

1 Kings 3

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- [0 : 0 0] Amen. Before we come together around God's Word, let's come together in prayer for a few moments.
- Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word once again. We thank you for the impact it already has made upon us and for the impact that it continues to make upon us.
- And once again, as we come round it and as we open up our eyes and our hearts to it, we pray to be submissive to your Word and to your calling and your invitation and your command.
- Our Father, we pray to learn and for your Word to have a living impact upon our every movement and our every thought. In Jesus' name, Amen.
- Turn with me then to the second part of that chapter we read, 1 Kings chapter 3 and verse 16, page 338 and verse 16.
- [0 : 5 7] Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. And so on. We're going to look at the whole of this passage together.
- I don't suppose there's a king in the whole of the Scriptures. There's a king that is more spectacular and glorious than Solomon. Even Jesus himself described Solomon in all his glory.
- And as you go on to look at his life and as you close your eyes and imagine the kind of palace and the kind of temple that he built and what it must have been like, artists have tried over the years to depict and to paint his palace and the temple that he built.
- It was quite the most remarkable reign from that point of view in all the world. The temple alone was the single most expensive building that anyone has ever built.
- Even to this day, the most expensive building in the world comes nowhere close to the cost, to the worth of the temple that he built for the Lord.
- [2 : 0 4] It really was quite an extraordinary reign. And you have to use your imagination as you read through the detail and the amount of gold that seemed to be flowing and the silver that seemed to be flowing at that time.
- In order to understand Solomon, we have to understand him as he appears in the Bible. We're not talking about just some kind of stately king. We're talking about the king over God's chosen people.
- And as such, there is a spiritual dimension to the person of Solomon. Solomon, first of all, was a king in righteousness, not simply concerned for the defeat of his enemies and for the security of his people, but he was concerned for the righteousness of the people of God.
- He was concerned that Israel would remember the Lord their God, and that's exactly what he did. But he was also a symbol. He was also a picture of a king that would one day appear, just as we saw this morning.
- The Old Testament is full of foreshadows of types of what God was going to do one day in sending Jesus to the world. And I believe that we have to bear that in mind if we are going to understand this passage as much as any other passage in the Old Testament.

[3 : 30] And I want us to look then at this chapter in terms of four things that strike me about this chapter. Three of them about the second half of the chapter and the first one about the first half.

I want us just to go through the chapter very quickly and hopefully to try and glean and try and discern some kind of useful information from it.

First of all, I want us to notice, the first thing that strikes me in this passage is the king's weakness in embryonic form. The king's weakness in embryonic form.

You find that in verses 1 and 2. Just as he's beginning his reign, and as he's confessing to God how incapable he is of this great task that he has been charged to do, you'll see two things that I believe were weaknesses that only came to fruition later on in his reign.

I believe that there are salutary warning to every person, man, woman of God that we need to watch our weaknesses. Now the two weaknesses are in verses 1 and verse 2.

[4 : 41] First of all, he made an alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and married his daughter. Now you might read through that and think nothing of it. That's the problem when a weakness is in embryonic form.

You don't think about it because it hasn't really developed yet. And to be sure, this hadn't developed at all. But as you go through the life of King Solomon, you discover that later on he ends up marrying hundreds of foreign women.

And you end up asking, well, how in the world did he manage to get into this kind of state, this kind of lifestyle and condition where he marries woman after woman after woman, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of women, and to his detriment, and to his downfall, in fact, at the end of his reign.

And it's obvious to me, in any case, that this weakness was with him way back at the very beginning when he was a young man. We have to watch our weaknesses in embryonic form.

I believe that every Christian needs to stop and needs to ask, well, in what areas of my life am I weak? Because if I don't check those areas, if I don't ask the Lord to guard my life, and if I don't focus on these specific areas in my life, they may very well develop in later life, and they may very well cause huge amounts of damage to my relationship to God and my witness as a Christian.

[6 : 14] The second weakness is found in verse 2. The fact that he had failed to get rid of the high places in Israel. Now, high places, there were all kinds of places, locations where there were idol worship, and the high places was one of them.

And what they were, were huge stone mounds of, they were either mounds of earth or huge massive stone structures which were enormously difficult to remove.

And always, as you make your way through the books of Kings and Chronicles, what you find is, after successive kings, no matter what they do to get rid of false worship, the high places invariably remain.

That's because they were simply so difficult to get rid of. And what we see in this chapter is that God's assessment of Solomon was that he showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burnt incense on the high places.

Once again, an area in his life, this time that he failed to correct. And there are areas, I'm sure, in your life and in mine that we fail to correct.

