

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Wisdom Is...*"

Please open your Bibles to 1 Kings 3.

Let me begin by reminding you of something I've shared w/ you before that's worth repeating...

The Old Testament gives us examples:

- **Romans 15:4 Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction**
- **1 Corinthians 10:6 These things [in the OT] took place as examples for us...11 These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.**

You've heard this before, right? 😊.

The Old Testament gives us examples...but examples of what?

Often examples of New Testament teaching!

This morning's account gives us examples of recent New Testament teaching we've learned about wisdom...such as:

- Wisdom is a gift; we can ask for wisdom and receive it...we'll see Solomon ask for wisdom and receive it.
- Wisdom helps us navigate through trials, which are tests...in next week's sermon we'll see Solomon face a test and use wisdom to navigate through it.

I'm going to read through the verses quickly. The account is straightforward. Then I'll discuss the application.

Look at **1 Kings 3:5**...

1 Kings 3:5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you."

Without a doubt, this is one of the most remarkable moments in the Old Testament. Think about what happened: the true and living God, the creator of heaven and earth, offered Solomon anything his heart desired!

I'm not going to spend much time on this, but something worth doing privately is considering how we would answer this question if we were asked.

Solomon's answer would change the course of his administration for good and for the good of the people. Look what he said in the next verse...

1 Kings 3:6 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. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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?"

Based on the census in 2 Samuel 24, there were probably over 4,000,000 people in the nation. This was a huge number for anyone to govern.

1 Kings 3:10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11 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, 12 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.

Now let me explain something important...

People confuse wisdom and knowledge – they think they're the same – and the confusion largely comes from this account.

I get the confusion: Solomon asked for wisdom, but he also knew lots about lots of other things, which is to say he had lots of knowledge, which makes wisdom and knowledge look the same.

The issue can be resolved by recognizing God gave Solomon two things: He gave him wisdom and knowledge.

Briefly look at **1 Kings 4:32**...

1 Kings 4:32 [Solomon] also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

These 3,000 proverbs contained wisdom. Many of them are in the book of proverbs. Some of his songs probably contained wisdom too.

Look at the next verse to see some of the knowledge Solomon had...

1 Kings 4:33 He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish.

This is some of the knowledge he had. This isn't the same as wisdom.

If you remember the end of Ecclesiastes, which we looked at recently...

Ecclesiastes 12:9 Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge.

Notice it says **BESIDES being wise**, - or in addition to being wise – he **also taught knowledge** as though he was wise, showing they're not the same and he had both.

It's important to understand this because **James 1:5** tells us to ask for wisdom, and if we don't understand that God gave Solomon knowledge too, we're going to think asking for wisdom means asking God to give us knowledge of trees, animals, birds, and fish. That's not what God is offering. If we want knowledge we need to go to school, read books, and learn.

Instead, as we've discussed God gives us wisdom to navigate life's circumstances...and that's what we see in these verses.

LESSON 1: WISDOM IS DISCERNING WHAT TO DO.

Let me give you three examples of how this is revealed in these verses...

First, notice the repetition of the word **discern**. It occurs three times in three verses:

- **9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may DISCERN between good and evil...**
- **11 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"**
- **12 behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and DISCERNING mind**

Discern is one of the best words for understanding wisdom, b/c wisdom is basically discerning what to do...and what not to do.

Second, at the end of **verse 7** Solomon said, **"I do not know how to go out or come in."**

Basically he said, "I don't know what to do," which is why he asked for wisdom so he would know what to do.

Third, if you look at **verse 9** Solomon said he wanted to be able to **discern between good and evil**, and at the end of **verse 11** God said Solomon **asked for understanding to discern what is right**.

If you remember early in the series I said that knowledge is amoral, but wisdom is moral. Since wisdom is moral it helps us do what these words are saying:

- **Discern between good and evil**
- **Understand what is right**

You might look at this and say, *"But wait a minute, aren't good and evil obvious? Doesn't everyone know the difference?"*

No. We need wisdom to discern the difference. We live in a world that calls good evil and evil good.

It may surprise you to search the Scriptures and find things that God calls evil. For example...

1 Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

We know divination – or witchcraft – and idolatry are evil, but rebellion and arrogance? Aren't they only sort of bad? We need God's wisdom to see this.

How about the passage in James 4 where God talks about how foolish it is for us to talk about our plans...

Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

What does God call this kind of boasting?

In **verse 16** He says **all such boasting is evil.**

Whoa, evil to talk about future plans?

Remember God's advice on this? In **verse 14** He says...

