

1Kings 3:16-28

God's Wisdom Reflected in Solomon's Wisdom

The first 10 chapters in 1Kings show us the nation of Israel reaching its peak as a nation. Under King Solomon the nation would become the solitary super power of the entire Middle East. Israel would not be subservient to other nations during that period but other nations would become subservient to Israel.

It would be a time of political prosperity for the nation. Following the bloody and continual struggles of King Saul and King David, now at last the nation would be secure. There would be no foreign invasions during the reign of Solomon and lest a nation would be tempted to invade them a 1400 man chariot force with 12,000 horsemen would be on hand to meet the challenge. I have at times thought upon that during times of political campaigns and the issue of our nation's military strength has been a campaign issue. It was the policy of the wisest king in all the Old Testament to maintain a strong military presence even during times of peace. So it was a time of political prosperity.

It was also a time of great economic prosperity. The nation was rich. So we read in 10:21-23: *And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.*

We see the nation importing gold. We see the nation in possession of so much silver that silver was counted to be a thing of naught. And we see rare and precious treasures being imported – things like ivory and apes and peacocks. In 10:11 we read of almug trees that were imported and used for pillars in the Lord's house as well as for harps and psalteries, musical instruments that were used in that period. So it was a time of economic prosperity.

But most importantly it was a time of spiritual prosperity. In Solomon's day the temple would be built – a temple designed by David, under the Holy Spirit's direction and a temple that would call for vast quantities of precious metals and expensive wood and would demand great skill in craftsmanship to build. This spiritual prosperity, however, was not found simply in the building of an impressive structure for you see once that building was completed and the dedication service was held something would take place that had not taken place in more than 400 years in Israel's history. The shekinah glory would fill the temple and the Lord's presence would be so overwhelming that the priests would not be able to minister. It was as if God Himself stepped down from heaven to direct the worship. And so it was one of those seemingly rare instances in Israel's history where the people were blessed and the people were united in their fear of the Lord.

All of this blessing and prosperity, then, because in the first half of 1Ki. 3 we read how the Lord was impressed with the prayer of the young son of David – a prayer not for riches

or honor or long life but a prayer for a wise and understanding heart with which to rule over the people of God. So impressed was God with that prayer that He says to Solomon in verse 12 *Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.*

In the portion of Scripture we've read this morning we have recorded for us the first public demonstration of that wise and understanding heart that God gave to Solomon. It was through this unusual incident that the children of Israel discovered that their new king was no ordinary ruler. And I believe the last verse of the chapter presents to us a very important key as to why the Holy Spirit saw fit to record and preserve this story in sacred writ. Notice what it says in v. 28: *And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God [was] in him, to do judgment.*

Notice, if you will, that they perceived God's wisdom in their new king. It does not say that they were impressed with Solomon's education or his own personal scholarship. The verse indicates to us that what they saw in Solomon transcended human scholarship. It was God's wisdom that they perceived in him. And then notice also from this verse the effect this perception had on the people. We're told that when all Israel perceived this wisdom from God they feared the king.

That term *feared* doesn't simply mean that they were afraid of the king, although they would have certainly known that there was no way you could pull the wool over this man's eyes. What the term means is that they respected or they revered their king. This morning we are in the Lord's house in the name of our king – King Jesus who in scripture is called the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And one of the purposes for the people of God gathering to worship King Jesus is that we too may be moved to fear our King. This could be a subject all in itself especially when you consider how the fear of the Lord is strangely missing to a very large degree in many churches today. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge and wisdom we're told twice in Proverbs and once in the Psalms which means that if you know little or nothing of the fear of the Lord then you have not even reached the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

What I would like to do this morning as the Lord enables me is to move you to deeper reverence toward King Jesus. And when you keep in mind that the wisdom that the Israelites beheld in Solomon was the wisdom of God then I don't believe that we're mishandling this text by raising and answering the question:

How is God's Wisdom Reflected by King Solomon in This Story?