[7 : 38] And these areas have left unchecked and unrebuked and unconfessed. They may very well prove to be problematic in later life.

That's the first thing that strikes me about this chapter then, his weakness in embryonic form. But moving on to the second half of the chapter, this remarkable story of the two prostitutes who came to the king and presented their seemingly impossible case to him.

How was he to know? One of them said that her child, or rather the other woman's child, had died during the night. The other woman had noticed this, got up during the night and swapped the two babies, taken her live baby and swapped it with her dead baby so that when they awoke in the morning, when she thought, first of all, that the dead baby was hers, when she looked at the baby more closely, the baby was dead.

Rather, the baby belonged to the other woman. And so there was this dispute that had arisen between one woman and another and they brought the dispute to the king himself.

What strikes you about this passage? Well, the first thing that strikes me about the passage is the sheer willingness of the king to give them the time of day.

[9 : 01] This was a massive kingdom. Solomon was concerned with great issues, with the political and military issues of the day.

And yet here he is giving the time of day to two ordinary women who have a problem. And it strikes me of how easy it was to get an audience with the king in Israel.

You would never find this in any other kingdom. You certainly never find it in Britain. You'd never find Gordon Brown taking to do with an ordinary dispute between two women. You'd never find that kind of thing.

I mean, even this week, of course, there was a very interesting thing in the paper about how Barack Obama had intervened in a case where a black professor had been arrested in one of the states in America by a policeman.

And there was this dispute, of course, because it was alleged that the black professor had broken into this home. In actual fact, the home was his own.

[10 : 02] He had to climb in the window because he was locked out. And there was a huge dispute over this because they accused the policemen of racism and this was something that affected the whole country.

Barack Obama, he intervened in this ordinary judicial case and he had those two gentlemen, the black professor and the policeman, and he had them over in his garden.

The papers were full of it all over the world with this meeting that took place. But that's extraordinary. That is absolutely extraordinary. You would never find that happening in ordinary times. It was only to make one particular point that he intervened.

But here are two ordinary women and they're coming to Solomon. People, nobody would ordinarily have given these women because they were so ordinary. They had no status in the kingdom at all.

There was no nobility about them. They weren't important people. They were ordinary people. Secondly, these particular women were prostitutes. They were right at the bottom of the social ladder.

[11 : 04] in Israel. They were the kind of people who Jesus was criticized for taking anything to do with. And here they are and their dispute, their problem, is brought before the king.

Now, don't tell me that that's not because he himself took a personal interest in the affairs of his own people. And whereas, normally, in any other kingdom, these two women would have been written off and told where to go.

Don't take them anywhere near the king. The king has no time for this kind of problem. Yet, Solomon was different because he represented the living and the true God.

So, whatever interest he took in those women represents, and here's the point, it represents the compassion and the concern and the care of the God that he represents.

That's the only way that we can make any sense out of this passage whatsoever. Two women who don't just represent themselves but who represent a broken and a dark and a sorry world, a world that has fallen into sin, and a world that needs God more than anything else.

[12 : 20] God's wisdom, God's rightness, God's compassion and his love and the change that only God can bring into a person's heart. How different the king's response is to these women from the response I would expect it to be, I would imagine, perhaps, him to say, well, what are you bringing this to me?

It serves you right. Look at the kind of profession that you're in. What do you expect is going to happen? Or, how dare you come to me? You shouldn't be prostitutes in the first place.

There's a law against the kind of profession that you're in. Or, if you hadn't been promiscuous as you obviously have been, you'd never be in this mess.

Go away on your own head, be it. It's not my problem. You got yourselves into this. Instead, he does the very opposite. He takes their story seriously.

See, everybody concentrate on the last part of the story, on the sword and his verdict on the situation. But, I think we see some of the marvel of this story from the very beginning.

[13 : 26] That here is a king. The very fact that these women, these particular women, find themselves able to come to the most glorious king in the whole earth speaks for itself, I believe.

And he wants to get to the heart of the issue and he wants to solve the problem. You see, even the unbelieving world would write people like this off.

The kind of people that we hear about in the news or people, perhaps we read about in the newspapers, like recently, Karen Matthews. You remember Karen Matthews some months ago and her daughter, Sharon.

She arranged for the kidnap of her daughter, Shannon, in order to make some money out of her. And the whole nation was utterly outraged by what this mother had done.

They called her for everything under the sun. And they called her scum. You name it, they called her for everything under the sun. And of course, it was a terrible thing.

