

Solomon

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] in Solomon's wisdom in dealing with the two mothers and the child that had passed away, and the living child, and who gets the child. So what we're going to be doing this evening is concentrating very much on the first part, and so we're going to read from verses 1 through to 9, and then I'll just fill in the rest as we go. So if you'd like to turn to 1 Kings 3, now hear God's word. Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David until he had finished building his house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall round Jerusalem. The people were sacrificing at the high places. However, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord, Solomon loved the

Lord, walking in the statutes of David, his father. Only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was a great, the great high place.

Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, ask what I shall give you. And Solomon said, you have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David, my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in a place of David, my father. Although I am but a little child, I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.

Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to govern this your great people? Well, it goes on to say that this pleased the Lord, that Solomon didn't ask for riches or honor. That was given to him because he had asked for wisdom. And then Solomon's wisdom is put to the test by two mothers, which says here they were prostitutes living in the same house, but two mothers. One of the child dies, one of the mothers takes the other child, and Solomon has to determine which mother is the mother of the living child. And of course, that would mean the mother of the child who's passed away. And so that's how it sort of ends.

And then in verse 28, it says this, that all Israel heard the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived the wisdom of God was in him to do justice. We're going to be looking at the first part in particular, though. So may God bless the reading and his word to us this evening. We're going to come back to that after this next hymn. So if you'd like to turn again to 1 Kings 3. As you do, you'll know that David at this point has died. Solomon is on the throne. And Solomon begins his sort of kingship or kingly rule, let's say, with very little attention on God, it would appear. So that's where we're kind of up to.

[4 : 2 3] You would probably associate 1 Kings 3 most of the time with the fact that Solomon has this difficult situation to deal with, as I said, with the mothers and the death of one of the children.

And this chapter is often known for the latter part of the chapter, where Solomon has to figure out which mother is the mother of the child that is living, and make sure that the living child goes back to the real mother. And that lays out more or less what this chapter is about. But I want to point out that that bit only comes after the bit Solomon asking for wisdom. Up to that point, it's quite a different story for Solomon. And here's why. In the same way today, as in Solomon's day, something happens where a distinction has to be made, a very careful distinction. And it's this distinction. That sometimes that we can be terribly impressed with people in what they have done, at the same time overlook the type of relationship that they have with God. We see it in the church all the time. And people are known for what they do and what they don't do. But the point here, and this is a careful point to remember and to grab hold of, is that there must be a distinction made between what a person does and their relationship with the Lord for this simple reason.

That sometimes we can be so caught up in the great thing that they have done, and perhaps they have done it for us, that we then overlook their relationship with the Lord. In other words, our view of them becomes very sort of one-sided in our favor, because they've done something quite precious to us or for us. They're a good person. We know them for that, for the good that they have done. But at the same time, we're not really asking the question that we should ask, and that is, what does their relationship with God look like? And the reason why I think that question needs asking is because 1 Kings makes us ask that question. That everyone knows at the end of 1 Kings 3 that Solomon has got the wisdom from God, able to do justice for other people, and the temptation is to go, well, he's a wise king. And we look at the very act that Solomon does for others, but overlook his relationship with God as what kind of a person he is. So let me try and explain it in a slightly different way. Someone might explain themselves as a good person because of what they do or they don't do.

In other words, I'm a good person because I do this and I don't do that. In fact, plenty of unbelievers might describe themselves in that way. You know, yeah, I've been bad in the past because I used to do this, that, and the other, but now I'm a good person because now I no longer do that or this.

Well, okay, that kind of change is good that you're doing good things rather than bad things. But more importantly, it doesn't seek to get to the depths of where they stand before God.

[7 : 40] The only point that you've got to is what they do and what they don't do. What we need to address is, okay, let's not overlook someone's relationship with God.

In other words, it's easy to not take any notice of someone's relationship with God because we're taking too much notice of the good things that they're actually doing. And sometimes we might even look at all the good things that they're doing as a measurement for their relationship with God.

Well, the trouble with that is you get into the New Testament with the Pharisees who could outdo every single one of us on any day of the week, hands down, with the good works that they do.

But Jesus was very, very clued up on them saying that despite all their good works, their relationship with God stunk. It wasn't close. It wasn't clean.

There's a problem there. And so this distinction can be made between what you do and the type of relationship you have with God because what really matters is the forgiveness of sins and then living the life that God has given you.

