

The Beginning of Wisdom Is This: Get Wisdom

1 Kings 3:3-28

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*The Lord's Day Evening
October 18, 2009*

If you have your Bibles, please turn to 1 Kings chapter 3, 1Kings chapter 3. It's a delight to be able to look into this passage with you tonight while Derek is still away. We've missed him this month of October. We'll be glad to have him back to jump back into 1 Samuel when he returns. We're stealing a look, somewhat in the distant future, of the people of Israel as we look at 1 Kings chapter 3 tonight, looking at probably the highest point in Israelite history. This section, 1 Kings chapters 1 probably to about 1 Kings 10 or 11, is where we're seeing the high point, the golden age, of the people of Israel. And we see some of the reason for that golden age tonight as we look at 1 Kings chapter 3.

Before we read this passage together, let's go to the Lord once again in prayer and ask for His blessing.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank You for Your Word. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Without it, we would be lost, we would not know where to go, we would not know what You require. But with it, O Lord, we have a testimony, we have a witness, that guides us, shapes us, molds us, conforms us, to the image of Christ. It is our desire tonight as we look at 1 Kings 3, O God, that we would find the footsteps of Christ, for each of us, and that we would diligently seek, by Your Spirit, to place our feet into those footsteps and to walk the way of wisdom. So come, Father, grant this. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is God's Word from 1 Kings chapter 3 beginning in verse 3:

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And

you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give Your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this Your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

Then two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. And we were alone. There was no one else with us in the house; only we two were in the house. And this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me, while your servant slept, and laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, he was dead. But when I looked at him closely in the morning, behold, he was not the child that I had borne." But the other woman said, "No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours." The first said, "No, the dead child is yours, and the living child is mine." Thus they spoke before the king.

Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; and the other says, 'No; but your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'" And the king said, "Bring me a sword." So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, "Oh, my

lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death." But the other said, "He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him." Then the king answered and said, "Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother." And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

Amen, and thus far the reading of God's holy Word.

Well, you know how the scene goes; you've seen it far too many times. You're on a boat, on the outskirts of a deserted island, trying to make your way to land, when a tremendous storm arises. Everyone on the boat, because of the fury of the storm, has to ultimately jump ship, with little to no hope of survival. Everyone dies, but you. You happen, right before you are about to go under, to latch hold to a piece of wreckage that keeps you afloat for at least the point at which you can remember, and then you pass out, only to wake up the next morning lying on the shoreline, half drowned, partially conscious, very happy to be alive. And there in the sand right next to you — strange, strange looking bottle, corked. It doesn't look like it's been opened in years. You take the bottle, you uncork it hoping for a little sip of water, maybe something fresh, and out pops a genie. The genie thanks you immediately for freeing him from the thousands of years of captivity of which he's been held in the bottle. And he introduces himself, and then he grants you three wishes.

Now normally when this tale is told, the person who gets the three wishes ultimately of course doesn't get what he or she really wants. Oh they get what they ask for, they just don't really get what they want. They wind up squandering their wishes on something they think will tantalize the heart and satisfy their affections, but ultimately is going to lead to their undoing. Or, which is often the case in the cartoon versions, they ask for something and the genie takes the wish way too literal. You know like, I want to be the ruler of the free world, and they end up being about twelve inches long and wood because he took the wish a little too seriously.

In the passage before us we have as it were that story, almost played out in front of us. We have Solomon. As he goes to Gibeon in order to sacrifice before the Lord, God appears to him in a dream and He says, "Name your request. What is it that you want Solomon? I'm here to do your bidding." Now of course when you are asked that question it's not a safe question. It may seem like the one thing you have hoped for and wished for, but of course in the morality tale of the genie story, it's never handled quite right, because it always reveals a little bit too much about our hearts.

I decided last night - I was reading through the text yesterday afternoon - before bedtime I decided I would try this question out on Rosalyn and Katie. Rosalyn is my six year old. Katie is my four year old. I wondered what they would say. I

asked them if they could have one thing, one thing in the whole of their life and world, what would it be that they wanted. Well Katie, quickly and unreservedly said, "A yo-yo." (laughter) - which is amusing and slightly disturbing. I don't know if that's a sign of foreboding of the future or what. It's also some sort of a commentary on a father probably —I could make her whole dream come true by going to get a yo-yo. That's remarkable to think about. Rosalyn, at six, looked at me probably, probably in the way that I didn't expect, but she looked at me and said, "What do you mean?" - with that kind of "What are you up to, really?" question. I think that's the kind of look and I think that's the kind of posture to some degree that we approach a question like that because it tells us so much. It tells us so much, doesn't it? In the quiet of your heart, should your heart be known, not the words that you would probably say in an upstanding community like this, you'd say all the right answers. What do you really want? And if God was asking, what would you say?