[14 : 29] I'm not trying to condone it at all. It was absolutely outrageous. And yet, you know, it's quite strange, isn't it? A world that decides the kind of person that it calls scum.

And yet, that same world will turn a blind eye to other forms of deceitfulness and immorality. The same world.

See, it depends on who you are and where you are. And it depends on your circumstances. Besides, who knows how these women began on the road to where they now were.

Perhaps each one of them was brought up, both of them were brought up in good homes. We don't know. But it's quite wrong to just assume that we know what people's backgrounds are, isn't it?

We make this assumption by the way that someone looks or the way that someone's done something or the crime that they have committed or the kind of lifestyle that they live. We make this assumption that well of what they must have been like for years.

[15 : 32] But that's not the case. Not always the case anyway, is it? That perhaps these women were brought up in good homes and yet at some point maybe in their teenage years they became careless and found themselves being rejected by their parents, abandoned by their parents.

They wouldn't be the first ones and it's quite strange, you know, when you, it's quite interesting when you think about those who are prostitutes in every age.

I wonder how many of them if you had asked them as young girls if they would ever imagine that this was where they would end up, I wonder how many of them would say yes. No, they wouldn't.

No, they wouldn't because nobody starts out that way. It's something you end up in, isn't it? And it's the same in our own day as much as any other day. They would have been horrified if you had suggested that this was where they would end up.

It's because we live in a broken world and what I'm trying to say is that in actual fact, you know, we're all the same. The Bible tells us that we all have the seeds and the roots of sinfulness in us and the reason why one is and one isn't is because of the circumstances that we have been blessed with or otherwise and I don't believe we have any right and I believe that this is where Solomon is so gracious that he is accepting and he wants to take to do with two women who are very, very different with different circumstances to his own and he's taking a genuine, caring interest in their case.

[17 : 08] Besides, Solomon too, he knew all too well the circumstances of his own birth. You remember? And perhaps he felt a certain empathy with those women.

He himself was the product of an illicit extramarital affair. He himself was the subject of gossip and talk.

An unlawful sexual union between David and Bathsheba. What was the difference? What's the difference between the kind of situation he sees here and the circumstances in which he was born and brought into this world?

And besides, and I'll say this just before we move on, Solomon knew only too well that the problem of prostitution wasn't just with the women but it lay with their clients and it's never been fair or just to focus on the wrongdoing of the women without focusing on the wrongdoing of those who make their profession possible.

Isn't that the case? It is the height of hypocrisy to call women for everything under the sun and yet to turn a blind eye to those who give them their wages.

[18 : 39] And perhaps Solomon knew and perhaps he was conscious of that weakness that we talked about earlier on in which he married the daughter of the king of Egypt and in which he ended up with 700 wives.

Don't tell me that a man who marries 700 women and ends up with a thousand concubines doesn't have some kind of sexual problem.

And it may very well have been that Solomon even at that stage recognized his own weakness and he recognized that he was in no position to condemn those women who came to him but to try and help them as a fellow human being.

The root let me tell you this the root of human depravity lies in all of us and we too might well be where they were if our circumstances had been different and if it wasn't for the grace of God.

You ask yourself tonight where would you be if it wasn't for the grace of God having touched your heart and your life.

[19 : 59] I ask myself that question I honestly stand here and say I have no it horrifies me to imagine where I might be today if it wasn't for the grace of God don't ever forget that don't ever forget where you might be if it wasn't for the kindness and the love and the salvation that God by which God has rescued you and brought you into his kingdom.

It distresses me no end when I see someone converted and for a while that person is full of the joy of the Lord and for a while he's thanking God and worshipping God and he wants to share his faith with other people but as the years go on that same person often becomes a bit critical of the world around him.

Isn't the world a terrible place? Oh there's all this stuff that's going on in the world. What do you expect the world to be? Do you really expect the world to sit up and listen to God and do exactly what God says?

That's not the world I find described in the Bible. The world I find described is a place of darkness and disobedience a place of rebellion. That's where God has placed us and it's a cop-out for any Christian to say the world is a terrible place.

