His grace is your wants to supply,  
With all your hard cases, to Jesus draw nigh.”

These hard questions! Now it is an important subject, a big subject in the Word of God. But we have one warning, beloved friends, and it is this: to “avoid foolish questions.” Some people are asking questions that they should not ask, unprofitable questions. The Word of God calls them foolish questions. There was that remarkable case years ago. There was a well-known minister called Benjamin Beddome. We have many of his hymns in our hymnbook. Among the old Baptists, he was one of the most eminent of the preachers. He was accounted an outstanding pastor and held his pastorate at Bourton-on-the-Water for fifty-two years. But he had a most timid disposition, and sometimes when he had to preach, he panicked. On one occasion, he was away preaching for another pastor, and when he came in the pulpit, he panicked. He did not know what to do, what to say. He

went down the steps and said to the other pastor, “I don’t know what to do. What shall I preach about?” The other pastor, knowing what a great man he was, could not understand it. He said, “Don’t ask such silly questions.” Beddome thought, “That is it! That has given me a text,” and he preached a remarkable sermon on the text, “Avoid foolish questions.”

People sometimes asked the Lord Jesus questions. They said, “Are there few that be saved?” And really, the Lord Jesus said, Never mind whether there are many or few; what about you? “Are there few that be saved?” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Some people, in studying Scripture, ask all kinds of questions they should not: If God is almighty, why did He allow sin to come into the world? If God is such a loving God, why did He choose some and pass others by? Of course, many people have asked foolish questions about the date of the second coming. Well, they asked the Lord Jesus: “When shall these things be?” He said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.” How many people dabble with foolish questions in the Book of the Revelation about all the details of the second coming, and when it will be, and the vials, and the seals, and all these things!

I heard of a godly woman once, and her husband had no interest in chapel at all. He was an ungodly man. Suddenly, he became interested in studying prophecy. He did nothing but read his Bible from morning to night. Of course, his godly wife was delighted, but there was no grace in it; there was no salvation in it. He was not concerned about his soul and his sins and eternity. He was just asking these foolish questions and hoping to find an answer to them in the Word of God.

Now I am sure the Queen of Sheba did not ask foolish questions. She had more sense, more grace than that, and more sense of her need than that. So she came. Having heard of the fame of Solomon, she came with all these hard questions.

Now beloved friends, if our religion is right, there will be a lot of questions. I am just thinking of some in Scripture. What about that one: “Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father’s house” for me? That is a good question. What about this: “Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon?” That is another good question.

Let me give you a Scripture example here. I am thinking of David before he was king. There were two occasions in his life, and they were very similar occasions (2 Samuel 5.19, 23). The circumstances seemed to be identical, completely the same. It was concerning going into battle, and David enquired of the Lord: "Shall I go up?" And the Lord answered him and told him, yes, he should go up. Now then, only a day or two later, he was in just the same position. What did he do? He did not presume; he did not just go on the past. He did exactly the same, the same humility: he enquired, and this time the Lord said, "Thou shalt not go up." It is the mystery of divine sovereignty. It is the Lord's will, not ours.

But the Queen of Sheba realised from the fame of Solomon how wise he was, and so she came with these hard questions. She did not know the answer, but the Lord did; Solomon did. "She communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not."

There is just one other thing I want to come to this evening, and it is this. There is this wonderful privilege that we can go as sinners in humility to the blood-sprinkled mercy seat with our hard things and with our hard questions. But do not forget, sometimes in the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Himself, the "greater than Solomon," He asked questions. There is a difference here. He does not ask these questions because He does not know the answer, but He asks the questions to stir our hearts and to make us think of the answer.

So these questions the Lord Jesus asks. There is one chapter in the gospels, and people came to the Lord, and they asked Him this question, and another question, and yet another question (Matthew 22). It is made clear, some of them were just to catch Him out, some of them just to trap His feet. Quietly the Lord answered them one by one in His infinite wisdom, and in the end, when He had finished with all their questions, He put a question to them, and it was this: "What think ye of Christ?" – what Ralph Erskine called "the greatest question in the gospel catechism." As John Newton says, it does try our state and our scheme. As he says, "You cannot be right in the rest," unless you are right here. "What think ye of Christ?" O to be able to give a good answer to that!

My mind goes back this evening to when I was a teenager. I was with a few friends. We had gone miles to see a professional football match.

It was miles away from home. There were crowds going there. I shall never forget it, though sadly it was not lasting and it was not saving, but amidst all that milling crowd going for pleasure, myself one of them, there was a quiet, serious-looking man standing there outside the ground lifting up a placard. He did not speak a word. It said, "What think ye of Christ?" It cut me through and through, but sadly it was not lasting and it was not saving. But can you answer that question, "What think ye of Christ?" We all know what we should answer, the right answer: He is "the Chiefest among ten thousand"; "He is altogether lovely." O but to be brought spiritually, graciously, to face that question asked by the Lord Himself, and eternity hangs on the answer to it. "What think ye of Christ?" It is a mercy if through grace we can give the answer.

But then I must mention one other important question that the "greater than Solomon," our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ asked, and it was this: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" That is another great question. Do not forget, in the context there, Simon Peter was asking foolish questions. He was asking about John, what the Lord's purpose was for John, and what the Lord was going to do with John; what was the future of John. Sometimes the Lord gives you a loving rebuke to a foolish question. He said, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." It is personal; it is not somebody else; it is not the other disciple, John. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" And the Lord solemnly, closely asked it three times.

"Hark, my soul! it is the Lord;  
'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word;  
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee:  
'Say, poor sinner, lovest thou Me?'"

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" There is a little hymn, and it is a mercy if from our hearts we can quote it:

"Do not I love Thee, dearest Lord?  
Behold my heart and see;  
And cast each hated idol down,  
That dares to rival Thee.

"Do not I love Thee from my soul?  
Then let me nothing love;  
Dead be my heart to every joy,  
When Jesus cannot move."

Well, the Queen of Sheba, Solomon – they have all gone their way. We are still living in the day of grace. “A greater than Solomon” is still on the throne, all-wise, almighty, and He still welcomes poor sinners to come with their hard questions, and like Solomon, he “told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not.”

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| What think you of Christ? is the test,<br>To try both your state and your scheme;<br>You cannot be right in the rest,<br>Unless you think rightly of Him.<br>As Jesus appears in your view,<br>As He is belovèd or not;<br>So God is disposèd to you;<br>And mercy or wrath is your lot. | Some call Him a Saviour in word,<br>But mix their own works with His plan;<br>And hope He His help will afford,<br>When they have done all that they can:<br>If doings prove rather too light,<br>(A little, they own, they may fail),<br>They purpose to make up full weight<br>By casting His name in the scale. |
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| Some take Him a creature to be,<br>A man, or an angel at most:<br>Sure these have not feelings like me,<br>Nor know themselves wretched and lost.<br>So guilty, so helpless am I,<br>I durst not confide in His blood,<br>Nor on His protection rely,<br>Unless I were sure He is God. | Some style Him the Pearl of great price,<br>And say He's the Fountain of joys;<br>Yet feed upon folly and vice,<br>And cleave to the world and its toys:<br>Like Judas, the Saviour they kiss,<br>And while thy salute Him, betray;<br>Ah! what will profession like this<br>Avail in His terrible day? |
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If asked what of Jesus I think,  
Though still my best thoughts are but poor,  
I say, He's my meat and my drink,  
My life, and my strength, and my store;  
My Shepherd, my Husband, my Friend,  
My Saviour from sin and from thrall;  
My hope from beginning to end,  
My portion, my Lord, and my All.

J. Newton