

Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to sing in Psalm 146. This time it's from the traditional version of the Psalm. I'd like us to look together this evening at the first of the passages that we read in the Old Testament, the first book of Kings and chapter 3.

I don't have a particular verse to take as a text, but I want us to concentrate on the second part of the passage. It's possibly a more obscure part of the Bible, possibly one of these places that we haven't given that much attention to.

But I hope that this evening that we'll be given something to think about as it relates to Solomon's wisdom and as it relates to the Lord Jesus Christ, because everything in the Bible points to Jesus and draws us to the New Testament, and as I hope this passage will.

Solomon, of course, is known for his wisdom, and we'll come on to that in a moment. But he's also known for having built the temple of God as a place of worship and sacrifice to God.

The temple, by the way, in Jerusalem was the single most expensive building that anyone has ever built ever in the history of the world.

[1 : 37] And the way I know that is because of the amount of gold that went into the temple. Now, prove me wrong if you like, and I'm quite open to be proved wrong, but I did this calculation some years ago on Google.

I went and looked at some of the most expensive buildings that are in the world, and they didn't even come anywhere close to the amount of gold.

If you check the price of gold and check the weight of the gold that Solomon put into the temple, that makes it right away the most expensive building that has ever been built. It was the most spectacular building, and it really was something that was amazing, even to those outside of Israel. So Solomon loved God. That's why he built the temple. He wanted a place where God would dwell amongst his people. Well, he did that because God meant everything to him, at least at that stage in his reign.

Sadly, as time went on and he reached the latter part of his reign, we understand that he went astray. And that's a really unfortunate, a really sad episode in his life.

[2 : 58] Nonetheless, we have to leave that to God to take care of, and we are concentrating tonight on the early part of his reign, and particularly his wisdom.

Now, his wisdom came around by means of a vision that he had during a dream early on in his reign. And we just read about that just now, where God came to him and he said something quite extraordinary.

He said to him, Ask of me what I shall give you. That's in verse 5. God said to him, Ask whatever I shall give you.

Now, at first you think, Well, what an intriguing, what an intriguing question for God to bring to Solomon. I wonder what we would have answered if God said that to us this evening.

I wonder how you'd respond to that. I suppose we have instinctive responses that doesn't really give much thought to it. But when you do give thought to it, it's actually one of the most challenging things that God could ever ask us.

[4 : 06] Because we are what we want. We are what we would ask for. Because what Solomon asked God revealed the true nature and character of Solomon himself.

When you think about it, this is not like the legends of genies coming to people and saying, Well, I'll give you three wishes. That's not the way it is at all. This is God.

And when we remember that this is God, and when we remember that this is a really solemn moment in Solomon's reign, and we will remember that Solomon wants to dedicate his life, and all that he has and all that he is to God, and God says to him, Ask what I shall give you.

That puts a whole different perspective on the question. I wonder what you would ask. I wonder what I would ask God for. If you knew that God was going to give you what you asked for, what would it be?

It would have to be something truly fundamental, wouldn't it? It would have to be something really important. Not just important to us, but important to God. Because this is God who is asking the question.

[5 : 20] And takes us away from the superficial, from the riches and the pleasure, and the things that might give me momentary joy, but things that will disappear very quickly.

And it brings me to ask, Well, what really is important in life? What is so fundamental that I would like to ask God for it?

How would you answer that question tonight? If God said to you, Ask of me what I shall give you. How would you answer that question? What would you ask for? Remember, it's God who's asking. And He knows your heart. He knows what you're thinking. He knows right and wrong. He is the living and the true God. What is it tonight that we would ask for?

It's really quite a challenge, isn't it? And it was as much a challenge to Solomon as it would be to anyone else. Isn't that different? It's different from when Jesus said to His disciples.

[6 : 22] He said, Truly I say to you, If you ask whatever, whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you. It's the same thing. Jesus is saying to us, He's inviting His disciples to pray.