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

See, that's wisdom. God tells us what is evil: boasting about tomorrow and then He tells us what is good: explaining that if the Lord wills we will do this or that.

We need wisdom to know the difference between good and evil because it's not always obvious.

In **verse 9**, Solomon asked for an **understanding mind** and in **verse 11** God said he **asked for understanding**. The word for **understanding** is *shama`* and it means, "to hear."

The Hebrew daily confession of faith is called the Shema, b/c it's from **Deuteronomy 6:4**, which reads...

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

So when Solomon asked for an understanding mind, he asked for the ability to listen well, or hear all sides of an issue...and this brings us to lesson 2...

LESSON 2: WISDOM IS ASSOCIATED WITH LISTENING.

I don't know what comes to mind when you think of wise people. I suspect many of us tend to associate wisdom with speaking. In other words wise people say wise things.

One of the problems w/ this understanding is when Scripture talks about wise people it often talks about them NOT speaking much. Instead they listen much. When Scripture talks about fools it says they talk much.

Let me give you a few examples...

Proverbs 1:5 Let THE WISE HEAR and increase in learning

This explains why people who listen well are wise: they listen and learn.

Similarly...

Proverbs 19:20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may GAIN WISDOM in the future.

Listen and you grow in wisdom!

Pro 10:8 The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.

Wise people **receive commandments** – which is to say they listen – whereas fools [**babble on**] – or talk too much.

Pro 10:19 When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

Saying what needs to be said is important, but – according to this verse – talking too much leads to **transgression** – or sin – whereas **prudent** – or wise people – **restrain [their] lips**.

Pro 13:3 Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Controlling what we say is so important God says doing so can save our lives.

On the other hand, **opening wide our mouths** – which means saying whatever comes to mind – brings **ruin** or destruction.

Listen to these last two Proverbs, which are next to each other to contrast the wise and foolish...

Pro 17:27 Whoever restrains his words (or doesn't talk much) has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit (or remains calm and listens) is a man of understanding. 28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Even fools can fool people into thinking they're wise if they'll be quiet. But since they're fools, they can't keep quiet, so they open their mouths and let everyone know they're fools.

Probably the most well-known verse about listening and speaking is in the NT...

Jam 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

One reason listening is a sign of wisdom is it shows self-control. We all think of things we shouldn't say, and:

- It's wise when we keep these things to ourselves.
- It's foolish when we don't.

Here's a question we should ask in the privacy of our own hearts...

In conversations:

- Am I typically speaking?
- Or am I typically listening?
- Am I asking questions to learn?
- Or am I talking so much people don't have a chance to share?

Briefly look back at verse 10...

1 Kings 3:10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

Whenever we see that someone's actions **pleased** the Lord, we should try to learn from their example because we want to please the Lord too. **HIGHLIGHT IT!**

This verse is primarily what made me want to draw application from this account.

And this brings us to lesson 3...

LESSON 3: WISDOM IS AVAILABLE TO THE HUMBLE.

Let me briefly share something that will relate to the passage...

Being a second lieutenant is a very unique position. You have an individual in his early twenties who outranks everyone in the platoon. All of these people have more experience than him.

In other words, the most inexperienced person, is the person w/ the most authority. The platoon sergeant, who serves as the second lieutenant's right hand man, could have been in the military longer than the second lieutenant has been alive.

When I was in ROTC they shared horror stories of second lieutenants who received their first platoon and acted like they knew everything. They said this was the biggest mistake second lieutenants made, and we would do fine if we were learners who acknowledged our inexperience.

I mention this b/c I feel like it's the approach Solomon took...

He had at least three older brothers, so he probably didn't expect to become king. Since he reigned 40 years and didn't die at an old age he probably took the throne between the ages of 20 and 30. This was challenging to be king for anyone, but especially when you have to follow the greatest king in Israel's history. He was certainly much younger than his advisers and officers, some of whom served his father David.

As the new king of Israel Solomon could have easily thought highly of himself. He could have been like that second lieutenant who acted like he knew everything.

Instead, he said he was **a little child** who **didn't know how to go out or come in**.

Solomon didn't mean this as literally as it sounded. He was young, but he wasn't a child. Instead, this was his way of humbly acknowledging his inexperience, inadequacy, and need for God's help. And this pleased God, and I'm sure this attitude pleased everyone who worked with Solomon.

I think this is a good example for us!

When we want wisdom, we should approach God this way:

- Come open handedly as a little child.
- Acknowledge our inexperience and inadequacy.

Let God know that we know we don't know what to do, and we need wisdom from Him.

Next, notice three times in verses seven and eight Solomon referred to himself as **your servant**...

1 Kings 3:7 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. 8 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. 9 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?"

