

Watch The Throne: *The Heart of Wisdom*
1 Kings 3:1-28

It's good to be with you guys this evening, do me a courtesy and turn in your Bible to the book of 1 Kings 3 and we'll spend our time largely in the first 15 or so verses. You'll recall that we are in the book of 1 Kings talking specifically about the life of Solomon. It occurs to me that even if you're here this evening and aren't a Christian you've heard something about Solomon. That he is a figure within the biblical story that is significant. And if I were to ask you to describe one thing that would have been a distinguishing feature of Solomon...well most people would say that it was his wisdom.

-This is one of his defining features, you know we don't really know how Solomon looked, or what his favorite food was, or what color looked best on him, but of this we are certain, Solomon was wise.

Of course wisdom looks different to different people and cultures. In a scientific era we identify wisdom with the ability to compute formulas and to accomplish feats of engineering, that's certainly of value and insight. In the middle ages it was seen as looking a bit different, and in ancient times it was different still. For ancient people wisdom could best be defined as, "Skill in the art of living."

-Say what you will about his theology, John Calvin really gets this right in the beginning of his, "Institutes" when he says that all of our wisdom comes down to but 2 issues, "What we know of God and of ourselves."

-That is, "Who is God, what is he like? And who am I, how should I live?"

How we live isn't a simple question, bound up in it questions about what is just? What is right? What is good? Who is God? Who am I?

Tonight we see Solomon's great prayer for wisdom and how it works itself out in his life.

Marriage to Pharaoh's Daughter, Worship in High Places: Our text, however, doesn't begin with wisdom, but it instead begins with a wedding. We're told that Solomon has made a marriage alliance with

Pharaoh, which means that Solomon has married one of Pharaoh's daughters. Now there's some debate here about whether that was or wasn't a good thing in Solomon's life. But the general consensus is that this was a bad idea.

The problem is not that these people are foreign, but it is the fact that there's no indication that she ever renounces the gods of Egypt. But there's a deeper problem when you think about what David's hope for Solomon was. Namely that he would be a second Joshua.

-Along with Moses Joshua led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land. But now, Solomon, as a second Joshua is leading people back into being bound to Egypt

We're also told that the people and later on that Solomon himself worships in the high places. We don't quite know what these are, but they seem to be altars built on the mountains, and they may even be left over from Canaan's pagan past. It seems that Israel had sort of, re-appropriated them to use in the worship of the one true God. You'll see as we go on in the book of Kings that the faithfulness of each king to come is directly related to whether they tear down the high places.

-There's some debate here about whether Solomon was sinning, was this acceptable because the temple hadn't been built or is this still an error on his part?

But we're also told something unique about Solomon that is not mentioned about anyone else in scripture, "Solomon loved the Lord." This phrase is used of nobody else in the Old Testament. It is commanded of the people of God, but Solomon is the only one of whom it is said, "he loved the Lord."

-What's going on here? Solomon is like all of us, even at our best we are a mixture of loves. Our affections are divided. We love the Lord, and yet we are constantly drawn towards other loves.

But there is a symbiotic relationship between the things that we do and the things that we love. They feed off of one another, some things which we never would have loved have come to grip our heart through familiarity and repetition. Perhaps you are in a romantic relationship that began as a really long and rich friendship. And over the course of months, and weeks, and years they were simply there.

-I can tell you that for the first 24 years of my life I absolutely hated coffee. I found it repulsive. But I decided to just try and drink a cup a day to see if it would help me with staying productive at work. Now I drink gallons, and while, "Love" is maybe not the right word for how I feel about it, "hate" doesn't quite work either.

"Solomon loved the Lord" was a true statement, but Solomon took for himself hundreds of foreign wives who worshiped hundreds of foreign Gods. Day by day, year by year, that changes him, to where by chapter 11 it is no longer said, "Solomon loves the Lord" but, "Solomon loved many foreign women."

