

Solomons Dream

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[0 : 00] to that passage that we read, 1 Kings chapter 3 and verse 5. At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, Ask what I shall give you.

I want to tell you that New Year's Day spells the beginning of a new year, and it represents a new beginning for each one of us.

Perhaps there are many of us here today who have spent many years in this world, and you've seen it and done it all before. Perhaps you might be tempted to become cynical about life and about anything that suggests newness, but the Lord's mercies are new every morning, and for the Christian, for the person who trusts in the Lord, he is able to look forward to a life which is full of God's mercies, which are new continually.

But Solomon's reign in 1 Kings chapter 3, insofar as it too represented a new beginning for the people of Israel, we've seen before of how appropriate that is, and this passage is, I hope, to look at at the beginning of a new year.

The old era had passed away with David, and now everyone looked forward to another's, not because they didn't respect and love David.

[1 : 46] Of course they did. They loved him very much indeed, and I think I said before that I'm quite sure that there was a period of extensive mourning for David. But now, as with everything, it had to come to an end, and they were now looking to something new.

But this also represented a new beginning for Solomon himself. And he, as much as anyone, was aware, not only of the excitement that there was in that new beginning, but the dangers and the uncertainty of a new reign and a new era.

David had set up a very high precedent. How now was Solomon going to follow that precedent that David had, and the standard that David had set?

And I believe that we have in this passage a pattern, a blueprint, if you like, for starting anything new. Starting a new year, as we're doing today, a new job, starting out on married life, leaving home, beginning a new chapter of our lives, whatever that is, we have a blueprint, an excellent blueprint in this chapter of how to begin a new chapter in our lives.

I want you to notice, firstly, that Solomon begins his reign in worship. He begins his reign in worship. He does so by expressing what God means to him, and that is what worship is.

[3 : 21] It's not just following some kind of outward form. Jesus says, He that what God is spirit, and whoever worships him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

And we will never begin to worship unless we express what lies the love in our hearts for the Lord that lies in our hearts. That is what worship is.

And I'm sure that you'll notice that he did so, Solomon did so, by offering a thousand burnt offerings. Now, that wasn't because he believed that the more burnt offerings, the more sacrifices you made, the more chance you had of being saved.

Solomon knew full well that God does not save anyone by works. The offering of a thousand bulls represented the love, the extensiveness, and the enthusiasm with which Solomon loved the Lord.

And that's something he wanted everyone to know, even if it went to what we might regard as a ridiculously extravagant extreme. But is God's love for his people not extravagant?

[4 : 36] And in that case, why should we hold back the expression of our love for him? That is exactly what Solomon is doing.

He is telling the people of Israel, God comes first as far as I am concerned. This is how much I love him, but more so, this is how much I am laying hold on the provision that God has made for me in the removal of my sins.

Now, we've said many times that a person who was saved in the Old Testament was not saved by works, he was saved by faith. And what Solomon is saying here is that God has made provision in the Old Testament for the removal of sin by the shedding of blood.

And anyone who laid hold upon that provision looked forward to the promise of the coming Messiah, by whose death and whose laying down of his life would pay the price for our sins as the once for all sacrifice.

And so what Solomon is doing is that he is accepting the sacrifice that God has, the provision that God has made in sacrifice. And I hope every single one of us this morning is doing exactly the same thing.

[5 : 49] Not by offering bulls or rams or goats, but by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ by which he laid down his life so that by the shedding of his blood our sins can be removed.

There is no other way to live. There's no other way to take that step into the future. There's no other way because if there isn't, we're lost. We're completely lost. But today there is a way and even here in this passage, here is a man who's saying, well, I'm going to seek first the kingdom of God.

God is first. As far as I'm concerned, I'm putting God in the first place and everything else is going to surround and revolve around my commitment and my devotion to the Lord my God.

Is that what you're saying this morning? Is that what you're saying as we go into an uncertain future? For every one of us, it's an uncertain future. But if God is for us, who can be against us?

And he's promised to be for us in the person of Jesus Christ. Are you following him? Are you following the Lord Jesus Christ by faith? And this is the Old Testament of way of expressing to us how much we need Jesus Christ.