In our passage tonight I want us to look at Solomon's request for wisdom. I want us to look at how he approaches this all important question from God and I want you to see how God comes in proportion to his need and displays to Solomon that He will give him the wisdom that he needs. In verses 5 and 6 we see Solomon's response. Solomon begins in verse 6 and Solomon says, "You have shown great and steadfast love to Your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness and righteousness and in uprightness of heart toward You." As God poses this question before Solomon, Solomon begins not by answering it, but by going back, by going back to the past. He says, "O Lord, You've been faithful. Your steadfast love has been proven in Your servant, my father David. I know the promises You made to him in 2 Samuel chapter 7 where You made a great covenant with him, that You would make his name great, that You would establish his throne, and that he would be the one to usher in this golden age of the people of Israel. You were steadfast in Your faithfulness. You worked in his heart. You made him a man of righteousness and of faithfulness and of uprightness. And Your love has been so steadfast that You've carried him all the way through his years and his ministry and You've even preserved for him a son, me, to carry on this legacy." As Solomon recounts God's promises here in 1 Kings 3, he recounts what he knows is a tremendous precedent that has been set for the beginning of his life and work and ministry as a king. "I know that my father was great, and I know that Your steadfast love was real and true. And now here I am."

You know it's oftentimes that sons walk in the shadows of their father, particularly those fathers in which the son is following in the vocational footsteps of. "Dad was a great lawyer. He made partner early in life, has tremendous achievements, wonderful assets, and a tremendous reputation in the community, and I'm thinking about being a lawyer too, but there's a question about whether or not I can measure up." As Solomon is entering into his ministry, into his kingship, he labors under the shadow of tremendous steadfast love and faithfulness and tremendous precedent, set by the king in whom God made the greatest of

covenants. Would he be able to uphold the commission, the challenge, that was given to him?

Now you can look back to 1 Kings chapter 2 and see right at the beginning David's instruction to Solomon. He tells him something very similar to what Moses tells Joshua right before Moses dies — that he's to meditate on the law of Moses, to remember the commandments and the statutes, to walk in faithfulness and in righteousness, and as he does so, there will be prosperity, there will be advancement of the kingdom. Solomon's heard that, but he also knows the precedent. He knows the way but he also knows the standard. He knows there's big shoes to fill.

But Solomon also knows something else, not just about the past, but about the present. Solomon has been a ruler, he's probably about the age of twenty, a young man — refers to himself as a child in this text. He has only been a ruler since the previous chapter. He's just begun. And he actually began on not the greatest of footings. If you were to look back over 1 Kings chapter 1 and 1 Kings chapter 2, what you would find is a kingship in jeopardy and in tragedy. There is subterfuge taking place all over the kingdom. David is nearing his death. David has multiple sons, his eldest son, Adonijah, thinks that he should be the appropriate successor to king David, but of course David has already told Bathsheba and Solomon that it will be Solomon who will rule in his place, who will carry on the succession of kingship. Well not only is Adonijah seizing upon himself the position of king, but one of the priests, and one of the advisors to king David, his closest advisor and closest priest, have actually joined Adonijah and are seeking to take over the throne. Now David let's Solomon in on this in chapter 2. He says, "I want you to follow in God's commands, and walk in His statutes, and meditate on the law of Moses, your way will be prosperous, and guess what? — there's a lot of bad things going on right now in the kingdom. You've got your eldest brother who's trying to take over, you've got a priest who is aligned with him, they are seeking to get into the court, my closest advisor is on his way into the ranks in order to create an insurrection in order to take over the kingdom, and I'm going to die about...now." That's exactly where Solomon is. He knows the way, but in the present circumstances, he's overwhelmed.

