

Date: August 16, 2009

Title: Wisdom: A Gift to Be Used Wisely

Scripture: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

1 Kings 2:10-12 (NLT) ¹⁰ Then David died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. ¹¹ David had reigned over Israel for forty years, seven of them in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. ¹² Solomon became king and sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

1 Kings 3:3-14 (NLT) ³ Solomon loved the Lord and followed all the decrees of his father, David, except that Solomon, too, offered sacrifices and burned incense at the local places of worship. ⁴ The most important of these places of worship was at Gibeon, so the king went there and sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings. ⁵ That night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!” ⁶ Solomon replied, “You showed faithful love to your servant my father, David, because he was honest and true and faithful to you. And you have continued your faithful love to him today by giving him a son to sit on his throne. ⁷ “Now, O Lord my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn’t know his way around. ⁸ And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! ⁹ Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?” ¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. ¹¹ So God replied, “Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies— ¹² I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! ¹³ And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! ¹⁴ And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life.”

Today, I am continuing to look at the early days of the Hebrew Kingdom as it developed about a thousand years before Jesus was born. Last week I was talking about King David and how David was a man after God’s own heart. Unfortunately, his son Solomon followed in his father’s footsteps for a while, but then he lost his way and pretty much everything fell apart.

One way to look at this story is to think of it as just an old story about a man who was king of a country just under 3,000 years ago. We can be tempted to pass over a lot of the stories in the Bible because they don’t seem to relate directly to our experience of life. We don’t have kings in our country. None of us have been called to lead “a nation so great and numerous they

cannot be counted.” Most of us live what we would call a modest life and the stories of King Solomon might seem like nothing more than ancient episodes of that old TV show, “Lifestyles of the rich and famous.”

But I think if we will look a little closer, we will see that all the stories in the Bible have a message to tell us. Actually, many of the stories have multiple messages for us. So, lets look a little closer at this ancient story to see if there might anything that we can learn and relate to our own lives.

The first verse of our scripture just gives us a little background. This is simply letting us know that David has died and his young son, Solomon has taken over a kingdom that is ‘firmly established.’ In other words, Solomon doesn’t have to straighten out any major messes, he doesn’t have any major wars to fight; he simply has to pick up where his father left off.

Solomon is not sure how to proceed but the scripture says he loved the lord and followed all the decrees of his father. He did this for a while, but it didn’t seem to last.

The night after a very large show of devotion, (1000 burnt offerings in a prominent place of worship) God came to Solomon in a dream and offered to give Solomon what ever he wanted. God actually says to Solomon, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you.” This sounds a little bit like the movie Aladdin to me; sort of like Solomon found a lamp and started rubbing the lamp and a Genie appeared and offered to grant him what ever he wanted. This is not the way I typically think of God, but it looks as though this young man asked for the right thing because he did not ask for a selfish or earthly gift, he asked for an understanding heart; he asked for wisdom. And God promised to give Solomon wisdom. And because he did not ask for a selfish or earthly gift, God promised to give this young king fame and fortune on top of the wisdom.

And, so that is exactly what happened. God gave Solomon wisdom and fame and fortune. Several other places later in this chapter and in other places in the Bible we read of Solomon’s legendary wisdom:

- **1 Kings 4:29 (NLT)** God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore.
- **1 Kings 5:12 (NLT)** So the Lord gave wisdom to Solomon, just as he had promised. And Hiram and Solomon made a formal alliance of peace.

- **1 Kings 10:23-24 (NLT)** ²³ So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king on earth. ²⁴ People from every nation came to consult him and to hear the wisdom God had given him.
- **1 Kings 11:1-3 (NLT)** ¹ Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. ² The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, 'You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.' Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. ³ He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord.

