

1 Kings 3:4-28

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Or am I going to stop and ask myself, what does God want me to have? It's a really challenging question.

How would you answer that question personally, but also how would you answer that question as a congregation this evening?

[3 : 22] Because remember, you are God's people. God is in a covenant relationship with you. He loves this congregation.

He loves Bon Accord, just like he loved Israel and just like he loved Solomon. So if he were to ask you, if he were to give you that same invitation, what would you say in response?

You think, well, this is a hypothetical question. Is it? Is it a hypothetical question? It's not really, because what's the difference between Solomon asking God for anything and what Jesus said to his disciples?

You can ask anything in my name, and I will give it to you. That's what Jesus said to his disciples. There's no difference.

The problem with prayer is our prayers are not big enough. They're not bold enough. They're not daring enough. When we pray, we tend to pray for all the safe stuff, don't we?

[4 : 31] Lord, bless me. What does that mean? Lord, keep me. Lord, protect me. Lord, guide me. All of these things, of course, are using safe language to keep God within our limits.

But God can do exceeding, abundant, beyond what we can ask or even think. How safe are your prayers this evening?

Or how dangerous are your prayers this evening? So what would you ask God for at the beginning of this vacancy in Bon Accord?

We've just established a vacancy committee. We're going to really give serious thought now to the future ministry in this congregation. How would you answer?

What were you asking for tonight in your prayer? Lord, give me my favorite preacher. That's probably what you're asking when it comes down to it, if you're really honest.

[5 : 34] I know who my favorite preacher is. That's who I want. That's not big enough. That's tiny. What we should be asking tonight is something along the lines, I want Bon Accord to grow beyond my wildest expectation.

I want God to work in people's hearts through the ministry of Bon Accord, which does it's not confined to the ministry of the person in the pulpit, but it's the ministry of the whole congregation as you witness for Jesus and as you shine the light of the gospel in Aberdeen.

Are you asking that God will somehow in his own mysterious power reach people and reach into their hearts and draw them to him through the ministry of this congregation, whoever is in the pulpit?

Now that's a big prayer. But it is also a dangerous one. It is a prayer that will take you where you perhaps don't expect to go, just like this took Solomon where he did not expect to go.

Solomon, of course, could have asked for all kinds of selfish things. He could have asked for his own personal happiness or his own personal success, but he chose to put all that aside because he recognized that this was God who was challenging him with this question.

[7 : 11] So he has to put God first, which is what I hope all of us do. And if it's God that's asking the question, then we're not going to answer a selfish answer.

We're going to ask, well, what does God want for me? Now we're getting it right because God knows what is best. We don't know what's best for ourselves.

We don't even know what's going to make us happy. The things that we think are going to make us happy actually don't turn out to make us happy at all. So we should be responding by God saying, Lord, give me what you want me to have.

And that's what Solomon recognized. He recognized that he wasn't really qualified to be a king over Israel. He just felt so tiny compared to the task that God had given him to do.

So he asked for the one thing that he needed. He needed the wisdom, the discernment, to be able to make right decisions, right decisions that glorified God and that God would be pleased with.

[8 : 15] What is wisdom? It's a really interesting question, isn't it? Wisdom.

We all know that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. What does that mean? Does it mean common sense? Does it mean that he had experience? Is it some kind of mystical quality that you acquire through meditation or some other kind of strange practice that you acquire some kind of hidden knowledge?

It means nothing like that. Wisdom is not just knowledge in itself in the sense of knowing facts.

It's not about intelligence. It's not about your IQ or your level of academic attainment. It's not about how much you know about a particular subject. Neither is it about obeying moral commands or rules.

Wisdom, I heard someone saying recently, is this. It's the ability to do what is good and right when there are no rules telling you what to do.

[9 : 31] Let me say that again. Wisdom is the ability to do what is good and right when there are no rules telling you to do. And you know that much of life is taken up with situations, challenges, events, where there's nothing telling you, well, this is the right course of action and that's the right wrong course of action.

Now, of course, there are situations in life where there's clearly a right way and a wrong way, but actually, there are very few of these. The vast majority of challenges in life, you don't have anything written down to tell you this is what you must do at this particular moment.

Do I take this job or that job? The Bible doesn't tell you. Do I live in this house or that house? Do I live in this town or that town? The Bible doesn't tell you.

Do I marry this person or do I not get married at all or do I go out with this person or whatever when the Bible doesn't say anything?

