

God's Gift of Wisdom

2nd Sun. after Christmas – 01/05/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Kings 3:4-15 Pastor Keith Besel

[Literal translation: Solomon's response to Yahweh's offer,]

v.7, **“Now, Yahweh my God, You have made (me) Your servant king in place of David, my father. But I am a mere youth. I do not know to go out or come in.”**

v. 9 **“So give to Your servant a perceptive heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this massive group of Your people.”**

Introduction

- ✘ Wow! The offer Yahweh gives to this young, approximately 20-year-old king, is something that none of us here could ever truly fathom.
 - ➔ “Ask what I shall give you” (v. 5). That sounds like a fantasy; like someone rubbing the magic lamp and a genie pops out, granting the promise of any three wishes we might ask.
- ✘ Only this is the real deal! This is no make-believe genie. This is the one and only, all-powerful Creator of the universe.
 - ➔ So, what would you ask? Would it be for power and influence? Or maybe popularity or possessions? Oh, I know, no one here is that superficial or vain, right?
 - ➔ So maybe your request would be a bit more tame, like asking for recognition and respect within your family or among your friends; or perhaps just asking for good health and happiness in life.
 - ➔ Even those things though are still focused on “me”; still a bit selfish in their motivation, aren't they?

I. King Solomon's Wisdom Turned to Folly

- ✘ So what did Solomon choose? He could have asked for a long reign; maybe that the land would be prosperous and the nation would grow in power and wealth. Or maybe his prayer would be for a large and efficient military; or just for a big palace with swimming pools and a spa.
- ✘ Yet Solomon asked for none of these earthly or self-centered things, did he? Instead, out of all the possibilities, he asked for wisdom. The Hebrew says that literally he asked God for “a perceptive heart” so that he would be able to hear, think, analyze, feel, and “discern” correctly “between good and evil” (v.9).
 - ➔ But before he even asks for it, he praises God for His generous and undeserved love in allowing him to serve as God's representative on his father, David's throne. And he acknowledges that the people he is now called to govern are not “his” people but “God's people” (v.9).
 - ➔ The point is this: Solomon's concern is directed away from himself toward his countrymen. His desire is for their well-being, and he wants to be God's instrument for ensuring their welfare. In essence Solomon is asking for God to make him a good and faithful steward over all that belongs to God from beginning to end.
- ✘ This request pleased God. So He granted it to the point that Solomon became famous in every age; to the corners of the earth for his ability. Not only did he know what was right, but he also had the wisdom to apply God's perfect truth and judgment in real-life situations.
- ✘ When the famous queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's wisdom, chapter 10:1 says that she came “to test him with hard questions.” That same chapter says she was physically exhausted after

her attempts to trip him up so that she finally said to Solomon, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, ... And behold, ... Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard” (1 Kgs. 10:6-7).

→ Most of us also know the story of what happened immediately after today’s text when two women came to Solomon, each one claiming to be the mother of a certain child. Solomon wisely rooted out the lying woman by commanding that the baby be cut in two, because he knew that the real mother would never agree to such a plan (vv. 16-28).

→ And of course we have the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which so beautifully convey Solomon’s – well, actually God’s wisdom to all of us as we consider and seek to live our lives in service to Yahweh.

✘ But sadly, most of us also know that Solomon’s story didn’t end as well as it began, did it? Before long, this prince of wisdom actually became the king of fools.

→ So, what happened? Well, along with God’s gift of wisdom, He also blessed Solomon with great wealth and honor. There’s no doubt that Solomon was thinking of his own sinful abuse of these gifts from God when he repentantly wrote these bits of wisdom: In Proverbs 11:2, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace.” And in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Then in Ecclesiastes 5:10, Solomon teaches us from experience, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this ... is vanity.”

→ Solomon’s greatest lapse in wisdom though is that he did not heed Yahweh’s command to love and worship Him alone as God and to be bound together in the one-flesh union of marriage with only one wife for life. Instead he fell prey to the pressures of the world and the desires of his sinful flesh and took many wives who believed in many false gods.

→ For all that God had gifted to Solomon, he forgot the One who loved him more than a thousand wives could have ever done. He ignored the One who gave him more than all of the armies and riches and fame in the entire world could ever give.

✘ This same man that built Yahweh’s temple, also built temples to pagan deities. The same king whose wisdom saved a child was now building temples where children were sacrificed to false gods.

→ Oh, how mighty the fall is when the greatness of wisdom turns away from God’s truth and follows instead the foolishness of our sin-filled and self-centered ways.

II. The better Son of David Brings a better Wisdom

✘ We started this morning by singing the hymn “*What Child is This*”. Solomon acknowledged to Yahweh that he was “a mere youth”; a child when it came to his experience and ability to govern God’s people on his own.