[6 : 58] A thousand burnt offerings. A thousand burnt offerings. That's how much Solomon loved the Lord. And we too are bringing in a new year by coming together in worship.

And our worship is worth-ship. How much is God worth to us? Can we truly say this morning, I love him because he first loved me.

But I want to notice also that Solomon went into this new era in personal communion with God. What we have in this chapter is a conversation, a personal engagement between God and Solomon.

God spoke to him and he spoke to God. Now what's so strange about that? There ought not to be anything strange about that. We ought to immediately recognize that that is what worship and personal communion is with the Lord.

And I hope that every one of us today is going into a new year in personal, not just coming together in an outward form, but in a personal relationship with the Lord in which God speaks to me in his word.

[8 : 09] There is nothing as personal as the word of God. There's nothing as appropriate to start any new chapter in my life as the word of God. And in which I come to God and I'm able to express my needs, my sorrows, my thankfulness, my dependence upon God.

That's exactly what is happening here. So there's nothing strange about this at all. But perhaps you might say, well, there is something strange, surely, about the verse you've chosen as a text, verse 5, in which God comes to Solomon and he says, ask what I shall give you.

Ask what I shall give you. Perhaps you've never read this story. And if not, this will all be new to you. As Solomon was worshiping on the threshold of his new reign, God came personally to him.

This is what the chapter is about. God came to him and he said, he put this challenge to him, ask what I shall give you. But the chances are that you have read this many times, often with amazement, at this statement which God makes to Solomon.

I want to suggest that there are two ways in which we can understand what's happening here. First of all, there's a wrong way. I want to get rid of that wrong way completely, right from the very start.

[9 : 28] The wrong way is to think of God as some kind of genie. is God there ready to do whatever Solomon wishes. This is not God coming to Solomon saying, I'll give you so many wishes.

That's not the way it's to be understood at all. The right way to understand this passage is for us to read it again and to recognize it doesn't say whatever you wish I will give you.

That's not what God is saying at all. What God is saying is, ask what I shall give you.

Even at that, your first reaction to that might be to say, well, wasn't that wonderful? I wish that God would say that to me. But remember this, that what's happening here is exactly what Jesus himself said.

There is no difference between what God is saying to Solomon and what Jesus says to us. ask and it shall be given to you.

[10 : 46] Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened to you. Or in John chapter 16, he tells us, truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

And you say, well, that's a really simplistic statement, isn't it? That does truly not mean that whatever I want, of course it doesn't. It doesn't mean that we can ask God for whatever we want. That's the whole point.

There's a vast difference between what we might happen to wish in this world and what God wants to give us. That's what we have to try and understand. Prayer is not the way of, again, we're going to see that in a few moments' time, that prayer is not a way of getting what we want.

It's a way of honouring God. by surrendering and submitting ourselves to him and yet asking him for what he wants to give us.

But all the same, it was a huge, probably the biggest challenge that Solomon had ever been faced with up until that moment in time. Because when you think about it, as God is saying to him, ask what I shall give you, what's the answer going to be?

[12 : 02] Isn't it amazing? There must be this kind of poignant pause between the question, the challenge, and what's all. Every one of us surely is asking, what is he going to say?

How do you answer a question like that? How do you answer? Because here is Solomon, he's faced with a whole array of different, it must have been a thousand things, a thousand issues, which he could have asked God for.

And what is it going to be? What is that one thing he's going to ask God for? Solomon. Because whatever that's going to be is going to reveal the character of Solomon.

And that's why I mean by the most challenging thing that's ever been put before him. His own nature, his character, his personality, is going to be what you really, in other words, let me say this, you are what you ask for.

That's what God was saying to him, you are what you ask for. Ask it, whatever that's going to be. And whatever his answer was going to be was going to reveal and expose the character.

[13 : 06] What would you say if God said that to you today? Ask what I shall give you. It's a very searching question, isn't it? I wonder what my answer would be to that. I wonder what your answer would be to that.

Ask what I shall give you. Is it going to be something that I want for my own personal progression in life? Or is it going to be something that will honor and glorify glorify God?