There's no clear black and white direction given. That's where we need wisdom. To know how to bring together all of the Bible's teaching and to apply it in the individual decisions and daily choices and the attitudes and the responses that we make on a regular basis.

[11 : 03] Wisdom is insight so that we can see the truth beyond appearances. It's discernment, knowing what the dangers of any given situation are.

Wisdom is prudence to carefully weigh up all the options in the light of what we know. It's discretion to determine what's best and to act wisely.

Wisdom is that specific human quality in which we're able to approach every situation with tact and with patience and with knowledge and with understanding and with diplomacy and above all, prayerful, biblical godliness.

I hope that by this stage every one of us is recognizing that we don't have much of it, including me, and that we're asking God that in whatever lies in front of us in the next few days, if that's God's will, that we will be given that quality to be able to face.

We're not talking about common sense. We're talking about a wisdom that comes from God and that begins with the fear of the Lord.

[12 : 24] It involves dealing with people. It involves patience. It involves anger management, diplomacy. It involves listening to people and not putting ourselves first.

It involves a knowledge of the Bible in which we bring it all together and that we put it together with our experience of living the Christian life. It doesn't come overnight. That's why wisdom is found with often long years and sometimes painful years of experience, sometimes even learning from getting it wrong.

So that's what Solomon prayed for and obviously his prayer was the right thing. It was pleasing in God's sight but it took him to places that he never imagined and very quickly he was faced with this celebrated situation, this legendary and I don't mean that I don't believe it.

Of course it happened. This is an actual fact but it is, it has become the stuff of Israelite history that Solomon acted in an extraordinary manner towards these two women who came to him very quickly into his reign.

I want us to think about the narrative that describes how these two women who were evidently prostitutes, who had babies, one of them died during the night, the other one tried to swap the live one for the dead one and they came to, and the one whose baby was alive but had been taken, replaced by the dead baby, they both came to Solomon and they asked him to make a decision as to which baby was the right one.

[14 : 15] It's an impossible situation. Here's the answer to his prayer. Perhaps not the answer that he expected but it's an answer nonetheless. How in the world is he going to be able to discern in the right possible way?

Well, you know the story. Let me just give you some things that strike me about this story and in these I hope that we will see beyond Solomon.

By all means we'll see the wisdom and the prudence of Solomon but I hope we'll be able to see beyond Solomon to where the Bible is pointing us always none less than the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want us to see that in a strange way Solomon foreshadows but not quite the life and the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want us to see the resemblance but not quite to Jesus and how he dealt with people. And I want us to see that while Solomon came to this amazing conclusion in the most dramatic fashion yet he wasn't quite there.

[15 : 37] That in order for the real problem behind this chapter to be solved you needed a greater than Solomon. So that's where I want to go this evening in the last 10-15 minutes or so.

Some things that strike me about this passage the first thing that strikes me is the willingness that the king had to give these women the time of day. Strikes me this is the king and here are two ordinary people living on the fringes of society and they get an audience with the king.

Now you can say what you like well Israel was a small place Jerusalem was a small city it doesn't matter the king was the king and you didn't just walk into the king's presence and yet here are these two ordinary women they're not royalty they're not nobility and they're getting an audience with the king and that can only be for one reason that's because the king was willing to meet with them to associate with ordinary people.

So in them going up to the king actually he's coming down to their level he's condescending to speak to them and to listen to their story.

But there's more to it than that it strikes me how easy it was for these women to get an audience and to get access to the king.

[17 : 09] These women were not the kind of women that you would naturally expect the king to be associating with. They were on the fringes on the margins of society.

they were prostitutes. It also strikes me how different the king's response is from what I might expect it to be.

What might I expect the king's response to be? Serves you right. What do you expect? in your profession.

Don't come to me with your problems once it's too late. That's the business that you're in. If you hadn't been so promiscuous you'd never be in this mess.

On your own head be it. You got yourselves into this. That's what I might expect Solomon in his position. Why should he have anything to do with them?

[18 : 25] But he does. And there's every indication that he is taking their story seriously. He's not dismissing them.

He's not trivializing this. This is a serious situation that he takes seriously. They're ordinary people. Why should they matter? They do matter.

You see where this is going? You see the resemblance between what Solomon is doing and what God ultimately did in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ when he condescended to the lowest of the low, to you and me in our position, and where he associated with us and took us seriously and involved himself in the lives of men and women on every level of society, not just the noble.

