

Solomon, the Wise Fool. 1 Kings 3:3-14

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

What does it mean to be wise?

Through the ages some very wise people have attempted to answer this question.

- Cicero said "The function of wisdom is to discriminate between good and evil."
- Immanuel Kant distinguished between science and wisdom, saying: "Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life."
- Robert Green Ingersoll quipped, "It is a thousand times better to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense."
- Robert Heinlein added, "Goodness without wisdom invariably accomplishes evil."
- William Saroyan noted that, "Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success."
- And Frank Whitmore rightly concluded that, "The biggest difficulty with mankind today is that our knowledge has increased so much faster than our wisdom."

We have just read the prayer of young King Solomon who history records as the wisest man of all times. Having inherited from his father David a strong and prosperous monarchy that ruled over a united and peaceful kingdom, Solomon went on to build Israel into one of the wealthiest most respected nations in the ancient world. Yet by the end of his 40-year reign, Solomon had also bankrupted that same nation and set in motion the conditions causing the division of Israel into a pair of bickering minor kingdoms constantly under the heel of and eventually taken into exile by foreign powers (*Northern Israel in 722b.c. and Southern Judah in 586b.c.*).

Solomon started out well, but did not end well. How could the wisest man in the world cause such a turnaround of Israel's fortunes in his single reign?

- Because **he forgot** to *[keep walking] in the statutes of his father David,*
- because **he forgot** to obey the laws of Moses;
- because **he forgot** the conditions – personally given to him in a vision – for continuing to receive God's blessings;
- because **he failed to heed** his own advice to "*remember your Creator in the days of your youth...*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Let's start at the beginning of his reign to find out what caused Solomon to forget and in the process become such a wise fool.

Solomon was just a teenager when David crowned him as the next king of Israel. He had grown up watching his father struggle with the consequence of personal sin, but he had also witnessed David's great faith and reliance on God which had brought success out of all his defeats and had grown Israel to the peaceful prosperous kingdom it had now become. As he crowned Solomon, David sternly charged him to ...

*Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and **keeping His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses**, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.* (1 Kings 2:2-3)

Scripture does record that that in the beginning, *Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David.* (1 Kings 3:3)

Young King Solomon faithfully followed David's lead...mostly. But there at the start of his reign, he had already planted the seeds of his eventual failure by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Perhaps Solomon thought this would be a politically shrewd way of assuring peace with a former enemy; such political marriages have been a standard practice for monarchs throughout the centuries, but for Solomon to do so was in direct violation of the Law of Moses (which we will explain later).

Since the Temple would not be completed for another seven years, Solomon showed his own devotion to God by traveling to Gibeon, to offer extravagant sacrifices on the altar in front of the Tabernacle that had once housed the Ark of the Covenant. Remember David had brought the Ark to Jerusalem and placed it in a new tent, with a new altar, but he had left the original tabernacle and original altar where it was, also staffing it with priests to offer daily sacrifices before the Lord.

It was after one such sacrifice at Gibeon, that God visited Solomon in a dream offering to give him whatever he asked. Pause for a moment to consider if God made the same offer to you What would you ask for: health, wealth, long life, fame, a Cadillac?

(pause).

When God offered, *ask what I should give you*, Solomon first rehearsed how he had witnessed God's blessing of his father David for his "*faithfulness in righteousness and in the uprightness of his heart*" (in his integrity) towards God. (6:6) After which, calling himself **God's servant**, and just **a little child**, *who did not even know how to go out or come in*, **Solomon wisely asked for the wisdom and discernment he would need to rule God's people**. This humble request so pleased God, that He gave Solomon not only greater wisdom and discernment than any human had ever possessed, but along with that He also promised Solomon a long life accompanied with wealth and honor beyond any king who had ever lived. All this with BUT one condition.

If you will walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked 1 Kings 3:14

All Solomon had to do was **remember to obey** what he had been taught from the Laws of Moses; but then there already was the problem of Pharaoh's daughter and more such political marriages to come.

Solomon's God-given wisdom soon became legendary to all the surrounding nations. The one illustration of such recorded in the Bible, had two prostitutes arguing over who was the rightful parent of a child. Both women had born babies at a similar time, but in the night one mother had rolled over killing her child. She then switched her dead baby for the other, now claiming the living baby as her own. When the real mother brought her complaint to Solomon, he offered to cut the living baby in half; giving a piece to each. While the mother of the dead baby quickly agreed with this dread decision, the real mother was willing to give the child away rather than see it die. By this means, Solomon determined who was the rightful parent and awarded the child back to her.

In time, Solomon's growing fame spread all the way down to Africa, causing the Queen of Sheba (Ethiopia) to visit him in order to determine if Solomon was truly as wealthy and wise as his reputation had claimed. According to the story in chapter 10, she *tested Solomon with many hard questions. Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her.* (10:3) Having also seen all his wealth and the order of his kingdom, she concluded ...

I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me; your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard. Happy are your wives! Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness.' (1 Kings 10:7-9).

Notice that the Queen of Sheba said "*happy are your wives,*" because by this time Solomon had married from the surrounding kingdoms an extravagant number of 700 wives and an additional 300 concubines; the same kingdoms that God had commanded Israel not to intermarry with *for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods;* which is exactly what happened to Solomon (11:2, c.f. Deuteronomy 7:3-6).

According to Scripture *Solomon clung to his wives in love* and began building pagan shrines for them on the hills around Jerusalem, so that they could continue worshipping the gods of their homeland. By his old age, Solomon had also followed his wives; worshipping their gods in their shrines (11:10).