How does he describe himself? Do you see that in verse 7? "I am a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. I am in the midst of Your people, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted." You know you often experience this emotionally when you feel that you're not up to a task. You've been called to something great. The precedent is significant. The turmoil surrounding the setting is rising, and what do you say? "Hmmm...I don't think I'm your guy." Sounds a little bit like Moses, doesn't it, at the burning bush? "Moses, I think you're the man to go into Pharaoh's court and to tell him some incredibly difficult things, like let all My people go, which supports your entire economy, let all of My people go; lead them out; I want you to be their ruler as you lead them into the land of Canaan." What does Moses say? "I'm not really good with this talking thing very

well. Is there a Moses on the other side of the mountain You are looking for? These are not the kind of credentials that I signed up for.” Right? Doubt, fear, reluctance.

It's the same thing the prophet Jeremiah had. It's the thing that many prophets had. It's the way that God often works, of calling us to something far above our understanding.. It's how He grows us up, isn't it? I wake up most mornings pouring cereal around the table thinking, “Who's trusting me with three kids and a wife? This is way too big of a thing.” And of course, when I began that journey, I knew instinctively that I wasn't qualified for it. And there was one faithful minister that said to me, “You know, you're right — you're not.” This is God's way. This is His way. He calls you into something where you can't quite see how you're going to do what God's called you to do, so He tells you, “Trust Me. Trust Me. You're not going to get through this without Me.”

I think one of the things that's dawning on Solomon in this passage is his total inability to be able to do what God's called him to do and to realize that the character that God established in his father — righteousness, faithfulness, uprightness — these are not virtues that you can just go and decide that you're going to get. These are virtues that must be given to you. Have you ever tried to get faithfulness or go get righteousness? Oh, you can pursue it. That's indeed what David has called Solomon to do — be in the law of Moses; follow His statutes — these things will come as God gifts them to you, but it's hard to go when you don't feel the equipping.

I think Solomon's beginning to experience this single important truth in the Christian life that we are only as good as the grace that we have been given; that we are only as good as the grace that we have been given; that if we are going to rely on self, upon ingenuity and smarts and our own personal wisdom, what we can conjure up, then we're not going to be ready when Adonijah comes with an insurrection, and Joab and Abiathar. We're not going to be ready. But if God calls, then He will equip. He will equip.

Solomon asks in this wonderful request for the right thing. He's feeling completely unable, completely devoid of wisdom, and he asks for what he needs. He asks for wisdom. You see, the beginning place of wisdom is knowing that you're not wise. That's what Solomon teaches us here. You see it's not for the wise that God came, it was for the foolish. It was not for those that knew all that they were supposed to do, without the aid or the help of God. It was those who knew instinctively that they weren't who they were supposed to be, and could not accomplish what they were called unless God should meet them. The beginning of wisdom is knowing that you're not wise and then knowing where to get it — and then knowing where to get it.

He asked very literally, in the Hebrew, he asked for a ‘hearing heart.’ It's probably translated ‘an understanding mind.’ — perfectly good translation, but a healing

heart. A heart that is attune and can listen to the intentions and the desires of God, that can take them in and embrace them and know instinctively that this is what I ought to do. "I need to know God, in order to govern Your people — that's what You've called me to do — I don't want to back down from this task, I want to move forward, but I can only move forward if You give me what I need. Give me this wisdom to be able to discern good from evil — to be able to discern good from evil." This pleased God. We are told in that next section that this was music to God's ears. He wanted to grant this type of request, and by it, we understand the heart of God with regards to prayer, don't we? That God always gives when we ask in accord with His will. You know that's what prayer is. Prayer is not always you asking what you want, it's asking what you know to be what God wants for you. And in the course of prayer, what God wants becoming genuinely what you want. To end up in that spot, that's Solomon here. "God, I want what you want. Give me what I need to govern Your people."

