

In Nomine Iesu

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Text: 1 Kings 3:4-13

Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that *was* the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"⁶ And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day."⁷ "Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I *am* 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 numerous to be numbered or counted."⁹ "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"¹⁰ The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.¹¹ Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice,"¹² "behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you."¹³ "And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

The Holy Scriptures are filled with examples for us of things that were unwise and things that were wise. The list for both is very long. But I want to give you just a few examples of each as we look at this text about Solomon and his request for an understanding heart, for wisdom.

Eve listened to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Cain gave in to his hatred for his brother. The children of Israel complained about God's care for them and doubted that He would keep His promises. David thought he could hide his sin of adultery from God by murdering the husband of the woman with whom he sinned. Ahab and Jezebel thought they could safely and without consequence introduce and promote the false gods of Phoenicia into the promised land of Israel. Judas thought he could take money for betraying Jesus without suffering remorse. These are some of the examples of unwise thoughts and actions we find

in the Bible. They are unwise because they are actions that demonstrate unbelief, or at least strong doubt, about the truth of God's existence, His promises, His power, His justice.

In contrast to these unwise works, there are examples of wisdom in Scripture, too. By faith Abel sacrificed to the Lord. Joseph trusted God's promises for him even though he went through slavery and imprisonment. Moses led God's people despite the worldly power in the form of mighty Egypt arrayed against him. Both kings Josiah and Hezekiah heard the Word of the Lord and took action to reform the kingdom of Judah, to cleanse it of the idolatry that had grown like weeds, to return to the promises of the Lord God. Martha, at the death of her brother Lazarus, still confessed her faith in Jesus and her trust in the promise of resurrection at the last day. The centurion with a servant near death needed only the Word of Jesus to believe that his servant would live. Wisdom is shown to be trusting in God's Word and living in such a way that the Word impacts your life, your decisions, your actions, your thoughts, your speech.

Solomon stood at the threshold of the burden of the office of king of Israel. His father David had died, leaving Solomon as the anointed one of the Lord. Following David would not be easy. David was a great leader, a writer of some of the most beloved poetry in Scripture, a man with his faults, certainly, but finally also a man who knew his sins, confessed them, and was absolved. Now Solomon hopes to begin his reign by trusting in the Lord as his father had done. Solomon knows that he is king due to the mercy of God, and through no merit of his own. He makes no demands from God, but speaks in humility when the Lord says: "Ask! What shall I give you?"

The Lord is ready to give Solomon whatever he wants. And it is instructive to see just what Solomon requests.

"Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I *am* 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 numerous to be numbered or counted.⁹ "Therefore

give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.

Solomon asks for what he believes will help him be a faithful and good ruler of Israel. He is not thinking about himself, but he is thinking about the needs of the people. He is beginning to understand the burden of authority and leadership, and he prays that God will give him the gift of an understanding heart in order to rule fairly and justly. He wants to be able to discern between good and evil.

Solomon's request pleases God. It pleases God because God sees in Solomon someone who is putting others first and not himself. As the Lord would say to Solomon, you could have asked for so many other things, things that would be good for yourself, but instead you asked for what would be best for your people. So God allows Solomon also the things that he did not ask for: riches and honor.

Notice here that when Solomon does make his request, he does not just ask for a little thing, he asks for something that is quite profound and difficult. Yet Solomon is asking this of God, the Creator of all things, the One who is all knowing and all powerful. So Solomon's petition is not insignificant – that would be insulting to God. God says 'ask,' and Solomon is trusting enough to do just that.

We are given an example of the Solomon's gift of wisdom later in this 3rd chapter of 1 Kings. There we are told about how Solomon must choose between two women, each of whom had a baby, but one had died accidentally in the night. Now both women claim that the surviving baby is her own. Solomon must determine which of the two women is the real mother.

²³ And the king said, "The one says, 'This *is* my son, who lives, and your son *is* the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! But your son *is* the dead one, and my son *is* the living one.'" ²⁴ Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵ And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other." ²⁶ Then the woman whose son *was* living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no

means kill him!" But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, *but divide him.*"²⁷ So the king answered and said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she *is* his mother."²⁸ And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God *was* in him to administer justice.

Solomon was able to show the difference between the evil intentions of the one mother as opposed to the good intentions of the other. Such discernment was a gift from God, a gift which Solomon used, as shown here, for the good of the people he served.

Solomon begins his reign by hearing the Word of the Lord, sacrificing to Him, praying to Him and receiving God's good gifts. When we consider our own lives in the light of this text in 1 Kings it is helpful to see this in the light of the words of Psalm 111: "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom." In the very first commandment we explain that to have no other gods is to "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." The beginning of wisdom is to see and know and believe in the true God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This God is not some casual part of your life. This God is the One who gives you your life, who gives everything, "all that you need for this body and life." To trust and fear this God is to have the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of seeing just what life truly is, life in this world of sin, living as those forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

With this beginning of wisdom you grow in thinking with wisdom, speaking with wisdom, and acting with wisdom. This wisdom of the knowledge of the true God is not something you will get from nature. You will not get it from other religions that claim your passions and your soul. You will not get it from the morality or ethics of this country – for there you will find only the foolishness that another psalm summarizes in this way: "the fool says in his heart there is no god."

This wisdom of fearing God is a wisdom we need, a wisdom that puts our lives in proper order, that sees as Solomon did that our own wants and desires

are to be subordinate to the needs of others, the needs of our own vocations where we strive to love others as God in Christ has love us. This wisdom of God is seen as foolishness and a stumbling block to the world, for it cannot see or trust in Christ. And finally this wisdom of God is all about Christ, about His work of saving us from sin, by dying on the cross. 1 Corinthians makes it clear that “Christ crucified” is the wisdom of God which the understanding of the world, the understanding of sin-darkened minds and souls cannot comprehend. It is only by the gift of faith, given by the Holy Spirit that such wisdom is received, and it is brought to us only through the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

Like Solomon we can often see ourselves as no more than little children who know neither how to go out or how to come in. Our sins bring a lost-ness to our lives, yet it is for the lost that our Savior came: to seek and save, to find and to bring home, the lost: you, and me, and all who have wandered from God. God grant us wisdom, the fear of God, the trust to pray for what we need, and the faith to believe the promises of God – the promises of forgiveness and life, promises He means for all of you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.