

Solomon: Lessons in Living – A Worthy Start

Our last two messages about the life of Solomon have been rather hard on him and his family, pointing out their faults and failures, and their need of God's grace and forgiveness. Today's message is perhaps more like you typically expect regarding his life. We're going to see all the good things which were on display at the start of his reign, and the reasons for them.

We left off last week with Solomon's step-brother Adonijah trying to proclaim himself king, and then David authorizing Solomon to be proclaimed in a formal ceremony. When the people at Adonijah's feast knew of Solomon's coronation, they abandoned his party. Adonijah, in fear of his life, fled to the tabernacle for refuge. How did Solomon respond? (1 Kgs 1:52) – "And Solomon said, If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." Solomon gave him mercy, along with the admonition to live a worthy life. Despite the mercy offered by Solomon, Adonijah later violated those terms, and Solomon had him put to death.

We come to 1 Kings 3, which is perhaps the high point of Solomon's life. There we read in v. 4 that he went to Gibeon, the great high place where sacrifices were offered to God, and he offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. You may wonder why Solomon would go to the high place at Gibeon for these offerings. Doesn't that sound like paganism? Gibeon, about 5 miles northwest of Jerusalem, was a priestly city in the territory of Benjamin, and we read in 1 Chr 16:39 that the Tabernacle was erected in the high place at Gibeon from the time of David until Solomon's temple was built, and 1 Chr 21:29 tells us the altar of burnt offering was there also. So Solomon didn't engage in some form of pagan ritual, but rather went to the house of God, offering sacrifices in accordance with the law, to honor and glorify God.

In doing this, Solomon wasn't seeking some special advantage from God – he was simply offering from his heart what he believed God deserved. Look at v. 3 "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father..." This is the best starting point for anyone. Deuteronomy 11:1 "You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always." Look at what God told the Israelites in v. 13-14, "And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil." God said that if people love and obey Him, the result will be blessings. Solomon began his reign over Israel by loving and obeying God.

Not only did Solomon love God and walk in His ways, but the way he worshiped God was sacrificial, extravagant. God didn't command a thousand burnt offerings – that seems to be a response from Solomon wanting to worship God abundantly. Nothing was too much or too good, in response to God's many blessings to him.

One night while he was there, "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?"

This is Solomon's great prayer for wisdom, and it gives us a great example of how to start well. God's offer to him came as a result of his worship, and Solomon responded with humility. To begin with, he identified God's prior blessings and faithfulness to his father David. Notice how Solomon even identified those blessings came because (and when) David walked before God in faithfulness, righteousness, and uprightness of heart. That is still the way God works today. His character is unchanging, and the only way for us to experience His true blessings is to be faithful, obedient, and righteous before Him.

Solomon then acknowledged he was unworthy of God's rich blessings. He wasn't the eldest son, nor had he done anything to deserve God's selection – it was all of grace, and he knew it. That is where you and I need to be with God – resting in His undeserved favor, and thanking Him for it.

Finally, he asked God for wisdom – an understanding mind to govern, to discern good and evil. We are told in James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Similarly, Prov 2:3-12 tell us "If you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding...then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom...then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path...discretion will watch over you...delivering you from the way of evil..."

How did God respond to this prayer? Verse 10-14, "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 have given 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.'" God graciously gave him what he asked for, in abundance, and even granted him the other things he didn't ask for.

The final words give us a warning, though. Just because we start well doesn't mean we will finish well. God reminded Solomon that continued obedience and faith would be necessary if he was to continue seeing God's blessings. There is a foreshadowing of things to come here, and we need to learn from that as well. 1 Cor 10:12 tells us, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." We have to be on guard against spiritual pride, constantly remembering it is only of the Lord's mercy that we stand.