

Seek wisdom; act wisely * 1 Kings 3, 10 & 11

November 17, 2019 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I think that if I was to ask you what Solomon was famous for, you would probably say 'wisdom.' And you would be right – Solomon was a very wise man. The Scripture reading that we just heard illustrates that nicely and we have hundreds of his proverbs recorded for us in the book of Proverbs in the Bible. Solomon was a very wise man.

And yet, the book of Kings invites us to consider what Solomon did with all that wisdom. It's one thing to be wise; it's another thing altogether to act wisely. Solomon's life teaches us to be wise in God's eyes AND to act wisely and that's a lesson we would all do well to learn. Turn with me to 1 Kings 3 and I'll show you why I say that. 1 Kings 3, starting in verse 5.

Now at this point, David had died and his son Solomon – had ascended to the throne. Solomon went to Gibeon to worship the LORD and while he was there – verse 5 –

5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Now that's a big question. Imagine the LORD showed up at your house one day like Ed McMahon with a big blank cheque and said – 'ask me for whatever you want.' What would you say? What would you ask for? It's an interesting question that can very quickly reveal what we truly treasure in our hearts – if we could have whatever we want.

Well, here's what Solomon asked for – verse 6 -

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. (That's the Davidic covenant at work).

7 "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.

8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

9 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 considers who he is and the great responsibility that God has given to him as Israel's king, and he asks very wisely for God's help in ruling his people. See, Israel is not just Solomon's people – Israel is GOD's people – a chosen nation – treasured by God – it's going to take real wisdom to govern God's people on His behalf. And so Solomon prays – 'give me wisdom. Give me a discerning heart to distinguish right from wrong.'

That's a good prayer. That's a good ask. And it's not just me that says that -

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

And God said to him – since you have valued wisdom over long life and wealth and vengeance, I will do as you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart and I will make you great, so that you will be great.

And then He continues – what’s more, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honour – so that in your lifetime, you will have no equal among kings. In a sense, this is the OT version of ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you’ – Solomon has put God’s values first by asking for wisdom, and God gives him that, plus all those other things. As long as he continues to seek first God’s Kingdom – walking in God’s way.

~~11 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,~~

~~12 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.~~

~~13 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.~~

~~14 And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life" (1Ki 3:5-14 NIV).~~

~~15 Then Solomon awoke--and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, 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. (1Ki 3:15 NIV).~~ He went back to Jerusalem and worshiped the LORD.

And indeed, the LORD made him wise. You see that illustrated in the story with the two mothers and the baby – God gave Solomon incredible wisdom to deal with that incredibly sensitive and incredibly complicated situation. And 1 Kings 4 gives us a good summary of Solomon’s wisdom – 1 Kings 4:29 –

29 God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. (1Ki 4:29 NIV). 30 Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. (1Ki 4:30 NIV).

God made Solomon a very wise man.

But here’s the thing – for a wise man, Solomon did some pretty foolish things. For a wise man, Solomon made some pretty bad decisions. And the way the book of Kings is written pushes us to ask – ‘sure, Solomon was wise, but what did Solomon do with that wisdom? What did Solomon do with the wisdom that God had already written down in His word?’

Turn over now to Deuteronomy 17 and I’ll show you what I mean. Imagine now that you are all teachers and it’s coming up on report card time and I want to give you the rubric for marking. I remember when I was teaching at Laurier, the students always wanted to know – what specifically am I being marked on? What standards do I need to meet? Well Deuteronomy 17 is the standard for Israelite kings. Deuteronomy 17 tells us what a wise king looks like. Verse 14 -

14 When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,"

15 be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite.

Ok, so Solomon passes on that.

Verse 16 -

16 The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again."

So – one – no accumulation of horses – why? – Because next to Goliath – horses and the chariots they pull are the tanks of their day. If you're trusting in horses for military strength, you're not trusting in the LORD.

So – one – no great numbers of horses. Two -

17 He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.

I mean, on one level, there is a marriage and holiness angle on this – God intends marriage to be one man and one woman and sexual union between them only – but at this point in history, marriages are often used to tie nations together. And if a king is bringing in foreign wives, they're bringing in their foreign gods. And as they pillow talk with the king, they're apt to lead the king away from God. So, two, no accumulation of wives. Three -

He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

The more of that you have, the less likely you are to rely on YHWH, so third standard here – no accumulation of wealth.

Moreover, verse 18 – when he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write out for himself a copy of God's Word, so that he will read it daily and take it in and make it a part of his everyday living – because wisdom is not just situational flashes of insight; wisdom is also abiding by the Word that God has already set out.

~~18 When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.~~

~~19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees~~

~~20 and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.~~

So that's what a wise king looks like, according to God's Word - no accumulation of horses... of wives... of wealth. Let's see how Solomon fares as a wise, law-abiding king of Israel. Got your marking pens ready?

Turn to 1 Kings 10, starting at verse 14.

14 The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, (that's 25 tonnes of gold)
15 not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land. [He had SO much money that...]

16 King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold (because what do you do when you have more gold than you know what to do with? You stretch it out to make decorative shields for your palace); ~~six hundred bekas of gold went into each shield.~~

~~17 He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.~~

18 Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.

19 The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them.

20 Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom.

21 All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days.

~~22 The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons.~~

23 King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth (1Ki 10:14-23 NIV).

Well, teachers, what do you think? How wise is Solomon here? No accumulation of wealth – he had so much gold that other precious metals were considered worthless. Now that being said – some of it was the blessing of God to be grateful for – some of it he used for the benefit of his people and historically speaking, Solomon's reign was literally a 'golden age' for Israel – people had it pretty well those days – what do you think? Do we give him a passing grade on this one? I'm willing to give him a pass.