And I'd like to consider 3 ways in which God's wisdom is reflected by the way Solomon dealt with these two harlots that appeared before him. Consider with me first of all:

I. The Wisdom of God's Justice

We know, of course, from the story that there was a challenge posed to King Solomon with regard to justice. Both women were laying claim to a child but only one of them had a just claim to the child – the other harlot, out of jealousy for the loss of her own child was attempting to make a fraudulent claim to the living child.

The challenge that Solomon faced was the challenge of determining which harlot was the real mother and which harlot could justly claim the child for her own. The challenge was magnified by the fact that on the surface of it there didn't appear to be any way to tell who had a just claim and who was making a fraudulent claim. They had both given birth to children. They both dwelt in the same house. They were both harlots and thus characters of ill repute. So on the surface of it justice and fraud appeared identical. How was Solomon to discern truth from error and righteousness from fraud when the appearances were identical?

I'll leave it to your own meditations to draw the applications from such a circumstance. In our day we're called upon to discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error and we need to discern what's genuine and distinguish it from what's phony. I'm sure I don't have to convince any of you that much of what takes place in Christianity today is phony and many who name the name of Christ are anything but true and the wisdom of Solomon is required at times in order to know the difference.

What I want to call your attention to now, however, is that in the end a just verdict was rendered by Solomon. I'll have more to say about how he arrived at his verdict in just a moment but for now I simply want to call your attention to the fact that in the end he did make the right decision and justice prevailed in the case of identifying the right woman as the true mother of the child.

And don't you know that the wrong decision in this situation would have been a most cruel matter. A woman who had accidentally killed her own child might have been rewarded with another child and a woman who had taken proper care of her child might have been deprived of her child. It would have been most unjust for Solomon to have made the wrong decision in the case before him. Thankfully he made the right choice and in the end justice prevailed.

Did you know that when God set His mind toward the sinner's salvation He was faced with the same kind of challenge? We read an interesting statement in Peter's first epistle regarding this challenge. In 1Pe 4:18 we read *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* Underscore that word *scarcely*. It's a word which in the original language means *with difficulty*. If the righteous with difficulty be saved.

And the thing we have to understand and appreciate this morning is not that the difficulty rests with us. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved* we're told in Acts 16:31. Nothing could be plainer or more simple where our salvation is concerned. The

difficulty, or the challenge, if you will, was with God. And what the challenge amounted to was basically this – how can sinners be saved without God having to compromise His character? If awarding the child to the wrong mother would have been a sore reflection on the character of Solomon, how much more does the character of God run the risk of even greater reproach when it comes to the sinner’s salvation?

And so the challenge God faced was something like this: How can love toward the sinner be reconciled with wrath which is the sinner’s due? Or another way to put it would be simply – how can justice be reconciled with love? How can grace be reconciled to holiness? How can blessing be reconciled to the curse which is upon us due to sin?

There are some that hold to the ridiculous notion that in salvation God has simply lowered His standard. Have you ever heard this kind of reasoning? – When God saw that men would not keep the 10 commandments He decided to make the matter easier by requiring men to only keep 1 commandment – *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*

I have stated on many occasions that such a gospel that appears to present God lowering His standard will never really carry any credibility to the sinner’s heart because the sinner knows in his heart that the God of all the universe must and will do right. Speaking of man in a generic sense in his sin Paul writes in Ro 1:32 *Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*

Sinful men know that their sin calls for judgment. This is something they know inherently. They may try to squirm out of such knowledge and indeed Paul says earlier in Romans 1 that sinful men hold or suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness – but they never can truly escape the voice of their conscience which tells them that sin deserves judgment.

This is what makes the doctrine of justification by faith so precious. I like to think of justification simply as salvation as it relates to God’s justice. And the glorious truth of the gospel is that God can be just and the justifier of those that believe in Jesus. You see God was able to meet the challenge and so devise a way of salvation that would not compromise His justice or any other aspect of His holy character.

This is what enables the believer to enjoy peace with God. *Being justified by faith we have peace with God* Paul tells us in Rom. 5:1. And the reason we can know peace is because we know that justice has not been set aside in our salvation, justice, rather, has been fulfilled through the life and death of Christ.