That's a cop-out and that's another way of saying I either can't be bothered being a witness in this world or I can't cope with it and I'd rather just retreat into my own little group of Christians and to just bide my time and make the most of the pleasant things in life but God has put us in this world just as he put his own son in this world and his own son was surrounded by publicans by tax collectors and sinners so are we and we've done a great disservice to the gospel by discriminating between one type of person and another the root of human depravity if you're really honest with yourself lies in me just as much as it lies with someone else and the Lord has asked me and commanded me to bring healing through the gospel to a broken world and here we have Solomon and he's willing because he stands in his throne room representing the God who he serves and the

[22 : 24] God who governs Israel and whatever he does reflects the glory and the grace and the kindness of God but it also reflects the wisdom of God that's the third thing I want us to see this evening we've seen Solomon's weakness in its embryonic form we've seen secondly Solomon's willingness to give these women the time of day but thirdly I want us to see the king's wisdom in resolving a distinctly human problem his wisdom in resolving a distinctly human problem earlier on in the chapter of course was that great incident where God came to him in a dream and asked him to ask for anything that he wished instead of asking for what we might expect a king to ask for military strength and for might and for strength of leadership and all the rest of it riches or glory or honor for himself Solomon asked for wisdom and God was pleased that he had asked for that wisdom now what does he mean by wisdom it means the ability the God given ability to make the kind of decisions in this world which are able to discern between what is right and what is wrong now some for some people they think that that's an easy thing it is not an easy thing at all and it takes great grace to be able to do that and that's and I believe we can see something of the detail of that grace in this chapter first of all the king was patient in resolving the issue and patience always goes with wisdom now I'm saying this because many of you are going to have to get up tomorrow and go into an uncertain and a difficult and a frustrating and a complex world in which our wisdom will be challenged and in which we will need that same wisdom that

Solomon asked for in order to make our way to negotiate our way through this world in a way that is glorifying to God and as people see the kind of character that we have and as it reflects the God who we serve people become interested in the gospel they're bound to but it begins with patience notice what happened verse 23 the king said after they had brought their account each one brought the differing account to the king the king said this one says you see he's not rushing into any kind of decision in a moment in time patience and wisdom is not about quick decisions it's about being able to think and to mull over and to be able to to reason in your own mind as the holy spirit works within you the king said this one says my son is alive and your son is dead that one says no your son is dead and mine is alive now what's he doing there he's weighing up the options he's weighing up the two stories the two accounts that he's heard he's not going to rush into any kind of rash decision neither does he do what many of us do when we're faced with a dispute and that's to listen to the first person that brings the problem let me ask you this when you're faced with some kind of dispute is it not true that always the first person that brings the problem seems to be the person that's telling the truth but that's not always the case in actual fact in this case it was the case but it's not always the case proverbs 18 and 17 says the one who states his case first seems right it's true until the other comes and examines him and wisdom demands that I mustn't just jump to any kind of quick decision and that's exactly what we find

Solomon now who knows how this is going to affect your life you might you see you come here tonight you think well what's this got to do with me it's got loads to do with us you don't know as you as you ask that God will implant these principles into your heart you don't know what kind of situation you're going to face in the coming days where you're going to need exactly the same God given qualities the wisdom and the patience but then I want us to see also that he understands the human being it is absolutely essential for anyone who's a Christian to understand the human being the good and the bad and Solomon did not arrive at his verdict as his finding at the end of the chapter without having first spent many many years in the company of people and taking them seriously if you think for a moment that this kind of wisdom just came to him all of a sudden you're wrong and if you think for a moment that wisdom is going to be suddenly given to you you're wrong as well wisdom is something that is learned and experienced and is found as we go through life what was it about humanity that enabled him to come to the decision to which he came first of all he knew the extraordinary love between a mother and her child after all this whole incident is grounded upon that love isn't it and he knew that from his own experience he had an extraordinary mother and even although he was an illegitimate child born out of wedlock nevertheless that did not mean that his mother was ungracious and unrighteous towards him she turned out to be a very good woman and his father of course despite all his weakness and what we know about him was a man after

God's own heart and that's made clear to us and what happened was of course his upbringing was a very precious one in which he owed his mother everything in this world he knew first hand the experience of a loving mother and that's why once again as was always emphasized I hope from the pulpit the value and the importance of family relationships in passing on not just that sense of security to our children but a wisdom that will recognize the very precious emotion and the love of a mother and he was able somehow to perceive in a very short space of time that when it came to a decision in which pride on the one hand and love on the other he knew that love was going to win at the end of the day because love is always prepared to make sacrifices for the well-being of the person that we love here is this mother and she is faced of course the king was testing he had no intention of cutting the child in two it would never have happened the king is testing and he's testing the person who has the real genuine concern the passionate excruciating love of a mother and he knew that the person who was his real mother was going to be prepared to give him up so that the child was going to live love but human love real human love