In fact, it was the noble people who rejected him. He was the friend of publicans and sinners, including that woman that we read about in Luke chapter 7 where the Pharisees said if Jesus knew what kind of woman this was, he wouldn't have anything to do with her.

And yet he did. These two women are a representation to me of the big picture of the Bible.

[19 : 54] The Bible talks about a whole world that is broken and miserable. A world that's gone so badly wrong. And what we do is we compartmentalize, we discriminate, we divide society into neat little categories.

So that as long as we don't belong to these categories, then we're okay and they're not and we can ignore these categories. But God didn't do that.

Because as far as God is concerned, all humanity is lost, dead in trespasses and sins, but God sent his son into the world to seek and to save by himself, coming into that world as one of us.

Besides, there's more to it than that, isn't there? We tend to write people off, don't we? But we don't give a moment's thought to the background behind the story. I wonder how these women had begun their lives.

I wonder what homes they came from. I wonder what background there was. There's always a background to everything. There's always a background. And with such a tragic situation like this, this passage, by the way, should break our hearts because it is something that replicates itself in every generation and in every society.

[21 : 24] It's a picture of the world that we live in. A world full of misery and sadness. A world that has gone its own way. And a world that has, where there is just such emptiness.

And a world in which, as well as being condemned because we have got it wrong, it's also a broken world in which there are victims as well as perpetrators.

Who knows what kind of homes these two women had come from. Who knows what kind of upbringing they had. If you'd asked them when they were 13 years old, what's your aim and your ambition in life, neither of them would have said, well, we're going to be prostitutes one day.

Because that's just not the way it works. Nobody aims. That's not a career path that you follow. I don't believe there's anyone who follows that as a career path.

Who knows what influences they came under as they were growing up. Who knows what kind of, I don't know, mistreatment that they might have had by people that were supposed to love them.

[22 : 31] I don't know. I don't know. All I know is this, that every person has a history. And we have absolutely no right to write people off.

And it strikes me that Solomon's not writing these people off, these women off. It strikes me that he deals with not just in seriousness but in loving concern.

There's something incarnational about Solomon's actions. Besides, and the more you look into this, the more intriguing it becomes, Solomon was in no position to be judging anyone with regard to illegitimate births.

Do you know anything about the history of Solomon? Do you know who his father was? Yes, you know who his father was. But do you know who his mother was? Yes, you know who his mother was. Do you know anything about how that all happened?

It's not exactly the textbook marriage as God would have planned it. It was an affair. And everybody knew the circumstances in which Solomon had been born.

[23 : 51] He knew the circumstances and it seems to me likely that he may have well been sensitive to his own life and the fact that he was in no position to be casting judgment on these poor women.

Solomon himself knew full well what lay in his own heart and that the problem of prostitution does not just lie with the women it lies with those who give the custom to them.

They are just as culpable. all. And perhaps Solomon even at that early stage in his kingship he perceived in his own heart the desperate weakness that there was for women.

How many wives did he have? Remember? 700 wives he went on to have. How many concubines he had? 1,000 concubines.

Do not tell me that that man doesn't have a weakness sexually. What's important in this is we have to recognize the root of human depravity lies in all of us.

[25 : 29] You don't have the right tonight to be saying oh well yeah you're right you're some guy eh? I mean come on. No no none of us have the right to say we have to be challenged personally as to where our sinfulness lies because every one of us has to stand before God in our own right for what we have done and what lies in our own hearts.

The one thing we cannot do is to look down on other people. None of us have the right to do that. Well the second thing that strikes me is that the patience and the seriousness with which he takes this situation and the way in which he weighs up understanding humanity.

This is a man with some experience. He doesn't rush into a rash decision when the two women bring their story to the king. It was him that wrote by the way in Proverbs chapter 18 and verse 17 the one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him.

I wonder if he had this in mind when he wrote that proverb. The one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him. We've all had that experience.

Somebody tells us something and the first thing you think is oh that's terrible isn't it? Until you hear the other side of the story. And then you have a bit more balanced perspective on it. And that's what's happening here.

[27 : 07] And that's where wisdom absolutely has to prevail. Where you have to take the two sides into consideration. You have to ask yourself how does this sit with what I know about the human race?

Solomon didn't arrive at his conclusion without having spent many years in the company of individuals or of other people. He also knew the extraordinary love of a mother.