That's the challenge, isn't it? That's the challenge. And that's where we are today. And the way in which we look forward to a new year. Our looking forward could be the way that I guess most people look forward in our hopefully to have a better life.

To have a more prosperous life. To have an easier life. To make progress in my own pleasure and in my own advancement. moment. Or is it a life, a year, a new chapter that's going to glorify God and in which he will take the first place and in which he will be honored in my life.

That's where we stand, either of these two places. And I want us to see then in the answer that Solomon gives four things in which I think that spell out a template if you like for the way in which we should take a first step into a new year.

[14 : 39] I want us to see four things in this prayer of Solomon. First of all, I want us to see that he thanks God for God's provision in the past.

What does he say? Solomon said, you have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father because he walked before you in faithfulness and in righteousness and in uprightness of heart towards you and you have kept for him.

Now I want you to notice this particularly. You have kept for him this great and steadfast love and I've given him a son to sit on his throne to this day.

That's the first thing that Solomon says in his prayer to the Lord. He thanks God for God's provision in the past.

And I think that with Solomon that we too at this stage in our lives need to stop and to recognize all that God has done for us.

[15 : 45] It is so terribly dishonoring to God, isn't it? It's dishonoring even when somebody gives you any gift of any kind for us not to thank. The first thing we say when somebody gives us something is to say thank you.

And yet isn't it the case that when you think about all that the Lord has done for us? I know that what I'm saying here is so basic and yet it's the basic things that we forget and that we lose sight of.

Isn't it true that we lose sight of all that God has done for us? The Bible tells us that we are to think, we are to consider what great things the Lord has done for us even if our lives are a mixture of what is easy and pleasant and what is unpleasant and what is sad and what is tragic.

We can safely say even at that, that the Lord has done great things for us. And so we need to at this moment in time stop and to thank the Lord for all his goodness over the past year.

But I want us to focus specifically on this word that Solomon uses, his great and steadfast love. Now that's a very particular word in the Old Testament, it's a word in the Hebrew called *hezad* and it appears many, many times in connection with God's faithfulness to his own covenant.

[17 : 15] Why was it that out of all the kingdoms of the world God chose one family and didn't just bless them by giving them food and clothes and weather and provision, he blessed them with his own presence and with his own promise.

The family of Abraham when he called him out of hour of the colonies and he promised that in his seed all nations would be blessed. He promised that in the years and the generations to come that he would be his God and that they would be his people.

He promised that the blessing of God and that word blessing is connected with this word that Solomon is using, his steadfast love of the Lord. A love that simply does not fail and does not go away and it's a love that has extended and been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ who came into the world to lay down his life as a fulfillment of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

God commends his own love towards us, Paul says. He commends his own particular, unique, saving, covenant love towards us in that Jesus died for sinners, for you and me.

While we were unrighteous, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. That's, you cannot explain that in any other way apart from the steadfast, immovable, unchangeable, extensive love of God and that love is as new today as it was ever.

[18 : 52] That love is being expressed to us as new today in the New Testament in the Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children, the sons, the daughters of God and that is what we are.

So let's stop for a moment. One more time. In a changing world, in a world that's full of uncertainty, in a credit crunch, a credit crisis, in a world where one end of the world doesn't know what the other end is going to do from one day to another, where who knows what might happen.

We're looking for steadfastness, something immovable and unchangeable. God, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Why is that so important to me? Because of his steadfast love towards me, a love that will not let me go. You have shown great and steadfast love love to us, says Solomon.

Let that be the basis and the rock and the foundation of us taking that first step into a new year. The second thing that we have in David's prayer is that he recognizes God's providence in bringing him to be where he is that day.

[20 : 21] God's providence. What do we mean by God's providence? God's love to describe the way that God orders the events that take place in our lives, every single one of them.

Life is not a random, meaningless series of events, but there is a God who rules and reigns over us and particularly focuses that rule and reign on his people so that we as his people, if we trust in Jesus Christ, we know, we know that there is a God and not one single thing misses his attention and falls out with that reign and rule and order that God in which God is controlling the events that take place in our lives is providence.

