

1 Kings 10:1-9

¹ When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ² Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. ³ Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. ⁴ When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, ⁵ the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.

⁶ She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. ⁷ But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. ⁸ How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.” (NIV84)

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO?

To what extremes would you go to accomplish your goals in life? Would you give up sugar and wheat to get healthier? Not just for a diet, but as a lifestyle? Would you sell your TV to get out of debt? Would you drive a beater car so that you can get free from car payments and use your money to do the things that you want to do?

Why is it that most New Year’s resolutions are broken by the second week of January? It’s because for many they are just words and no heart. It’s easy to speak it’s much harder to act and even harder to sacrifice. “I’d like to lose weight, but not even to sacrifice the money for a gym membership and the time to actually use the gym!” Many New Year’s resolutions are left unfulfilled because people aren’t willing to “go far enough” to actually do the things that are required to back up words and intentions. The phrase “put your money where your mouth is!” comes to mind. In order for a resolution to be successful, you need to “put your money where your mouth is,” you need to back up your words with actions, you need to go far enough to do enough to make them come true.

How Far Would You Go? Are you willing to go far enough to make real change? Are you willing to go far enough to make the resolution come true? Are you willing to be dedicated to the cause or not?
How Far Will You Go?

Did you make any spiritual resolutions this year? Are you going to make an effort to be more regular in worship? To attend a Bible Class at church? To resume devotions at home? To read through the Bible in 2016? Are you going to succeed? **How Far Will You Go** to make those resolutions come true?

How far will you go to serve Jesus? That’s the question that we are going to consider today and with God’s help and with his strength, he’ll give us success.

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This morning we celebrate Epiphany. It's sometimes called the Gentile's Christmas. It's a day set aside to thank God that he has revealed himself as the Savior of not just the Jews, but of the Gentiles or non-Jews too. It's often spent focused on the Magi or Wise Men who came from the East. While we don't know a ton about them or where they came from, we know that they traveled a great distance "from the East" to find and worship Jesus. They were willing to go on a great and long journey just to find the baby that they knew had been born.

Our text from 1 Kings tells us of another who took a long voyage to see someone – the Queen of Sheba traversed the desert to visit King Solomon, and if that trip doesn't surprise you, the reason she made it might!

Almost all modern scholars agree that Sheba was in southwest Arabia, modern day Yemen. That's 1,367 miles from Jerusalem. To put that trip into perspective, to go 1367 miles you would have to drive from here to Prudhoe Bay, then turn around and drive back as far as Fairbanks (and you'd still be 20 miles short so I guess take a lap or two around Fairbanks) and then you have 1367 miles.

Oh yeah, and you need to take away modern roads, and cars and hotels and just about every comfort you can think of and then you are close to knowing what the Queen's voyage was like. And yet, here's a woman willing to travel in a camel-drawn caravan, not just to see the glamour of the King's life, but to learn more about the true God.

"When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions..." She wanted to have her questions about his God answered. And what really took her breath away? The relationship Solomon had with his God. ***"When the queen of Sheba saw... the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed."***

So in the end she praised God: ***"Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness."***

And if you're still doubting that the queen of Sheba was a believer, listen to Jesus' own words in Matthew 12:42: ***"The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here."***

Incredible, isn't it? That this woman who lived 1,367 miles away from Jerusalem should even know the true God. Perhaps one of Solomon's merchant ships carried the news to Southern Arabia. Incredible, isn't it? That this woman who lived 1,367 miles away from Jerusalem should come to believe that this God of Israel was the true and only God? The Holy Spirit is amazing in his work! Incredible, isn't it? That this woman who lived 1,367 miles away from Jerusalem should travel so far to learn more about God and to worship him.

1 Kings 10:1-9

How far would you be willing to go to worship God? How far is your drive in to church? (In your heated vehicle?) For many it's less than 5 miles maybe up to 30 miles for a few. But what if the only church was in Fairbanks? Would you still worship as often as you do?