I don't mean the kind of love we hear about in rock songs which very often reflect a love that is here today and gone tomorrow but I'm talking about the kind of love not the kind of love that you read in mushy romantic novels but the love that we find the extraordinary love that we find in the Bible and within humanity it's based upon gods why is it that love is found within the human race uniquely you don't find it in the animal kingdom at all love is uniquely human because of God's extraordinary love the love that is made known in Isaiah chapter 49 can a woman forget her nursing child that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb even they may forget yet says God I will not forget you what were the options for

[31 : 26] Solomon well one option that was quite clear that both mothers couldn't be right there was only one real mother the other was lying but that meant that one mother was telling the truth and truly loves her child but the other mother he didn't know this the other mother was equally emphatic and he didn't know he had no idea which one was I reckon he probably guessed but he had to make absolutely sure why was the other it's quite strange isn't it it's quite sad actually to see the two mothers it's easy to understand how the real mother is emphatic and passionate about her child but what is more sad is to ask why is the false mother so emphatic about getting the living child it must have been bitterness about what had happened perhaps a bitterness that was rooted in her own sense of lostness and guilt and it's easy enough to say wasn't she a deceitful person wasn't she an awful person how can she possibly come to these conclusions but that just shows how messed up she is we live in a messed up world and it's important for us with the love of

God in the love of God to try and bring healing to a messed up world it's easy to cast judgment and to condemn people Jesus could have done that like when he took the woman that was caught in adultery it would have been easy for him of all the people in the world he could have condemned that woman outright the woman at the well who had five husbands and the one she was now with wasn't her husband he could have easily condemned that woman outright and said what are you coming to me for look at the mess you've made of your life but the compassion and the love of God accepts a person and reasons with that person in the gospel that's why God says come now let us reason together says the Lord though your sins were like crimson they shall be as white as wool what were the possible outcomes what was he going to do well I suppose one of them was to order that neither mother kept the baby but she should go to another family well that wouldn't be fair to anyone he could have randomly ordered that they toss a coin just cast the lot and well that's fair enough you know let the baby go to whoever whoever guesses heads that wouldn't have been right either but he reasons as to what principles are going to govern arriving at the right solution that's his determination to get to the right solution and it comes down to this that the right mother is going to do anything to save her son and the wrong mother will not bother will either not bother or confess to her lies it's really an amazing example of how a man like Solomon guided by the Lord himself and yet making use of that wisdom that God had gave given him was able to come to such a marvelous solution to the problem but it was a problem a solution that was motivated by God's love and God's love alone and only those who know

God's love for themselves are able to bring God's love to a hurting and a lost and a lonely and a broken world and we need to be those who practically display just like Solomon the love of God having experienced that love we need to display and demonstrate that love in all kinds of practical ways there's never been a time when the display of God's love has been more urgent as there is today there are millions of people who have never known the kind of love that we've known in Christ and it can only be demonstrated to them in real genuine action that's the challenge that you and I face in this world lastly we've looked at the king's weakness we've looked at the king's willingness we've looked at the king's wisdom and I want to leave you tonight with the king's want the want of providing what was really needed by these women you can't help feeling can you that having read the story and having marveled having been so impressed with Solomon's wisdom that somehow it hasn't ended right

Solomon has shown his wisdom the woman has her son back the problem has been resolved but has it has it the real problem remains doesn't it these two women go out the door as they came in the true mother has her baby back but there's been no change as far as we can discern there's been no change in their heart and that's where they really need the lord the real problem remains do you know why that is that's because Solomon for all that what he can do he can't do a thing about their sinfulness and their guilt that's why you and I need the greater than Solomon the one that Jesus described as the greater than Solomon and that's

Jesus Christ himself because when he came into the world he too was concerned with ordinary sinful wrongdoing people people who were wracked with guilt people who were stuck fast in a dark world a world which they could not escape from and in which they were guilty of their own wrongdoing but yet as those very same people came to him those prostitutes those tax collectors the fringes of society the lowest of the low he was able to say to them your sins are forgiven you remember the woman that came to him in Luke chapter 7 the woman who was crying why was she crying because she discovered her own ugliness not from the outside but from the inside but she also discovered that only Jesus was able to help her and to save her and forgive her and as she came to him in the sorrow and in the brokenness of her own repentance

[38 : 59] Jesus said to her go your way your sins are forgiven that's what we need Solomon couldn't provide it but Jesus can will you come in your sin tonight and will you ask that the Lord will forgive and cleanse and wash you from all your filth and heal you from all your ugliness the ugliness of our heart the horror of what's in our heart and as we ask him and as we turn away from that sin God promises to change us and to bring us newness of life let's bow our heads in prayer let's bow our heads in prayer