So we see the wisdom of God’s justice reflected in Solomon. Solomon met the challenge of justice in the case before him and God met the challenge of justice with regard to the sinner’s salvation. This shows us something of the genius of Divine wisdom. My next point takes us to the heart of God’s wisdom for we see next:

II. The Wisdom of God's Love

When the challenge was put to Solomon over rightly identifying the true mother of the child in dispute, Solomon recognized something that is very basic to human nature. He recognized that one of the strongest bonds of love in all the world is the bond of love between a mother and her child.

When David DiCanio was ordained here during the week of prayer his mother was able to be here also. It was really quite touching to see how emotional David became when it was his turn to speak and he paid tribute to his mother. She was the one that had poured her life into him and so developed his character to become a servant of Christ. Word reached me some time later that one of the younger mothers in our congregation was so moved by the tribute that she later remarked – I want to be Mrs. DiCanio – meaning, I want to so pour my life into my children and see them so grow in grace and in Christ that they'll be able to pay a similar tribute to me when they're grown up.

And this love bond between a mother and child I dare say is universal in nature. Even among unsaved mothers there is, generally speaking, a strong bond of love toward their children. Now by recognizing this bond of love between a mother and child Solomon was able to solve the dilemma before him by going through the motions of severing that love bond. *Bring me a sword* he says in v. 24. *Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other* he says in the next verse. Do you see what he was doing? He was solving the crisis by placing his finger on that love bond. In the interest of her child the true mother became willing to part with the child if that's what it took for the life of her child to be spared and thus the true mother became identifiable and the dilemma was solved.

Now the mother/child love bond is but a dim reflection of an infinitely higher bond of love that has existed from all eternity. I'm making reference now to the bond of love between God the Father and God the Son. *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* the Father says of His Son in Mt. 3:17. This is something that we do well to keep in mind as we endeavor to magnify God's grace. The Father has always had the Son and He's never needed His creatures in order to find satisfaction in His life. They do gravely error who harbor the notion that God would be so poor without them. We add nothing to God. The love bond between the persons of the Trinity has always been sufficient for God.

Now in the narrative we've read it was the potential severing of that bond of love between the mother and her child that provided the solution to the challenge. In our salvation it was the actual severing of the bond of love between God the Father and God the Son that provided the solution regarding our salvation.

Have you ever thought about where the greatest suffering of Christ was to be discovered? We know that His physical sufferings were great. Having His back whipped with the Roman cat of nine tails was painful. Each one of those 9 leather strips contained pieces of sharp stone that tore the flesh away from His back and His sides. We know that the crown of thorns pressed into His brow was physically painful, bringing steams of blood down His

face which had already been beaten by the angry Jews when they taunted Him and challenged Him to prophesy by naming the ones that had beaten Him.

We know as well that it would have been painful having iron nails driven into His hands and feet, nailing Him to a cross and when that cross was lifted and positioned over the socket dug into the earth to receive it, we know that it would have been painful when the dropping of the cross into that socket would send shocking pains throughout His body and cause many of His bones to pop out of joint. And as He hung suspended between heaven and earth on that cross it became painful to breath. As the weight of the body caused the body to sag His air supply would be cut off and the only way a crucified victim could breath would be to push himself up from that iron pin driven into His feet so He could bring his diaphragm out of His stomach and thus take in a breath of air. And when a victim became to weak to make that painful push from His feet on that iron nail he would die from suffocation. This is why the Roman soldiers would break the legs of the other two thieves that hung on both sides of Christ. With their legs broken it would become impossible for them to lift themselves up to take another breath and hence their deaths would be hastened.

So we know that the physical sufferings of Christ were great. We also know that His emotional sufferings were great. You should know that Christ felt the pain of rejection. He felt the pain of His disciples abandoning Him and He felt the pain of His enemies taunting and mocking Him. I often think on Christ's emotional pain when I'm dealing with or praying for those that have been rejected perhaps through divorce. A rejected spouse undergoes a great deal of emotional pain so much so that he or she might wonder whether anyone else can really understand. I want to tell you that Jesus knows the pain of rejection.