There are many things, if you really look into this statement, the second thing that Solomon says, there are many strange things about this. For example, why would God take a man whose birth was questioned, who was the subject of talk and gossip, who was the result of an adulterous relationship?

You know, it's quite strange, isn't it, how God should place his love on him. That's because God doesn't act the way that he doesn't depend upon our sense of morality and rightness.

God's love, God's love extends beyond what we think. And God, God's grace is greater than all our sinfulness.

[22 : 03] And that's why we're here today, to remember the grace of God in the gospel. And how many times in the pages of scripture do we find people, the very last people that you would ever to become famous as people, men and women in the Bible, as people that God would slot into his particular plan and purpose, the very last people.

We would choose the upright ones. We would choose the ones who had a blameless record, the ones who were whiter than white, squeaky clean. These are the ones that we would choose in order for God.

But that's not what God's grace is all about. God's grace reaches down to those who are oppressed and those who are sinful and those who need him.

That's why Jesus was surrounded by the prostitutes and sinners of his day. That's why he chose to be amongst them in order to reach out the saving love of God and to bring them into his kingdom by faith.

The providence in which Solomon was made to be what he is. And you know, the fact is that strangely enough, you know, you look around us today, this morning, you see this whole variety of faces and ages and backgrounds and circumstances.

[23 : 20] For some reason, God has brought us all together. We are in Stornoway today for a reason. God has ordered that we should be in Stornoway today. God has ordered that we should come into his house today and together to worship him, to hear his word.

He's ordered you to be you. He's ordered you to live in 2009. He's allowed you to see another year, 2008, coming to an end, and he's allowed you because he has a purpose and he has a reason for it.

It's not something random. He doesn't want you to be someone else. He doesn't want you to live somewhere else. He doesn't want you to be in any other circumstances. Everything, I know you, and I know that many of you are living through difficult times when you're struggling with various circumstances and that's the will and the power.

It's easy to say that. I know that. It's easy for me to stand up, you might say, and to say, well, you're not where I am. And yet, what other answer is there?

What can I say? Am I going to say, well, that's just the luck of the draw? And if it is, what are we doing today? Why are we not just drowning our sorrows?

[24 : 34] Of course we're not. We're recognizing that what Paul recognized in Romans chapter 8, God, he says, works all things for the good of those who love him.

Oh, it's easy to say that. I know it's easy to say it. But there is nothing else. There is no other promise. And what's marvelous about it is this. It's true.

And sometimes you don't see it, but you lay hold of it because it's God's word. God's providence is, we'll never understand it. You'll never ever understand God's providence.

Don't even try. And yet it's something we can lay hold of. I'm quite sure that Solomon couldn't understand God's providence either. He couldn't answer the question, why me? Why am I here?

You say, well, it's easy for him because he was a king. We're going to find out in a few moments of time. It wasn't easy for him. There was never a more vulnerable moment in his life. never a moment in his life when he probably felt like running a million miles away from the responsibilities that he had.

[25 : 40] It was not an easy thing to be a king in Israel. And God knows the difficulties that we face as well. God has brought us here for his reason.

He's brought you to this day for this reason. However long our lives are going to last, I don't know. Whatever faces us, I don't know. That's why I read that verse, that extra wee verse in verse 16.

I guess the last thing that Solomon ever expected as he set out on his reign, as he had prayed to God, as he had been promised the wisdom that God had given, here was the first test, the most unusual, extraordinary, bizarre situation that ever could face anyone.

What in the world was he going to do with these two prostitutes, one of them whose son had died and the other one whose son was living. I don't want to go into that too much today.

What was he going to do? But yet he knew that this was the test and you and I are going to be tested as well and we are going to be, it's easy to talk about God's providence and God's goodness and God's strength and all of these things.

[26 : 48] It's easy to use the platitudes. It's more difficult when we're tested and when we're faced with situations that we find almost impossible to deal with. God's providence means we are, who we are, for what we are, when we are, at the time.

God has raised us for this purpose and for this purpose to glorify him. Thirdly, he acknowledges his total ignorance in his profession.

