

Ephesians 5:15-20 Wisdom
1 Kings 3:3-14

His name was Solomon. In the sense that he expanded Israel's power to its high point he was Israel's greatest king. Because he was criticized for his divided spiritual loyalties, the faith of Israel has seen his father David is their most iconic king. He nonetheless had a reputation for wisdom even in his own time.

There is a genre of literature in the Bible called, "wisdom literature," including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. There is even a non-biblical book called, "The Wisdom of Solomon," all of these are either attributed to or associated with him.

The Tradition of Solomon

The reading for today tells the beginning of the story. When Solomon became the king he was given, in a dream, the opportunity to ask for anything he wanted. He could have asked for power and wealth; that Israel might be the most powerful nation on earth, the greatest empire in history. He could have asked for personal pleasure or benefit. Instead he asked for wisdom.

"Now, O Lord, you have made your servant king in the place of my father David. But I am only a little child and I do not know how to carry out my duties." One does

not have to be a king to relate to that feeling. ". . . So give to your servant a discerning heart to govern your people, and to distinguish right from wrong."

The text tells us that the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom because it showed that his concern was not for himself, or for his own protection, but for his people, that they might be served with justice. It was a good start. It reflected well on Solomon's character.

It was said that Solomon was the author of 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 psalms (1 Kings 4:32); that his reputation was far and wide and that people came from around the world to hear him.

The story of the two women both claiming to be the mother of the same child is very familiar and sometimes, even now, one will popular references to it. You know the story, he threatened to cut the baby down the middle and give each woman half.

One said that was okay with her, that if she couldn't have the child she didn't want anyone to have it. The other offered the child to the first woman rather than let it be killed. Solomon gave the child to the second woman saying, "you are the mother of the child." And he was right, even if it turned out she was not the biological mother. She was the one that cared for the well-being of the child.

Wisdom

The primary definition of wisdom that you might find in a dictionary or on Google would go something like this,

“Wisdom is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight.”

Wisdom was important to the Greeks, from whom we who speak the English language inherit the word, “Philosophy,” which means “love of wisdom.” And the Greek word has turned into a beautiful name for a girl, “Sophia.” It is likened to the living of a “good” life, and offers the reasons to pursue it. The philosopher Socrates is quoted, “the only true wisdom is knowing that you know nothing.”

When turning towards the scriptures, one finds that in the Old Testament wisdom is a prominent theme, it is considered a virtue to be sought and maintained. In Proverbs we are told, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” And wisdom is sometimes personified as a woman, “wisdom calls aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in the marketplace,” and is described as being present with God before creation and even taking part in creation itself.

In the New Testament, Paul contrasts the preaching of the Gospel of Christ crucified with the wisdom of the age. The opposite of a wise person is a fool, and Paul

tells us that in the wisdom of the world the Gospel is foolishness. God chose the foolish things in the world to shame the wise. In Luke we are told that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and other people.

Wisdom means getting one’s priorities in order, making good decisions, pursuing righteousness. It stands to reason that the result of attempting a pious life will be wisdom. Solomon believed that it is a gift from God that can’t be acquired in any other way except to seek it, ask God for it.

Paul’s Statement in Ephesians

So it is not a surprise that in his Epistle to the Ephesians Paul once again makes use of the idea of wisdom when he tells them, and by extension us, to be very careful how we live, not as the unwise, but as the wise.

After acknowledging the truth that the days are evil, which means that they are corrupted by sin, Paul goes on to offer some suggestions about how to live a good life. To be sure, these suggestions are not comprehensive, just like in the text from last week that also came from Ephesians, we were looking at a summary of sorts, not a complete list.

These are Paul’s suggestions:

- (1) Seek God's will, not the will of the self
- (2) Be sober, filled with the Spirit, not inebriated
- (3) Worship together, use music to teach one another
- (4) Be Thankful

These are certainly characteristics of the living of a wise life. Paul goes on to speak of mutual submission to one another, and to give instructions to all the different players in ancient Roman life, and then to teach about spiritual armor.

Christian Wisdom

The general ideas expressed in Solomon's humble prayer and also in Paul's reflections in just this one text offer much for Christians like us to consider. In its simplest form, the idea of wisdom means to the ability to make right decisions as we live our lives. While that may serve as the simplest way to understand it, nonetheless like in many other things, the simple is not by its simplicity easy.

I think of the game of football, another season is upon us. It has a simple goal, to push a ball across a line. But it takes complex coordination of a well-conditioned and rehearsed team to accomplish. And there is an opponent pushing in the other direction.

Or I think of the achievement of flight. To fly is easy to see and to imagine, birds have inspired humans since before they could write it down to attest to it. But it was

hard to accomplish. It took many generations accumulating knowledge; it took experimentation and failure. It took a near rocket-science education, determination, endurance, faith.

Wisdom is a gift from God that is worth seeking, but it comes as a gift by conscientious effort, and the desire to seek it. It comes with sobriety; it always comes in the context of a community helping, nurturing, encouraging, affirming, correcting, guiding. And it comes along with gratitude which is the companion of faith.

We are all like Solomon in his weakness, only small children, not really knowing how to carry out our tasks; the tasks of a personal life, of life in relationship and community; family, friends, the larger society, issues of citizenship. Many times we find ourselves in situations that confuse us, leave us wondering what to do.

Let us, as believers in Christ, begin with a prayer like the young Solomon prayed, for a discerning heart, to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, to discern what is God's holy and pleasing will. God is faithful. We are in this together. Be thankful.

To the Glory of God.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)