But He's reminding them that this is God who they're dealing with. And therefore, we are placed under the spotlight of God's scrutiny.

And we are being asked to reveal the secrets of our hearts. Well, when Solomon was asked that question by God, this was his reply.

He wanted discernment. He wanted the ability to discern right from wrong because he trembled at the prospect of being a king and particularly the king over Israel, God's covenant people.

This was no ordinary kingdom. This was God's chosen people. And he stood as God's representative, as it were, in front of the people. And so that his judgments would have to reflect the judgments of God.

[7 : 26] So it's a huge, massive responsibility which he could get wrong very easily. And he needed that ability, that skill that could only come from God to be able, when he's dealing with a complex situation, these intricacies, particularly when it came to people and judging one situation between one situation and another.

He needed that skill to be able to make the right choices. And that's what wisdom is in the Bible. Wisdom is not just what we would call common sense.

Wisdom is something particularly that God can give us in which we are able to take the principles of his word and apply them in daily life.

Every single one of us right now needs wisdom. Right now, this is the most relevant. We're trying to be relevant tonight. We're trying to make a connection between what we're doing here and what you will be doing tomorrow.

Maybe even later on tonight. But tomorrow, in your place of work, in your home, in your neighborhood, as you relate to people. What is it you need in order to apply the Christian life?

[8 : 40] You need this quality, this unique quality called wisdom. It's not just common sense. There are a lot of people with common sense. There are plenty of atheists with common sense who know how to live well by applying what they've learned already from this life.

That's not what wisdom is as God sees it. God has given us his word and we're to take our knowledge of the word and be able to apply it into the intricate and the complex situations that we frequently come across in our families and in our places of work as we deal with people.

And would you not agree with me that some of the people problems in this world are the most complicated? And I don't believe that Solomon all of a sudden acquired wisdom.

I believe that it came to him cumulatively as God took him through sometimes painful episodes in his life and showed him and taught him as he understood, as he accumulated his knowledge of the human race and how human beings behave.

That's what Proverbs is all about. I'm sure that you've read the book of Proverbs. If you haven't, then go home and read it. It's all about human nature, the ways that people behave in certain situations.

[10:04] Proverbs reveals Solomon's amazing and God-given ability to understand how people behave in certain situations.

You know, there are some situations in life that are black and white. They're no problem. For example, if I'm tempted to steal something from someone else, that's a no-brainer.

I go to the Bible. The Bible says, you shall not steal. End of story. I don't even need to think about it. But you and I both know that life is very seldom as clear-cut as that.

There are situations where there is no chapter and verse that tells me exactly what I am to do in a situation. I have to take what I know from the Bible and I have to apply it in a Christ-like, godly way. A way that reflects what I know to be the light that God shines on my life through His Word. That's what wisdom is.

[11:14] And you see, a classic example of this, this is one of the first examples, we believe, of how Solomon's ability to know human beings as he's guided by God helped him to make this decision, this perhaps at first sight a risky decision, but a decision nonetheless that won him the respect of the people of Israel.

There are several things that strike me about the second part, about the two prostitutes who came to the king. And I'm just going to share these with you this evening as to how they demonstrate this ability that Solomon had, how they demonstrate the godliness in which Solomon dealt with these women, the grace in which Solomon dealt with these women, and also how they point to, in a strange way, they point to the real answer that there is in this passage, to the need that there is in this passage, which can only be provided by Jesus Christ.

The first thing that strikes me about this passage is that the king's willingness to give the women the time of day.

Don't you find it strange that here is the king of Israel and these two women, these ordinary people, are able to speak to him?

I mean, it just doesn't happen, does it, normally? I mean, if you want to speak to the queen of Britain, you just can't do that.

[12:57] You cannot call her up and make an appointment. You can't wander up to Buckingham Palace and knock the door or ring the bell and expect that the servant will show you to where she is.

You just don't do that. In fact, even if you really, really, really wanted to meet the queen, you probably would never be able to unless you happen to be given some special invitation and some special circumstance because it just doesn't happen that way.