His profession was to be a king. God had called him and he had placed him on the throne of Israel. In many senses, this was out of Solomon's hands. he had not chosen himself to be king.

God had brought him to this place and given him this enormous, impossible task for any one man to carry out. And he acknowledges there and then before God that I know nothing about what you are asking me to do.

I know nothing. Isn't that amazing? The only place you'll ever find that is in the Bible. Imagine somebody went for a job and the first job interview and the person said to him, well, what do you know about the job?

[27 : 54] He said, I know nothing. He wouldn't have much chance to get the job, would he? And imagine Solomon had stood up in front of all the people and said, I know nothing about being a king.

The people would have lost confidence in him right away, wouldn't they? That's the kind of thing that you say to God. There are things you say to God that you don't say to other people, aren't there? And this is Solomon saying to God what really lay within his heart.

That's the amazing thing about prayer. You can pour out your heart to God. You can tell him anything you want. Even it's the kind of things that people would be shocked at. And this is what he said, God's his own ignorance in his profession.

But you know, there's another way of looking at that as well. And that is this, that in God's hands, ignorance is as good a place to start as any. I remember hearing a preacher saying that once. ignorance is as good a place to start as any.

And that's what God wants. He doesn't want you to pretend to be someone. He doesn't want, he's not, he's not impressionable. He doesn't want you to stand before him and tell him all that. That was, that was what the tax, that was what the Pharisee did.

[29 : 02] He stood before God and told him all the things that he had been doing. That's not what it's about at all. It's about the emptiness in our heart. And God can take that person who is empty in his heart and who is prepared to admit and confess that he knows nothing and he's completely incapable by himself of doing anything in God's service and God can do anything.

Let me tell you, anything with that person. You just look at the disciples. What were they? A bunch of unschooled, ignorant fishermen. What did they do? What Jesus did with them? He changed the course of history and used these men to change the course of, to bring the gospel to many, many people.

That is the way that God works. It's the way that grace works. It's not the way that we work. But it's because that's the only way that God's name is going to be glorified amongst us.

And that we're going to see that this is not, we're saved by grace and not by our own works or by anything that we do. And then lastly, he asks for wisdom to look after God's property.

The reason I use the word God's property is because Solomon makes special mention of the people of Israel. They weren't just any people. We've seen that before. It wasn't just, this wasn't just a nation amongst all the other nations in Canaan at the time.

[30 : 33] This was God's people, God's special possession. And the same word is used in the New Testament for those who have come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior.

Solomon was dealing with the people of God and there was only one way in which he could deal with them and that was to have. There's only one thing at the end of the day, it came down to wisdom.

Wisdom. What is wisdom? It's that one of these words that you could interpret in a thousand different ways, isn't it? Unless it's like the word love. Love is interpreted in a thousand different ways in today's world.

It's the same with wisdom. For many people it's common sense. It's just nothing but another word for common sense. For other people it's experience. You can't be wise until you're gray-headed and you're old and you've had experience in life.

For other people it's connected to, other people connected to Eastern mysticism. But that's not what wisdom is at all according to the Bible. Wisdom, according to the Bible, begins with, you know what I'm going to say, the fear of God.

[31 : 46] And it's a fear, the fear of God is not the dread of God. Fear of God is a relationship with the Lord in which we have come to know him and come to worship him and come to serve him.

And come to seek the kingdom of God first. That's what the fear. We've come to love the Lord with all our heart and mind and soul and strength.

That's God's first commandment to each one of us. To love the Lord. That's what the fear of God is. And you will never ever know the wisdom that God is offering his people until you begin to know the love.

Until you have that love for God that only God can give you when we ask as and when we ask it. And yet we need that wisdom, don't we? There are a whole host.

There's a whole host of circumstances and challenges and decisions and people and places and situations that we face in our future.

[32 : 45] Just as there was this time last year. We don't know what they are going to be. But we need to have that quality that the Bible calls wisdom in order to be able to know how to deal and how to progress and how to take one step at a time into an unknown future.

That's what wisdom is. It involves knowing God's word. It involves having a greater and greater knowledge of God's word.