Well, let's keep going – verse 26 –

26 Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills.

28 Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue--the royal merchants purchased them from Kue.

29 They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans. (1Ki 10:26-29 NIV).

Well, what do you think? Is Solomon acting wisely here? Is he accumulating chariots and horses, such that he will rely on his own might rather than God's? It sure looks like it to me. He's even going back to Egypt to get them – to the one place Deuteronomy 17 said not to go to get horses? So, what should we give him here?

Now, chapter 11 – and this is where things get really messy.

1 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter – wait – besides Pharaoh's daughter? What's that all about? Well, if you look back to chapter 3, just a few verses before Solomon asked God for wisdom, the narrator tells us that NIV 1 Kings 3:1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. ... So he's made an alliance with Egypt, where

they're not supposed to go back to – he has taken a foreign princess and by extension a foreign god into his house – and I guess that was not enough, because he also took wives from (back to chapter 11) the --Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites.

2 They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.

3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

5 He followed Ashtoreth the [fertility] goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites – he was a god who demanded child sacrifice...

10 Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command.

~~11 So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.~~

~~12 Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.~~

~~(1Ki 11:1-12 NIV).~~

So, what do you think? Is Solomon a wise man?

Certainly, God gave him insight in various circumstances to solve some very difficult problems – but did Solomon put that wisdom to work in his own life? No. He had wisdom but acted foolishly. And did Solomon actively apply the wisdom laid out in God's Word? No, he straight up ignored it.

Warren Wiersbe writes –

Solomon had wisdom for everybody else but would not apply it to himself (Rom. 2:21–24). The man who wrote Proverbs 4:23 [Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.] did not obey it. The king was required to write a personal copy of Deuteronomy and study it (Deut. 17:18–20), so surely Solomon knew Deuteronomy 7:1–11; 17:17. It is one thing to know the Word but quite another thing to do it (James 1:22–25).

And really, this is the lesson that Solomon teaches us. It's not enough to be smart. You need to be wise – in God's eyes – AND to act wisely. We need to seek wisdom and act wisely. Let me unpack that.

First, we need to seek wisdom.

It takes wisdom to make good decisions in this world, doesn't it? To know right from wrong; to parent fairly; to know when to keep your licence and when to give it up. These are all things that require wisdom and discernment. Some of them are moral decisions; some are just decisions that have to be made. And while there is lots of wisdom to be had in the world, it doesn't always line up with God's wisdom.

And so we need to seek God's wisdom. We need to ask, along with Solomon, that God would give us discerning hearts – hearts that can see the world from His point of view and incorporate His values in our decision making. The apostle James says over in the NT "5 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." When we ask God for insight and wait on Him, He will show us the way and eventually give us peace about that decision.

But God doesn't just give circumstantial insight; He has already recorded the breadth of His measureless wisdom in His Word. The Bible is God's repository of wisdom and we need to dig into it ourselves, to see what He has already said about our situation. We don't need to remake the wheel every time; God has already recorded His wisdom for us in His Word and we become wise when we allow the Bible to shape our thinking.

So one, through prayer and Bible study – we need to seek wisdom. But two, we also need to live wisely.

Not only that though – not only to do seek wisdom, we also need to live wisely.

Right? That was Solomon's great failing. He knew what was right but didn't do it. And we're not that different from him – we sometimes know what we should do but struggle to do it. We need to embrace God's wisdom – but we also need to apply that wisdom in our lives.

Again, the apostle James says in James 1 - 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, sees a big ole chunk of spinach stuck and his teeth, and goes away and does nothing about it.

~~24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
(Jam 1:22-24 NIV).~~

We need to seek wisdom in prayer and in God's Word and we need to apply it, in our lives. Simply knowing that we should forgive others is not enough; we need to be willing to forgive. Simply knowing that you should be humble is pointless, unless you are looking to the interests of others and not just your own.

Seek wisdom; act wisely.

How do you do that? Well, look, I just really want to encourage you to make Bible reading a part of your everyday – or at least almost everyday – routine. That's the only way that we will become wise in God's wise – to personally, intentionally take in what God has already said. If I can help you with that – set you up with a reading plan or something – I would love to. The greatest compliment that you can give me is for me to show up at your house for a visit – and you pull out your Bible and say – 'pastor, look what the Lord has taught.' I mean, that's wisdom.

And I think it's really significant that when Jesus came to earth, it was said of Him that one greater than Solomon had arrived. Think how rich and powerful Solomon was; how wise and insightful he was – our Saviour, our leader, our Lord Jesus is greater than Him. As we follow Jesus as His disciples, go where He would go, do what He would do – He makes us wise and help us to apply that wisdom.

Seek wisdom; act wisely.

Now, there is one more little point that I want to make that is especially relevant at this church – and it's the importance of finishing well. At a younger church, they're just not really thinking about that, but we're a congregation that's growing older. And Solomon's life teaches us the importance of finishing well.

At the beginning of his life, Solomon depended on God. Think back to his prayer in chapter 3 – who am I to lead these people – I am but a child – I need Your help Lord; Solomon clearly started off relying on God for all things. But by the end of his life, it appears that he felt real need for the Lord. His money, his power, his wives, his reputation, his political clout – all of those things took his eyes off of God. Now I don't think that there's anybody here really in that boat, but we would all do well to realize that faith is a lifelong endeavour. And when we stick with it – through our 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's – we will one day hear God say 'well done good and faithful servant. You have relied on me, you have received my grace, you have lived in light of it – enter into my rest forever.'

That's the ultimate goal is wisdom. Not wisdom for its own sake, but wisdom that leads us to God that deepens our relationship with Him. Seek wisdom, act wisely and walk with God into eternity.

BENEDICTION

1 Cor. 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.