→ And now we know, even with God’s gift of wisdom, who this “child” named Solomon really was. He was not the ultimate son of David that Israel needed to continue as God’s holy people forever. No, Israel needed a new king, a better Son of David, one who would reign with wisdom and establish a kingdom that would not; that could not ever fall to sin and corruption like this.

✘ And that brings us to today’s Gospel Reading where God gives us a glimpse into the youth of the true Son of David; the one born in Bethlehem, the city of David. He’s the one that was visited by royalty from the east; worshipped by a trio of wise men that God had gifted with the ability to discern that He was no ordinary man; that His wisdom far surpassed even that of Solomon, even as He was only a toddler when they came to bring Him gifts fit only for the true Son of God.

- Luke 2:40 tells us that this 12-year-old “child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him.”
- ✘ And then verse 47 says that even the so-called “Bible experts” were listening to Him so that “all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.”
 - Obviously, God really wants you and me to get this point, because He inspires Luke to repeat himself at the end of our Gospel Reading, saying that this 12-year-old child, “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (v.52).
- ✘ But let’s be honest, God gives us a bit of a mystery here when you think about it. Scripture tells us that Jesus, as a boy, “increased” in wisdom and stature. But 1 Corinthians 1:24 also says that He is Himself the Wisdom from on high. He is the eternal Wisdom through whom the world was made; the very “Wisdom of God” in human flesh and blood, the One who has been perfect from eternity.
 - So, how do we reconcile these truths? First, we don’t doubt them. Instead we marvel in, and simply embrace in faith the marvelous mystery of the Word becoming flesh in Jesus. It truly is the one and only “Christmas miracle” that God unveils a bit for us here in today’s Readings; the fact that God’s wisdom is entirely beyond our ability to grasp, yet at the same time, absolutely crucial that we keep it forever in our hearts by faith.
- ✘ While Solomon had to ultimately learn and grow how to use God’s wisdom “the hard way”; having fallen from God in sin, Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus, as the true Son of God was tempted “in every respect ... as we are, yet without sin”.
 - You see, God gifts you and me with His wisdom in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John where Jesus says, for example in Matthew 6, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” ... “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (vv. 19, 33).

III. True Wisdom = Jesus on the cross

- ✘ This is where the wisdom of this world – our friends and family; co-workers, classmates and even so-called experts like teachers, professors and government leaders who have not, and will not embrace the mysteries of God’s wisdom in faith, consider you and me and our God to be absolute fools.
 - Yet God warned us against this when He declared in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares Yahweh. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”
- ✘ And now in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, God teaches and shows us that the true “heavenly treasure”; the perfect “wisdom of God”; His “righteousness” is NOT a thing or a characteristic that we can attain and control here in our earthly lives. No, God’s gift of Wisdom is a person; the true Son of David; born of the Virgin Mary, who has now saved us from our foolish ways by sacrificing His life on the cross.
 - Yes, even that; Jesus’ crucifixion which pays the guilt-price for all mankind’s sin, is viewed by the world, and even many “believers” when we brush Him aside, as foolishness instead of true wisdom.
 - Honestly, why else do we search and scramble for reasons to explain and excuse our absence from Christ’s teaching and gifts of grace given here in worship and Bible Study or Sunday School? Why do we turn away from, and even act embarrassed, when His Wisdom in Scripture shows that the ways we are living, acting and speaking in the world are wrong and

sinful in God's eyes? Why are we so hesitant to turn away from the foolishness of our sin and openly repent when we stray in sin; when Jesus stands waiting for us with His open arms of love and grace and forgiveness but we simply turn the other way? Why indeed?

- ✘ It's because we are just like Solomon when he went astray. We too are filled with pride; unwilling to admit that we are wrong. We actually like the trappings around us of money, material goods and fleshly pleasures.

→ And so, we don't speak up or stand with God when the world, in its foolishness, tells us that Jesus on the cross is a sign of weakness; that His sacrifice is something only a "fool will believe and trust".

- ✘ Look, the world is, and always has been, filled with those who think they are so much smarter than God; so much wiser than Jesus who came in a manger, grew as a boy and died in the greatest act of love; in the fullest expression of God's perfect Wisdom for us.

→ But 1 Corinthians 1:27, 30 tells us this is how it must be, that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ... And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Conclusion

- ✘ So, do you want to be truly wise and discerning? Do you want to know what is good and evil? Do you want to serve the Lord according to His plan and His will for you in this life?

→ Then, dear Christian, receive "God's Gift of Wisdom"; receive Jesus as He comes to you every day in Your baptismal grace; as He comes to you in His words of guidance and truth and grace in Holy Scripture. Receive Him as He feeds you with Himself in His body and blood given here at His Supper.

→ Jesus: He's the Good King; the "child...born to us"; upon whom "the government [is now] upon His shoulder" (Is. 9:6). He's the eternal King who has already paid for your foolishness and sin, whatever it may be. Yes, Jesus gives you Himself as the wisdom that never fails; as God's wisdom for today and eternity! Amen.