And this brings us to lesson 4...

LESSON 4: WISDOM IS AVAILABLE FOR SERVING.

One of the main things you notice is Solomon could have responded very selfishly to God's offer. He could have asked for a long life, riches, or the death of his enemies. Instead he asked for wisdom.

And it's not just that he asked for wisdom, it's **WHY** he asked for wisdom. He could have asked for wisdom so that he would be rich and famous. Instead, he asked for wisdom to govern the people well.

And this reveals why we should ask for wisdom, so we can do well the things God wants us to do.

And this reveals why we might not receive wisdom at times when we do ask for it. Here's what I mean...

The New Testament parallel to this account is **James 1:5**, which we looked at in our last sermon...

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

James 1 and **1 Kings 3** are complementary passages:

- **James 3** tells us to ask for wisdom
- **1 Kings 3** shows us someone asking for and receiving wisdom

But a little further in **James** we get to see why we might ask, but not receive...

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

I'm sure if Solomon asked for something selfish to satisfy passions, he would have been asking wrongly and God would not have been pleased.

Instead, Solomon is a great example of why we **SHOULD** ask for wisdom. He asked for wisdom so he could serve God and people well...and that's why we should ask for wisdom.

I do think this brings up one point about wisdom worth mentioning...

Solomon asked for wisdom so he could do his job well...versus asking God to do it for him.

This is what wisdom does. It allows us to do the things God wants us to do...versus God doing them for us.

Briefly look back at verse 12...

1 Kings 3:12 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.

Notice God said **I give you**. We've talked a few times that wisdom is a supernatural gift. Remember, this is why Job couldn't find it in the natural world. It's something given by God. It's not something we can earn or work hard enough to receive. This is a perfect example. Solomon could work hard, but if he wanted wisdom he had to get it from God.

After God gave Solomon wisdom, look what else he gave him...

1 Kings 3:13 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.

If you write in your bible circle the words **I give you also** and write, “**Matthew 6:33,**” which says...

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

You are looking at one of the best examples of this verse in scripture. Perhaps the best example!

Solomon put God first and God added all these things to him.

Solomon’s request embodied the important kingdom ethic that Jesus would later preach to his disciples...and this brings us to lesson 5...

LESSON 5: WISDOM LEADS TO OTHER BLESSINGS

Solomon never read **Matthew 6:33**, but he practiced it and the Lord gave him the other blessings that he didn’t ask for.

I mention this because the book of proverbs, which is the book of wisdom, makes the point that if we pursue wisdom we will receive other blessings...and making this more interesting, the blessings Proverbs mentions look like the blessings Solomon received pursuing wisdom.

Go ahead and turn to Proverbs 3. We won’t turn back to 1 King 3.

Keep in mind that Proverbs are generalities versus guarantees.

Here are a few examples of the blessings that follow obtaining wisdom...

Proverbs 3:1 My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, 2 for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

Solomon pursued wisdom and God said he would give him long life, and the father tells the son he’ll receive length of life if he pursues wisdom

Two verses later...

Proverbs 3:4 So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

Solomon pursued wisdom and God said he would give him honor, and the father tells the son if he pursues wisdom he’ll receive honor.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

This is what wisdom does: it makes straight paths for us in that it allows us to know what to do.

Proverbs 3:9 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Solomon pursued wisdom and God said he would give him riches, and the father tells the son if he pursues wisdom he'll receive riches.

Let me be clear about what I am and am not saying...

I'm not saying we'll get long life, riches, and honor if we seek wisdom and put God first.

But I am saying we will get the other blessings God wants us to have.

CONCLUSION

Katie said this account reminds her of a genie in a bottle. I agree w/ her, and maybe you've thought of the same.

In the fictional story of Aladdin, he retrieves an oil lamp from a booby-trapped cave. When he rubs the lamp a genie appears and says something pretty close to what God said to Solomon...

“Ask what I shall give you.”

This sounds like the greatest offer that has ever been made to anyone.

But there is a greater offer.

Katie and I were having a conversation the other day and she said, “Doesn't it all seem too good to be true?”

I said, “What?”

She said, “Heaven, forgiveness of our sins, eternity with God, all this.”

It does sound too good to be true. The Gospel is the greatest offer that's ever been made to anyone. Through repentance and faith in Christ:

- Jesus receives the punishment our sins deserve
- We receive the righteousness of Christ that we don't deserve

Speaking of wisdom – or the opposite of it – people have to be fools to reject this offer. Don't be one of those fools.

If you have any questions about anything I've shared, please see me after service so I can speak with you and pray with you. Let's pray.