And yet, here are these two ordinary people. They're not royalty. They're not nobility. They're ordinary people. And they're getting to speak to the king. He's speaking directly to them.

Not only that, they're bringing their own personal problems to the king. I can pretty much guarantee that if you got to meet the queen and she asked you how you were, you probably wouldn't tell her your own personal problems.

You would think, as I would, well, the queen is far too important to be listening to my personal problems. And yet, here are these two women and they are speaking. They are unburdening themselves.

[14:10] They're pouring their hearts out because they're desperate desperate, or at least one of them is desperate. I don't actually believe that the two of them were desperate. We'll see that in a few moments' time.

But is it not amazing that they got to speak to the king in the first place? And that is because he is willing to speak to them. And the reason he's willing to speak to them is because he has a heart for them.

I find it even further, more amazing when you come to see the kind of people that they were. They were two prostitutes on the margins of society.

I guess every society it kind of differentiates between people, the kinds of people that are in that society, don't they? Wherever you get human beings, you get a categorization and there are some people who sort of fit in the central category in society and there are others who kind of are drifted or pushed to the margins and I'm sure you'll agree with me that these two women would have been very much on the margins of society.

The Bible reminds me time and time again that God is no respecter of persons and that the person at the very heart of society, the person who is respected and who is decent in a sinful world is just

as likely to be corrupt and sinful, perhaps manifesting itself in different ways and yet the world we live in it does tend to classify people, doesn't it?

[16:01] And these women were on the edge. It also strikes me the way in which the king talks to them.

He wants to hear their issue, their problem. He's concerned about their problem and there is a genuineness about his concern.

The whole passage is where the king gives himself over to thinking and reflecting on the problem that they bring before him.

He could have said, what do you think you're doing of all people? What are you doing coming to me? What have I got to do with you? You're a different classification from me.

He could have been judgmental. He could have reminded them of their lifestyle. He could have told them, you brought this on yourself.

[17:04] This is self-inflicted. He could have said, on your own head be it. You got yourself into this, then get yourselves out of it. Instead, he takes their story, see there's a compassion in this chapter, isn't there?

A compassion which is utterly extraordinary. You read about other kings of Israel, they were only interested in themselves and their idol worship and satisfying their own pleasures, but this king, at least at this stage in his reign, he has a heart for the ordinary people in his kingdom and he's not ashamed to be surrounded by what other people or what society regards as the margin.

Does that remind you of something? Does that not remind you right away of Jesus? Now, I'm not saying that in every respect Solomon was like Jesus because he wasn't.

In some respects, he was the opposite to Jesus. But at least here, you have a king who condescends into the real world and surrounds himself by the shame and the darkness, the misery. and this is a miserable scene. It's a scene of great, great sadness. My heart goes out to both of these women.

[18:39] Both of these women. I know that one of them's a liar. I know that. I know that one of them's cheating, but she's lost her baby. And she's maybe acting irrationally because she's lost her baby.

Maybe she's doing something just instinctive. Maybe she's doing something that she's going to regret one day. I notice by the way at the end of the chapter, both women leave. He doesn't judge one or the other.

Both of the women leave. And I suspect that Solomon, okay, this is a bit of speculation, but I suspect that Solomon, he knows himself, the heart of humanity.

humanity. And he has the grace and the compassion after listening to the story of these women and after having judged so wisely, he lets them go without anything more being said.

Because they represent a miserable world and none of that misery has changed in 3,000 years where you and I are this evening.

[19:44] We still live, we live in a world full of heartbreak and brokenness. I hear some people say, well, you shouldn't be talking about a broken world, you should be talking about a sinful world.

You should be saying to people that, you should be reminding people that we're under the wrath of God, that we've strayed, that we've sinned against Him, we've rebelled against Him, and that we are culpable and guilty before a righteous God.

