

Wisdom

Dn. Jacob Bush July 26, 2020

When we hear the name, “Solomon” what words come to mind? Assuming we do not have an uncle, nephew or other relative by that name the words that might come to mind are “king” “successor” because Solomon was the king of Israel and succeeded his father King David. Another word that might come instantly to mind is “wise” or “wisdom”.

Solomon was known as a man of great wisdom. Wisdom is a necessary quality for a king if he is to make the decisions that are best for his subjects and for his kingdom. The word for a person that lacks wisdom is the word psychopath, and we naturally do not want a psychopath to be in charge of an entire nation. Although, there have been some rulers throughout history that have been considered psychopaths, but Solomon was not one of them. So renowned was his wisdom that we are told in I Kings 4:34 that, “Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.”

Over 3000 proverbs are attributed to Solomon, many of which are recorded for us in Scripture in the book of Proverbs. The fact that they are included in Scripture tells us that wisdom is not only important for kings and rulers but is also important for everyone to have. Christ made that clear when he said, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) Things have not changed very much since that time. As Solomon said, “There is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) The world was full of wolves then; it is full of wolves now. It is the command of the Lord that we be wise.

We need to make a distinction between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom that comes from God. That distinction can be found in James 3:13-18,

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from Heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

The difference between worldly and heavenly wisdom can be seen in the fruit of a person’s life. The wisdom of the world is all about self. It is about getting ahead of someone else, being better than someone else. It is about obtaining fame and fortune. The wisdom that comes from God is selfless. It is about righteousness and justice and putting others before ourselves. It cares nothing for fame and fortune. It is true wisdom.

How do we obtain true wisdom? Where do we begin? We begin with God. One of Solomon's proverbs recorded for us states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10) The fear of the Lord is not being terrified and running away and hiding. The fear of the Lord is a reverence for Him and a respect for Him. It is understanding who God is and willingly submitting to His authority.

This is where Solomon started. Look at I Kings 3:3-15. Starting with verse 3, "Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David..." King David was his father. David was called "a man after God's own heart." (Acts 13:22) He loved the Lord and he taught the love of the Lord to his children. On his death bed, David charged Solomon to, "be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in His ways and keep His decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go..." (I Kings 2:2, 3). It is clear that leaning on the Lord, submitting to His authority, and growing in our relationship with Him are all wise steps to take in our lives. And for us who are parents, teaching these things to our children and grandchildren is important as well. No parent wants their child to be unwise, disrespectful, and selfish. We want our children to be wise, respectful of others, loving, selfless.

Solomon was not perfect, of course. Continuing in verse 3, "...except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places." These "high places" were the places where idol worship and worship of foreign gods took place. The practice of using those high places for the worship of God was forbidden in Mosaic Law. Such places were supposed to have been demolished by Israel (Numbers 33:52) to purify the land of such evil and to prevent their slipping into the worship of idols and foreign gods. For Solomon to worship at such places was not wise at all.

Verse 4, "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 to you.'" Even though Solomon was not perfect, God still made this offer to him. Solomon had the beginning of wisdom. He had the fear of the Lord. But he needed to grow in his devotion to God, so God came to Solomon and asked this question.

We can never sell ourselves short in our relationship with God. We cannot think that because we do not measure up to whomever in our own eyes that God cannot use us. It is not true at all. God can use us. God wants to use us. God wants us to grow in wisdom and in our faith. And if we listen to Him and submit to Him then we will grow in wisdom and in our faith.

Verse 6, "Solomon answered, '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.'" What is Solomon doing? He is ascribing honor and glory to God! He is acknowledging

God's providence in the life of his father and showing that he understands that all good things come from God. He is worshipping God!

Continuing with verses 7-9,

Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 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?

Solomon is being humble before the Lord. He acknowledges his own shortcomings after having already acknowledging who God is. Remember Proverbs 9:10 states that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Here Solomon demonstrates that proverb. He has the right understanding of who God is, creator, sustainer, the giver of all good gifts. And he has the right understanding who he himself is, a little child unable to carry out his duties.

Solomon refers to himself as a little child. Scholars agree though that Solomon was in his early 20s at this time. I remember, a long time ago, when I was in my early 20s. I do not think I had this same attitude of humility back then that Solomon demonstrates. I thought I knew everything. Now, of course, I realize that I was just like Sgt. Schultz from "Hogan's Heroes." I knew nothing!

That is a great lesson for people in their 20s now. And not just for people in their 20s, but for young people of all ages from 0 on up to 120. We all need to Have the right understanding of who God is, and a realistic, humble, understanding of who we are. The world would be a much better place if the majority of people had such an understanding.

Solomon submits himself to God by referring to himself as God's servant and recognizing that the people belong to God. Notice his humility. He acknowledges his own shortcomings in being able to govern and recognizes that he cannot do so without help from God. Therefore, he asks the Lord for discernment. He asks for wisdom.

Here we have an Old Testament example of New Testament principle. James 1:5 states "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." God asks Solomon what he wants. He did not ask for wealth or power or long life or any material thing. No, Solomon recognizes his need and asks God for wisdom. And his request pleased God.

Verse 10 - 14

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you

have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you long life”

Solomon asked God for wisdom, and God granted Solomon’s request, and even gave him extra bonus gifts of wealth and honor. Ask and you shall receive.

Solomon awakes in verse 15 and responds to his encounter with the Lord by going to Jerusalem, and he “stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.” Before this event he worshipped at the high places, now he worships before the ark of the covenant. He seeks the Lord on God’s terms. He is showing wisdom already.

The rest of this chapter of I Kings relates the account of how Solomon settled the dispute between two prostitutes who both had sons. One was smothered so they both claimed the live son was their own. Solomon said to cut the baby in two and give half to each and the child’s real mother stopped that from happening. Verse 28, “When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.”

Solomon used the wisdom God gave him. He did not put it on a shelf. He did not bury it. He used the gift God gave him, and he used it to God’s glory. As a result, people from all over the world came to Israel to hear from the king and so were exposed to people who knew the One True God and most likely got a glimpse of how good God is.

Wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord. We cannot hope to have true wisdom without having the fear of the Lord. It is that godly wisdom that we want so that we can be sheep among wolves and ultimately bring honor and glory to God. We do not want to look like the wolves. Wolves think they are pretty smart and wise, but they are smart and wise in the ways of the world. They understand the human philosophy and ethics, but they are ignorant of God and ignorant of His ways. We want to remain sheep. We want the wisdom that comes from God. That wisdom that James says is “first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17) We want to live and speak and move in such a way that God is glorified in our lives. That others will come begin to have the fear of the Lord and come to a fuller understanding of who God is because they see our lives.

Solomon started with the fear of the Lord. He gained wisdom by asking God for it. Then he walked in it praising God and seeking to glorify Him. That is the pattern for us to follow. That involves daily worship of God, daily humility, daily submission to God and daily walking in His ways and obeying His statutes and commands. That is the path of true wisdom. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!