Can you imagine what Jerusalem looked like in those days, with the Temple of the God of Israel, the one true God, surrounded on the hillsides by shrines to pagan gods; all built by the same man who **forgot** that Israel had been ordered "*break down, smash, cut down, and burn*" all such pagan shrines; *for you are a people holy to the Lord your God ... who had chosen you out of all the peoples on the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.* (11:5-7)

Solomon the wise fool had forgotten from where his wisdom and wealth had come and he had forgotten God's condition that he follow the Laws of Moses. For, not only had the law of Moses forbid anyone in Israel from intermarrying with the surrounding pagan nations, but it had also specifically forbidden the king from having "*too many horses, too many wives and too much gold,*" for the same reason, that all such things – held in abundance – would pull the king's heart away from God. (Deuteronomy 17:7)

Solomon's gift from God had been wisdom and the ability to discern good from evil, but apart from God they quickly became his weakness.

- He trusted thinking more than praying.
- He was so impressed with his intelligence that he questioned everything and believed nothing. Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes,
"Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief" (Ecclesiastes 1:17-18).

The Bible describes such wise fools when it says,

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...." (Romans 1:21-23).

This is a perfect description of Solomon. He had been given a great gift, but failing to honor his promise to follow the Laws of Moses, he began to trust the gift instead of the Giver. He began to rely on his own ability to understand, rather than seek the knowledge, wisdom and revelation that comes from God.

Like many great, famous, wealthy, and powerful people after him, Solomon thought he was somehow the exception to the rule. Solomon broke the rules, because he thought he was too smart to fail. But, as warned, his wives weakened Solomon's love for God, his horses weakened his dependence on God and his gold weakened his desire for spiritual wealth.

Like Solomon, our weaknesses are often the exaggeration of our strengths; strengths which we let become untethered to our dependence on God; Who gave them to us.

- If you are a **laid back, even tempered person** who never gets upset over much, it is a tremendous strength. But carried too far, you may not get anything done, or you may fail to stand up for something when you need to.
- Perhaps **you are a go-getter**. Your strength is that you can get more done in a day than most people can accomplish in a week. It is a great strength, but if it goes too far you may be so overly committed that you neglect your family or your own need for spiritual reflection. You may be so driven that you take no time for your relationship with God or others. You may try to push others to the same level that you are driven.
- Another strength may be that you are **very practical and have clear goals**. The dark side of that is that you can carry it too far and forget other people's feelings in your attempts to arrive at those goals.
- Your strength may be **your humor**, but carried too far you may fail to take even important things seriously; you may carelessly hurt others with your brilliant but caustic barbs pointed at them.
- Are you **financially astute**? Your strength can become your weakness as it leads you to base your security in money rather than God?
- Is your strength **intelligence**? Does it lead you to ask so many questions that you never find any answers?

Don't let your strength become a weakness. Don't take it too far. Don't forget your dependence on God even in the area of your strength. In the opening of the Book of Proverbs which he wrote, Solomon advised,

The fear of the Lord
is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7

For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of His faithful ones. (Proverbs 2:6-9)

While the Proverbs of Solomon do contain a lot of wise advice, this was like the bad parent telling their children, "do as I say, not as I say do!" Seduced by his own fame, forgetting where all his wisdom and wealth had come from and the commitments he had made to keep such, Solomon wandered away from his faith in the God of His fathers and ended life as a bitter old man.

It is no accident that Solomon also wrote Ecclesiastes, the Bible's existential book of despair; meaninglessness is the theme of the book. Beginning with the words: "*Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, all is vanity!*," Ecclesiastes ultimately tells the story of a man who having lost God, now finds no pleasure in life ^(Ecclesiastes 1:2) At times in the book, Solomon even comes up with the correct solution to a happy life, but by this time he was so trapped in sin he could not follow his own advice.

If the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us anything, it is that even for the wisest person in the world, ignoring God is the road to foolishness and despair. Ecclesiastes' conclusion ends the same way it had opened...

The end of the matter [is this].
Fear God, and keep His commandments;
for that is the whole duty of everyone.
Ecclesiastes 12:13

What Solomon's life, and especially his book Ecclesiastes can teach us is that you can make life too complicated. Real wisdom means loving God and loving others. That is pretty much it. As my grandmother used to tell me, *don't get too smart for your own britches*. This is still good advise.

The Bible clearly teaches, "*you shall worship no other god, because the Lord is a jealous God*" (Exodus 34:14). God will not share us with any other loves. We need to reawaken to the fact that the Christian life is an all-or-nothing affair. Christianity is not a trivial pursuit. It is not a ritual to be performed, it is a life to be lived. It is an exclusive relationship of love.

The problem in America today is not the immorality of the media, it is not the unethical behavior of our leaders, it is not our courtrooms or our schools; the problem in America is the church. Because the people of God have failed to be what they should be, we are living with moral confusion and chaos. We sat down when we should have been standing up. We have failed to be salt and light to the world. Like Solomon, we have failed to depend on God's wisdom and are leaning on the wisdom of the world. We have been worshiping the gods of this world and failed to keep our love for God undivided and unspoiled. The Apostle John's vision of the end of times has Jesus saying to the churches,

I have this against you, that you
have abandoned the love you had at first.
Remember then from what you have fallen;
repent, and do the works you did at first
Revelation 2:4-5

*'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. **Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.** If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Revelation 2:2-6)*

Unless we repent, unless we change our mind!! **We need to remember** the task with which we had originally been charged: *disciplining the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything Jesus taught us* (Matthew 28:18-20). When the church remembers this, and starts being the church once again, then the world will be changed by its witness and Spirit filled presence.

Let's pray for this.

Here is an interesting side note. While the Bible does not record what were the "*many hard questions*" with which the Queen of Sheba tested Solomon, Hebrew legend does; We will explore these questions next Wednesday, November 26th when we gather for "Something More."