Now what do we see in this last section? Well, we see the display of God's wisdom. We see the provision. God's not taunting Solomon here. "Solomon, just tell me what you want...Oh, that's great." He's in the posture of giving to Solomon what he needs. He comes genuinely in generosity. As James tells us, "If he who lacks wisdom, let him go to God who will give generously." That's what God does here. And we see this curious, odd and potentially violent story unfold. Two women. Two prostitutes, who come with children. One who has died because the mother, in the middle of the night, rolled over and smothered the child to death — tragic. And then waking, she realizes it. In the midst of her tragedy, in the midst of her fear and of her fright, in the midst of her grief, she concocts a midnight plan. She sees the other child sleeping soundly beside the other mother and she thinks, "If I just take my child, the dead child, and swap him out, she'll never know, and I'll still have a child, and that's what I've always wanted is a child. She'll never know. She'll think it was her child that died, not mine." But like most midnight plans, it didn't work. The mother wakes up the next morning and realized immediately, "This is not my child." And she says, "Of course it's your child, but I'm sorry, it appears that he is dead." And the argument that we read just moments ago, begins to instill among the women, and obviously moves its way up the court. You wouldn't be able to get to Solomon that quickly, but they end up in the highest courts. They end up before the wise sovereign judge and king, Solomon. And though no one else has been able to see through, this wise Solomon, being able to discern good and evil, has two witnesses before him — one word against another — and he concocts and plan; a plan to expose the heart. "We're going to argue over the child? Fine. Bring the sword. Bring the sword."

What happens? Well, it's what would happen in every mother's heart. "No, my son! I'll be willing to face any injustice and never be able to see my child again if it means he would live!" And yet the other, now hardened and calloused, and certainly entrenched in enmity says, "He will be neither mine nor yours. Divide him." How does Solomon do this? We're given the hint at the end of our section.

We're given the hint in verse 28 — As Solomon sees this woman, the mother revealed because of her heart yearning for her son, here is the declaration of Israel — “they heard the judgment that the king had rendered, and it says they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.” You see, there is a wisdom that if we come open hearted, and if we come leaning in to the instruction of God's Word, there is a wisdom that God grants that is a God-shaped intuition — to be able to see and to discern the proper path. A wisdom that knows the direction based on the collective instruction which God has given and the gift of His grace in the moment to ask. The people stood in awe.

Now this cameo portrait launches us into the rising tide of the Solomonic reign — chapter after chapter of incredible wisdom and tremendous wealth and magnificent accomplishment happens from these pages, all the way up until about chapter 10. The temple, the greatest of the accomplishments that are given for Solomon to do, happens, and is more majestic than anyone could imagine. And then not only are the people of Israel perceived that he has the wisdom of God, but as far away as Sheba there is a queen who comes who has heard reports about the wisdom of Solomon. She comes and says she has seen nothing like this — not in terms of his wisdom, not in terms of his wealth, not in terms of his glory. But then we are told, Solomon, in chapter 11, has married a whole lot of women and he has begun to serve the foreign gods of the women of which he is married. We're told in chapter 11 that the heart of Solomon begins to move wayward.

The story of Solomon is a story of a failed glory. It ends in the tragic fall and division of the kingdom of Israel, with his sons fighting over the throne. Solomon begins to look not like his father David, in uprightness and righteousness, he begins to look like his father Adam, who underwent a very similar, almost genie-like fashion request in the Garden of Eden with Eve — that all of their dreams would come true if they just eat the forbidden fruit, that they would know, interestingly enough, good from evil, exactly like God. Solomon proves to us that though the wisdom of God is there and has been given, that he's still a son of Adam, and he's still a fallen ruler, and there's still a need for a greater Solomon to come. And in Matthew chapter 12, the Lord Jesus takes the two high points in all of the Solomonic rule — the temple and the visit of the Queen of Sheba — and He said, “The world knew the wisdom of Solomon, and yet something greater than Solomon is here.”

You see, David's son Solomon wasn't the son that we needed, and David was not even the father that we needed, but they all point to the greater Son of David, Jesus, who we all need. As we see Israel crumble along the edges and the wisdom of Solomon fade, we see as the apostle Paul says in Corinthians, we see the Gospel that many will call foolishness, who will stumble over it and fall, that with true wisdom you will see that it is the power of God. And this night as we gather, we gather in that wisdom, the wisdom of the Gospel, to accomplish all

that we could not accomplish and give to us all that we need. May God do that in our hearts.

Father we do pray for this kind of wisdom, the wisdom that comes in the Gospel, to revel in it, to share in it, to show it's glory and it's eternal effectiveness, to usher in the kingdom that You are building — a greater kingdom than Solomon's, for there is a greater king than Solomon. He is King Jesus. And it is tonight King Jesus, that we bow yet again to You. Give us Your wisdom we pray. Amen.

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