So we have Christ's physical pains and we have His emotional pains and we know that His sufferings were great. But I would suggest to you today that as great as these pains were they did not constitute His greatest suffering. You see all the while our Savior was suffering from the afflictions of His tormentors He was completely silent, so much so, that it caused Pilate to marvel. But when it came to His crowning penal affliction which was the severing of His Father's love and favor it brought forth a cry from our Savior's lips that we'll never be able to fully comprehend – *My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me?* And in this crowning penal affliction our salvation was accomplished. The dilemma of the sinner's salvation was met – but oh what a price was required in order for God to meet the challenge.

Now let's remember the theme we're thinking upon this morning. We're thinking upon the theme of the wisdom of God. And could I suggest to you that in His wisdom God could conceive of no greater way to show His love for sinners than what we find Christ demonstrating from Calvary's cross.

How prone sinners are to think that if God loved them He would give them more money or He would give me a fancier car, or He would give me a larger house, or He would so order his providential rule over the world in such a way that life would be easier for me.

The real truth of the matter is – were God to give you all the material goods of this world until you had enough money to buy whatever of the world’s toys your heart could wish – that would be no manifestation of His love. And I think it’s fair to say that the proof for such a statement is in the pudding because in our day and age sinners have so much and yet it doesn’t satisfy them and they mistakenly think that if they had more that would satisfy them but when they get more they discover that the world’s goods can’t satisfy the deep craving of their souls.

But show me now the love of Christ! Let me behold the very dying form of One who gave Himself for me and now the deepest needs of my soul are met. What are those deepest needs? You have a deep need to know that your sins are forgiven. You have a deep need to know that everlasting life is your portion. You have a deep need to know that you’re reconciled to God and that you’re adopted into the family of God. Let me know these things with assurance in my soul and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of God’s glory and grace.

And so I wonder today – have you responded to the greatest demonstration of love that Divine wisdom could conceive? Have you responded to God’s love by embracing that love in simple faith in Christ? Will you receive Christ’s love? When you think of all that Christ endured to demonstrate His love to you how can you fail to respond to it? How can you not be moved to deep and solemn reverence before such a Redeemer?

And if you spurn His love and reject His offer of salvation because your love for sin compels you to spurn the love of Christ – will you be able to blame God for your own eternal condemnation in hell?

There is yet another reflection of God’s wisdom in Solomon’s dealings with these harlots. I’ll only have time to mention it. We’ve considered the wisdom of God’s justice and the wisdom of God’s love. Would you think with me finally and briefly on:

III. The Wisdom of God’s Testings

What a test the mother of this child was put to by King Solomon. In order to gain her child she had to be willing to give up her child. Christ sees fit to put His followers to the same test.

Sinners are tested to see if they’re willing to give up what is most precious to them which is their sin – and if they’re willing to repent of their sins then they gain eternal life. They gain a home in heaven. They gain the righteousness of Christ which qualifies them to enter heaven.

Isn’t it interesting that in the end of the book of Job after Job has been severely tested over a prolonged period of time, when God appears to Job, He does not appear in order to give an account of Himself to Job – quite the contrary – Job is the one called on to give an account to God and not the other way around. And so no explanation is found in the book for Job’s sufferings. And I remember when I realized that then the question came to my mind – what is the solution, then, in this book? What is the solution to the dilemma of the

people of God suffering? And the solution is God Himself. Job didn't get an explanation from God but he certainly gained more of God.

And so will we – when we submit to the testings that God in His wisdom sees fit to put us through. In the end we gain. The mother in the narrative gained her child back. Sinners gain salvation. Christians gain more of Christ. Isn't our Savior awesome? I trust that what is said of the Israelites in the narrative can be said of you now – that you've been moved to fear King Jesus as you've been exposed in some measure to the greatness of His wisdom.