He had an extraordinary mother. Bathsheba was an extraordinary mother. He was also, he was somehow able to perceive in a very short space of time, that if it came to a decision based on pride or love, then love would win the day.

Because real love is prepared to make sacrifices for the well-being of her child, even if it costs her. At least my son will be alive.

But real human love also reflects the love of God, because that's where it comes from. So he knows what love is, because he's experienced the love of God.

[28 : 28] And when we experience the love of God, it changes the way you look at things and the way you look at humanity. It gives you that compassion that you don't have unless you know that love of God for yourself.

So what were the options for Solomon? Well, both mothers can't be right. There is only one real mother. The other one must be lying.

That means one mother is telling the truth and truly loves her child. But the other mother is equally emphatic. No, this child is mine. No, this child is mine. Is it a bare-faced lie?

You know, I feel, you might think, well, how can this mother, how can this, the mother of the dead child, how can she be so utterly deceitful? How can she in this crucial position, because she is grieving, because she's just lost her baby, and someone who is grieving is irrational.

We need to feel desperately sorry for this mother. mother. I feel really sorry for her. She doesn't know what she's thinking, because she's at her wit's end.

[29 : 52] She's just discovered her baby has died. Here is the tragedy of humanity. Not only are we the perpetrators of sin, but we are the victims of sin.

We have to suffer the consequences of the sickness and the decay and the corruption and the misery that sin causes. I feel so sorry for this woman, even although she's lying through her teeth.

And it really impresses me that Solomon doesn't judge her. He lets them both go. Once he's given the live baby to the right mother, he lets them both go.

That really impresses me. But it's not enough, isn't it?

Is it? Because even although a decisive conclusion was reached, and the right decision was reached, the live baby was given to the right mother.

[31 : 03] Solomon had done his job. He had acted in prudence and in wisdom and out of an experience of the love of God, he had acted correctly.

Do you know the greatest tragedy of this story is that both of these mothers, they leave as they came in. They are unchanged. The problem has been solved at least in a measure.

there's another extent to which the problem remains because these women are just as needy and just as lost as ever before.

And it would take a greater than Solomon to one day come into the world to finally and decisively change the world by removing the guilt and the darkness of sin.

And you know who that person was. The person who is described by the Bible as the greater than Solomon. Because although in many senses he resembled many aspects of Solomon, he went way beyond what Solomon was able to do and he won the victory over sin and death through his death on the cross.

[32 : 41] And it was for that reason that he was able to authoritatively and decisively say to the woman in Luke chapter 7, a woman of repute, something similar to the woman who came to Solomon.

Here's another woman but the whole story is different. This time is a woman who comes and she is coming in repentance and in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ who says to her, your sin is forgiven.

God is forgiven. Now that's the solution to the real problem. And that's what the gospel is all about.

And we have that solution tonight. And as a church we are commanded to share that solution to this world around us that contains people who are just as desperate and just as miserable and just as culpable as these women were as they came to Solomon.

And so let me come back to the very beginning. How would you respond to that invitation? Ask me for whatever you want.

[34 : 17] Because if you're going to pray a big prayer, Lord, do something truly marvelous with this church. Fill the church, but not just with numbers, but with people who are repentant and people who want to come to Jesus, to discover Jesus for themselves, and to have their lives transformed by the power of the cross.

You pray that prayer, you don't know where God is going to take you in answer to that prayer.

When Solomon, he asked for wisdom, this is where God took him, to the most extraordinary, to the most awkward situation, where his wisdom is stretched to the very limit.

When we really want to bring the gospel to a lost world, we don't know where God's going to take us in pursuit of his answer to that prayer.

Are you ready for it? Are you up for it? Are you still going to pray that prayer? I hope so.

[35 : 37] Because the Christian life is one great adventure where God leads the way, and we have to trust him. But God has a great work for us to do.

And he's prepared us, and he's preparing us to continue that work, because the power is his. So let's ask that prayer.

Lord, do great things. Our Father in heaven, we pray that we might be at your disposal.

We pray, Lord, for the world around us, a world that is confused and helpless, as well as being culpable and guilty.

we pray, Lord, that your mercy will be made known to that world through each one of us here who knows you. We pray that individually and collectively that we may bear witness to the God who has saved us and has forgiven our sin.

[36 : 44] We ask that you will do great things among us. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.