Now, we might think that someone who is wiser and eventually richer than any other king on earth would have it made. I mean you might think that with that kind of wisdom a man would be able to have a life that you and I could only wish we had. I mean, this guy is smart, he's rich, he's famous, he's got money, he's got respect, he's got women. But listen to what Solomon said about all of this in the book of Ecclesiastes. This is King Solomon, later in life reflecting upon his own life:

- **Ecclesiastes 1:16-17 (NLT)** ¹⁶ I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them." ¹⁷ So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind.
- **Ecclesiastes 2:8-11 (NLT)** ⁸ I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire! ⁹ So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. ¹⁰ Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. ¹¹ But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.

"Nothing really worthwhile anywhere." The wisest, richest king in the entire world is reflecting upon his life and realizing that he has used his wisdom unwisely. He has worked hard to acquire all that the world has to offer and still he is unhappy. This man who started out trying to walk in his father's footsteps got miserably sidetracked and ended up using the gifts that God gave to him for personal gain. Somehow, even with more wisdom than any other human, Solomon lost sight of the real reason he was put on the

throne of David – to glorify God. He had all this wisdom and power and instead of using these gifts for God's mercy and justice, Solomon used them to increase his own wealth, power, and prestige; he essentially had it all and still he lost his way.

Solomon started out strong. He built the temple of God, alright, and it was magnificent, but then, as he began to become more and more successful, he began to use his gifts for purposes that were not carrying on the work of his father, but rather making his own life look grander. He began to establish many foreign relations and much of this involved marrying a princess or a daughter of an influential man. And, of course when you have 700 wives and 300 girlfriends you have to have a pretty big house, so he built a palace that ended up being more majestic than the temple he had built for God.

And you can understand that when the people from all over the world come to ask you what you think about a subject, it might go to your head. After a while you might just begin to think that you are pretty darned important. I mean, if everything you touched turned to money, and other wealthy people admired your abilities, do you think that you might tend to forget that the reason you have all you have is not because you are so very important, but because you are blessed.

Does that ever happen to you? Do you ever forget that you have what you have because God has given you gifts? I know I sure do. We live in the richest country the world has ever seen. Our economic and educational system allows for anyone to take the gifts of God and use them however they see fit. Now, I know that this is an exaggeration, but being born in America is almost like God saying, "*What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!*" I know that it is not nearly that simple, but just because we live in a country that affords extreme liberty coupled with a incomparable access to the world's resources, we can do just about anything we want to do. I know that is changing and as I said before, it is not really that simple, but the reality is that God has given you and me some pretty awesome gifts and amazing opportunities in life. And, like Solomon, we have received these gifts, not because we deserve them, or because we are more important than people living in other parts of the world, but because we were born where and when we were born.

And, like King Solomon, the temptation is always there before us to use the gifts for our own personal gratification and comfort. We can easily begin to believe that we deserve what we have because we worked so hard to get it.

But we can take a warning from King Solomon who realized later in his life that chasing after wealth and power and prestige are all like chasing the wind. Listen to the way Eugene Peterson expresses this in “The Message.” This is the end of Chapter 5 of Ecclesiastes:

*After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, **the now**. It's useless to brood over how long we might live.*

Then, he continues in chapter 11:

Don't hoard your goods; spread them around. Be a blessing to other. This could be your last night. When the clouds are full of water, it rains. When the wind blows down a tree, it lies where it falls. Don't sit there watching the wind. Do your own work. Don't stare at the clouds. Get on with your own life.

This strikes me as very similar to the message we will be studying in just a few weeks, as we look at our ‘Live Like You Were Dying’ campaign and sermon series.

God gave King Solomon the gift of wisdom, and ironically, he didn't use it wisely. This sounds funny doesn't it? But God has given us gifts as well and our challenge, with God's help is to see if we can do a little better.

The bottom line is we have to remember that all of life is a gift **from** God and if we are going to get the most out of our lives, we have to live that life **for** God. Anything else is, as Solomon said, simply chasing the wind; meaningless activity that in the end leaves us empty and cold. I don't think there's any wisdom in that, do you? Amen.