Well, the truth is your church isn't that far away. It's only a few miles for most. So how far are you willing to go to grow in your faith? Are you willing to make the trip in twice a week? Or is that too far to go so often?

The truth is, you don't even have to go that far to grow in your faith. You all have Bibles in your own homes. You can get a free app for your phone. You can get meditations and audio Bibles. You don't have to leave your bed to learn more about your Savior. But are you willing to even go that far to pick up the phone and read a few chapters of God's love letter to you?

Sadly we don't like to be inconvenienced even a little, let alone willing to travel 1,367 miles to worship our Savior. What little love we show to him.

Imagine you're the owner of a small business. And as your business grows, you hire a few more staff. But one of your employees refuses to do any of the work they were told to do unless you stand right over their shoulder threatening to fire them unless they did it. He never takes any initiative to do anything on his own. He's unwilling to be inconvenienced in the slightest for the sake of the company. What would you do? Of course you'd fire him! He wouldn't be in your employment for long, would he?

Well, we deserve to be fired by God for our apathy toward him and his Word. We deserve the fires of hell for refusing to be inconvenienced in our selfish pursuits in order to serve him. We deserve to be sent more than 1,367 miles away from God, but to spend eternity banished from him and his heaven.

That's what we deserve. But we don't get it because the queen of Sheba wasn't the only one willing to travel so far, with such commitment, passion, and zeal. There was another who traveled even further to save you and me.

How far would Jesus go to save us? He left heaven to come to earth. That distance is infinitely greater than 1,367 miles. He left his glory to be born in a stable, to live in poverty, to take the abuse of other men. He traveled with determined resolution every step that took him to the cross—to separation from God the Father in a hell we can never imagine—to pay for our apathy, our selfishness, our every sin—to keep us not just in his company, but in his family!

And what's more, he sent the Holy Spirit to travel to the ends of the earth to carry that Gospel message to you and me. I don't know if you can get much further away from Jerusalem than Alaska! Yet, he sent missionaries, pastors, and teachers all the way here to share with us that mystery now revealed: that God's grace is for all! It's for Arabic queens, for Eastern scholars, for Roman Gentiles, and for you and me!

We don't have to travel to Jerusalem to learn about Jesus. The Gospel has been brought to us all the way out here in Alaska. That's what God has done for you with the Gospel—he's delivered it right to your doorstep—because nothing would stop him from rescuing you and bringing you into his family!

1 Kings 10:1-9

And nothing will stop him from rescuing you and bringing you into his heaven. That's how far he's willing to go for you!

“Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you...” not just on a throne, but into his family through your ***“relation to the name of the Lord”***! Who will give you not just a little wealth, but the riches of heaven! And right now, you have the Lord's eternal love because of Christ our King who maintained God's perfect justice and yet still made us righteous and holy! (cf. Romans 3:21-26)

So, how far are you willing to go to thank him? Would you be willing to give back to him some of the gifts he's given to you? And because of the Lord's eternal love for you, he has blessed you with so much! You have many things that the queen of Sheba and King Solomon never dreamed of: Motorized vehicles, refrigerators with foods they'd never imagined, we have TV's and microwaves, computers and smart phones, tools at our disposal to free up more time to serve God.

And in a sense, we even have more wisdom than Solomon. We have seen the prophecies fulfilled. We have the New Testament. We know exactly what Jesus did to pay for our sin where he had only vague notions. In wisdom and wealth, you have far exceeded... Solomon!

So let's use our free time, let's use our wisdom, let's use our wealth to do all we can to serve our Savior in thanks for the way he served us. Let's bring our very best to him just as the queen of Sheba gave her best gifts to King Solomon. Let's offer such great sacrifices of thanks to him that when others see them they are just overwhelmed as the queen of Sheba was at Solomon's sacrifices!

How far would you go? We would go to any lengths, we would travel any distance, we would go to any extreme to show our thanks to Jesus for going to such great lengths, and traveling so far, for enduring the extremities of hell for us. We'll gladly give him, our time, our money, our skills, our energy, ourselves, our very lives, to learn more of his grace and to serve him in thanks!