We are. But we also live in a broken world, a world that is suffering because of our sin. I know that some of that suffering is self-inflicted, and yet it's still suffering.

And Jesus came into the world to heal the brokenhearted by removing the sin in His own death on the cross. Remember how when Jesus met the woman at the well in John chapter 4, you remember how skillfully He won her over to Himself.

By the end of that conversation, she knew how guilty she was. She knew that she needed to be saved. She knew, remember what she said, she went away and she said to everybody, come and see a man who's told me everything that I ever did.

[21:10] He exposed all the secrets of her heart. And yet she had found her Savior, and her life was changed.

Jesus surrounded Himself by just these kind of people. The people who needed a doctor, as He said Himself. It's not the righteous who need a doctor, but it's sinners. They need to be healed, they need to be.

So we live in a sinful world, but we also live in a broken world. And we have to interact with a broken world. As churches and as congregations and as Christian people, we're called to interact and to bring the gospel of God's light in the Lord Jesus Christ, which alone can transform. And you know, when you come across people people, you have to remind yourself of several things. When you come across, let's say, these women who represent so much of the world in which we live, we don't know what their background was, we don't know how they got to be, where they were that day, we don't know what kind of homes they were brought up in, maybe they went astray, there's plenty of people who go astray, plenty of people who make wrong choices in life and have to suffer for it and are pushed over to the margin for their own doing, yes, that's right. Other people don't have the same opportunities in life. I'm not saying, I'm not talking about excuses or anything, it's just a fact. I'm often thankful for the kind of life that I, I've had such a privileged life. [23 : 07] I think that we have to be very, very careful before we pass judgment on someone just because of appearance or just because of circumstance.

We represent the God of grace, the Jesus who came into the world to be surrounded by all of the people in the world.

And of course, there were plenty of people who criticized him for that. He's going to be the guest of a man who's a sinner. They hated Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19. They couldn't understand why Jesus surrounded himself by the wrong kind of people.

I mean, after all, he's a rabbi. He's someone who knows the Old Testament. He knows his Bible. He should be in the synagogue or he should be in the temple. He should be associating with the right people and he didn't because he came to seek and to save the lost.

I can't help thinking also that Solomon may well have sympathized because of his own background which came into the circumstances of his birth.

[24 : 24] life. You know how his mother and father got together? They got together through an affair. His father committed adultery with his mother, David and Bathsheba.

He wasn't the child that was born as a result of that but he was the second child and it would have attracted all kinds of gossip and innuendo. Well, we all know where he comes from.

We all know what union he comes from. And he would have had to live with that stigma. I can't help wondering whether something of that entered into his sympathy for these women.

men. And I can't help thinking of how God is answering his prayer at that moment in time and giving him the ability to graciously deal with the situation as he found it.

What happened was, of course, these two women lived together. Of course, it begs the question, where were the men? Opens up a whole world of corruption, doesn't it? It exposes us once again to the world in which people are abused and taken advantage of.

[25 : 41] These women were, I'm quite sure, taken advantage of. Anyway, the kings, I want us to look at how the king dealt with their problem.

One of the children, one of the babies had died. And the mother of the dead baby had swapped the babies. And nobody knew, of course, there were no DNA testing in those days.

There was no way in which you could scientifically determine who was, of course, each mother knew within themselves whose was hers. But it was, as far as outside judging was concerned, Solomon had no idea because the baby is probably too young to look like his mother and he doesn't know and he's got to make a decision.

And he does so, so carefully and so patiently and so wisely. Verse 23, we read that the king is ruminating on this.

He's allowing himself to reflect and to think very carefully. He's not going to come to an instant decision. And as he ruminates, he does so with the wisdom that God has given to him.

[26 : 55] He's not going to rush into a rash decision. And he doesn't just listen to the first person who asks him or the first person who comes to him. He listens to both stories so he can weigh one up against the other.

It was him that wrote in the book of Proverbs that the one who gives you their story first always seems to be the right one until you hear the second one. What a wise thing.