This man who built the temple of the Lord is now building high places to gods who demand child sacrifice. So it will be with you if you are not careful of what loves you let shape you.

How different Solomon's greater son will be, Christ who's bride the church is made up not just of the daughters of Egypt, but of people from every tribe and tongue and nation. Yet rather than being led astray by her, he makes her holy, rather than being drawn to lesser loves, he teaches her to love truly.

A Faithful God: So Solomon goes to one of the high places to offer an exorbitant number of sacrifices. This may well be him going before the Lord to ask for success in his leadership as king. This could be some sort of a coronation prayer. But none the less, he goes to the high place of Gibeon, and it's there that he encounters the Lord in a dream.

-Now a word about this, because we've got people coming from all sorts of backgrounds in here. The Bible is a book that spans the course of human history, and it documents maybe 10-15 instances of this happening.

-Those numbers don't stack the odds in your favor that God is going to speak to you in a dream. I'm not saying it can't happen, I'm just saying it doesn't happen very often in the framework of the Bible so I wouldn't expect it in your life.

Yet he does so with Solomon, and as Solomon begins his rule he is given a coronation present from the true king of Israel: God says, "I'll give you whatever you want."

Solomon's approach begins by him recounting the faithfulness of God. He talks about the fact that God has made good on his promises. The fact that he has been faithful to David, in his approach to God he is almost reminding himself of who this God is.

I wonder if this is not lacking in our own approach to God? How often do we come to God with flippant prayers that fail to recognize the faithful one whom we are approaching. I wonder if our prayers aren't somehow more tame because of it? The Jewish people often referred to the Lord as, "The God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob." and that wasn't just a helpful way of remembering who he is.

They were in some subtle way reminding themselves of what he was like: He was the God who had been with Abraham as he left his homeland. He was the God who had spared Issac. He was the God who had blessed Jacob. The God of the Exodus, the God who had silenced the mouth of Pharaoh, the God who spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. This is the God who I am approaching.

On the other side of the cross how much more faithful do we know him to be? He is the God of the virgin birth, the God of the cross, the God of the empty tomb.

A Plea for Wisdom: Finally Solomon gets to his request, "You have tasked me with leading this people and I am a child" that's not to say that Solomon is truly a child, he's old enough to have children and be married, but he is showing his humility. So then he asks, "Give me wisdom, so I can discern good and evil and lead your people well."

There's a few startling things about this passage. The first is that it is a selfless request. Solomon doesn't ask for money, or power, he asks for the wisdom necessary to lead God's people. This is what God delights in, because Solomon is finally understanding the call that is placed on all the people of God, "We are blessed to be a blessing."

-This is true in our own lives as well, whatever gifts God may have given you were not meant to terminate on your own happiness but instead to serve the people of God and the world.

Finally, Solomon asks for the wisdom to discern good from evil. Again, there is an echo of Eden, because the knowledge from the tree of good and evil is exactly what Adam reached out to take. He takes it so that he can be like God, it is wisdom for the sake of his own pride. Wisdom for the sake of arrogance.

-Solomon instead asks the Lord for wisdom for the sake of the people of God.

You know I had a conversation with a friend in seminary awhile back. He talked about a season of difficulty and doubt that he had gone through, just wondering how he could really come to know the truth. So we talked a bit about that season, and then he explained to me that the turning point for him was when he came to a realization, *“Truth isn’t just an abstract idea out there. It’s not just a concept, truth is a person.”*

That’s true of all virtues and noble characteristics. Love is not simply an ideal, but a man, kindness is not simply a character trait but has a name, wisdom is not simply the firing of neurons but it is a man. Solomon asks God for wisdom, but Jesus is the very wisdom of God incarnate.

If wisdom is skill in the art of living, then we will ultimately find wisdom for our own lives in the only one who has ever been fully human, the only one who has truly ever lived, and the only one in whom there is life and life in abundance.