I want to challenge you today. At the beginning of a new year, do we ask God to give you a greater knowledge of what his Bible tells us?

Do we have a hunger for God's word? And not only just to know it in our heads, but to be able to practice it and to be able to put it into practice in our everyday lives.

It comes through also what we've read here, that personal communion with God that God promises to each of his people. Is 2009 going to be a praying year for each one of us?

[33 : 59] In which we're going to discover a fresh time and again the importance and value and the need that every one of us has for that personal communion with God. You know what? It's when we try and solve our problems by ourselves that things go wrong.

I'm not saying that things become easy, but you'll never be able to solve the kind of problems that you and I face by trying it in our own strength. We need the power and the company and the presence of God with us.

And if there's one lesson I've learned in over 40 years a Christian, it's that. It's the times when I leave God out of my thinking that things go catastrophically wrong and I fall and fail and backslide.

I hope 2009 is going to be a year in which we come near to God and he will come near to us. That's what wisdom is. But wisdom extends to all the kind of situations that we're going to face, not least the ones that involve people.

It involves our patience in various situations. Patience when it's stretched to the very limit. It involves what you say. The use and the control of our tongue.

[35 : 09] It involves our anger. You know, there is such a thing as righteous anger. And yet, for the most part, it's true to say, isn't it, that when our anger, when we express anger and when we become angry, it's not righteous at all.

But when we begin to appreciate the kind of character that God wants us to have, we're going to have much more control over our emotions and particularly our anger. We're going to have control over our tongues.

What we say to people, we're going to be, stop and let our words be few. That's wisdom. We're going to listen to the advice of others instead of thinking that we know everything.

We're going to listen to the rebukes of others instead of thinking that we're better than other people. Let the righteous smite me, said David. It's oil to my head. If someone was to come to you and say, look, I really want to talk to you.

I think there's something wrong. There's something here that I think you need to look at. What do you say? You say, I don't want to hear. This is none of your business. Don't even come near me. That's not what David was like at all.

[36 : 11] David was prepared to listen to the advice and to the rebukes of other people who loved the Lord. And he was put right. His own life was rectified.

And put right through their intervention. That's how God worked. There is a host, a host of different scenarios and situations I could talk about today in which we need the wisdom of God.

The wisdom to be able to choose between two decisions. The wisdom to be able to go into the most difficult situation just the same way as Solomon. Solomon had to very quickly deal with the most bizarre.

Not everything in our lives is black and white. Not everything is either easy or difficult. There are some things when it just takes our breath away.

Having to make the kind of decisions that we have to make. Who knows what they're going to be. If God is for us, who can be against us? That's the one thing that we have. God working in our intellect and in our emotions and in our life, preparing the way before us.

[37 : 17] giving us the experience of life, giving us the knowledge in his word. So that when the time comes, we'll be able to rely and depend upon him and he will give us.

He will give us his strength in time of need. Time has gone. The result of Solomon's prayer was this. Two results.

A, God was pleased. God was pleased with what Solomon asked. That is the objective in all prayer.

To pray for what pleases God. God must come first. Paul tells us in Ephesians, find out what pleases God.

That's our objective, isn't it? That's our objective for 2009. Find out what pleases God. Solomon's prayer pleased God. And because Solomon asked for something that was going to honor God and honor his people and honor his cause, God secondly gave Solomon not just what he asked, but what he did not ask for.

[38 : 28] He gave him the power and the influence and the wealth. He gave him the success and the riches that he, because you know why? He knew that Solomon could handle it if he had the wisdom to handle it.

And that same God comes to us today and tells us that he is able to do in us and for us more than we can ask or even think.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, once again, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We rejoice that we can start a new year knowing that if God is for us, who can be against us?

We rejoice that we can start a new chapter in our lives, being united with Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit. Lord, we pray to forgive all our sins.

Lord, whatever sins and wrongdoings we have done in the past year, take them away. And Lord, give us, we pray, to look to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

[39 : 47] Lord, give us to look to him and his providence. Bless the rest of this day to us. Bless the days that lie ahead. Who knows what this year will hold? And yet, if God is for us, then who can be against us?

Forgive our sins, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.