What a knowledgeable thing to say. What a relevant thing in every society and in every part of the world. He understands also humanity, the good and the bad.

He understands the extraordinary love of a mother. He's been brought up by the extraordinary love of Bathsheba who's no doubt played a central part in his own life.

He was able somehow 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.

[27 : 56] because real love is prepared to make sacrifices for the well-being of her child. And he staked his decision on that principle because he knew that it was an unbreakable principle.

Real love is going to make sacrifices. Because real human love, and I'm talking about real love now, is what God has given us as we bear the image of God.

God puts it this way, can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion of the son of her womb.

That's the kind of love that reflects the love of God, a real love, the kind of love which we have discovered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course, as the story unfolds, we know that there were, I'm sure that there were several options open to Solomon. But Solomon took perhaps what was appeared on the outside anyway to be the most risky.

[29 : 03] at least that's what appears to be on the outside. But on another side, it was a decision on which was grounded on the safe principle that love, the love of the mother would prevail in the end.

So he said, bring a sword. He said, divide the child in two. Of course, the real mother, she just, there was no way she was going to allow this to happen. The false mother said, yeah, let it happen, that's fair, that's no problem.

The real mother, the woman in whose heart the child was, she could not possibly allow her child to be put to death.

And by that, Solomon recognized who the true mother was. God and this decision, of course, won him the respect.

All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered and they stood in awe of the king because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

[30 : 20] Such an amazing story, isn't it? Such an amazing story and yet there's something missing. there's something in the end that leaves you with a kind of empty feeling.

At least it does for me anyway. I'm sure it does for you as well. And the reason for that empty feeling is because these women go out as they've come in. They're not changed.

Okay, justice has been done but what they really need is what we all need this evening is for our sinfulness to be removed. And for that we need a saviour, not just a king but a saviour.

If we are going to be saved, Solomon cannot save anyone. He can't do anything about the problem of sin that lies at the root of the world's need.

But the Bible tells us that there is a greater than Solomon who was to come into the world. That's how Jesus described himself. A greater than Solomon is here.

[31 : 29] Now, in what way is Jesus greater than Solomon? Well, precisely this. Because Jesus was able to do what Solomon wasn't able. Solomon had tremendous majesty and splendor and riches and wisdom.

He was a great man in his day. And yet there was one thing he wasn't able to do. In fact, nobody in the Old Testament could do it. Nobody anywhere at any time could do it.

only Jesus could lay down his life as the sacrifice of our sins so that the guilt of our sin, all of our sin, whatever that sin is, could be removed.

And that's what God promises. And that's what God guarantees in the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on the cross. you can't help feeling here that in a kind of inverse way the story points to Jesus in that it leaves you with the one thing that is missing.

And that's the salvation of these women. Indeed, the salvation of all of us. sin. And that's what we have in Jesus. And that's why tonight in our sin, we run to Jesus and we put our trust in him.

[32 : 59] Not in ourselves because we don't have the answer. But Jesus came into the world to lay down his life so that by his death we could be saved.

And what that means is that our sin could be completely removed, forgiven, washed, purged. God could remove it altogether and that he could give us a new life.

That's what we need. That's what the world needs tonight. I listen to so many different theories of what the world needs. You listen to news programs, you listen to experts and they tell you this and they tell you that and this is what is needed politically and educationally and medically and all the rest of it.

And all of these things there's value in it. But you think, well, we know what the world needs. The world needs Jesus because only in Jesus can a man or a woman or a boy or a girl find eternal life. Do you have that eternal life yourself this evening? Only through Jesus can you have the life that God can give you, the forgiveness that God can give you.

[34 : 17] And it's free. Ask him and it will be given to you. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that there is a greater than Solomon in Jesus Christ.

And we pray now that we will discover him, that all of us tonight will discover not only who Jesus was, but discover for ourselves what he has done to save us from our sin.

So Lord, bring your word to us we pray in great power in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing together and closing and closing and .