[8 : 49] You know, when Solomon exercises his wisdom and reunites the right mother with the living child, yeah, that is a great thing, that Solomon has done a great thing and he's known throughout all Israel, verse 28, for doing such a great thing for other people.

But what you don't notice here is, okay, but what is Solomon's relationship with God like? Well, it must be good because he's done this great thing. Well, there's the issue, the temptation to think that because he does a great thing for God, then therefore his relationship with God must be as equally as great.

And the trouble is, thinking that way can lead us astray for a number of different reasons because we're not noticing the other things that aren't always noticed, that need to be noticed, might I add.

Here's the thing. Solomon asked God for wisdom, and that's a good thing to ask God for. And he asked God for wisdom specifically that he might be able to do good to other people, that he might be able to lead this great congregation of God's people, that he might be able to work justice for other people.

And this pleased God. Solomon didn't ask for riches or honor, though he was given that. And we are so caught up in the fact that Solomon receives this that we're losing track of his character, of the type of person that Solomon actually was, that he gets this wisdom, he uses this wisdom, but his relationship with God still needs a couple questions being both asked and then, of course, answered.

[10 : 30] Now, if you get to Jesus, you've not got that problem because everything that Jesus does is, of course, both wise and just, and no one's going to call into question his relationship with God.

So those two are a perfect marriage, everything that he does and his relationship with God. But Solomon isn't Jesus. Solomon does do the justice of God on earth, but he's not Jesus.

And therefore, the issue that you have is his relationship with God needs to be questioned. And here's why. Solomon is known as the wisest man on earth, and at the same time, everyone in this room recognizes that though he is the wisest man on earth, he was also the most foolish.

But how can both be true? How can both be true? How can a man have a reputation for being so wise, and yet at the same time, have another reputation for being so foolish?

Well, I think it's very, very simple. That Solomon was the epitome of a man who was wise for other people, but so foolish for himself. He knew the right decision to make for everybody else, apart from himself.

[11 : 46] I think that's the distinction that we're meant to see. That he does know how to do justice amongst God's people, and that's what we notice. But when it actually comes to himself, look at the foolish mistakes that he makes time and time again.

And it's a deep challenge to anybody reading the life of Solomon, how someone can have so much wisdom, and at the same time, have so much wisdom from God, and yet be so foolish.

And the summary is simply this, that Solomon recognizes that he's king, that he comes before God, because he's doing things that he should not be doing. And God stops him in the middle of doing something that he shouldn't be doing at Gibeon, and says to him, Solomon, ask for whatever you want, and I'll give it to you.

And Solomon, you know, sort of takes everything into consideration. And he says, well, what I need is discernment. I need justice to be able to lead the people that you have given me.

But that's not how the chapter starts. The chapter starts by telling us that Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, something which he's not allowed to do, because marriage was only ever supposed to be between a believer and the rest of God's people.

[13 : 06] So Solomon already is in an unholy union, an uncovenantal union amongst the people of God.

And God explains that back in Deuteronomy 7. So right at the very beginning of the chapter, we don't have a king who recognizes everything that he needs to recognize. We have a king who's already gone off on his travels, doing things, and God has to stop him midway, and says, hang on a minute, Solomon, ask, ask, and it will be given to you.

It's almost like a test to see what Solomon will ask for. So here's the first thing that we need to notice about Solomon, that he's married the wrong person.

But secondly, he's also worshiping God in the wrong way. You'll notice in verse 2, it says that the people are sacrificing in the high places. Well, you're not allowed to do that.

It then says in verse 3, that Solomon as well is making offerings at the high places. Again, you're not allowed to do that, because God has made it very, very clear that he's only to be worshipped in one place, that the sacrifice is only to happen in one place.

[14 : 18] So even before we get to this point where Solomon is asking God for wisdom, he has already gone astray. And here's why he's gone astray. He has a divided heart.

But the division is not what you think. It's not as simple as Solomon not loving God all the time and loving everybody else all the time. No. You see, heart in Scripture, all the way through from beginning to end, involves both affection and thinking.

So whenever we read about the heart throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, it's always referring to love or affection and thinking. And that's really quite important.

Solomon has a divided heart. It's not that he loves God some of the times and he loves something else the other time. He loves God. It states that he loves God. But he's gone and married Pharaoh's daughter.

So he doesn't love God's law that much to go ahead and break it, to go ahead and do what he wants to do. In other words, out of his heart, he's married Pharaoh's daughter, out of love, let's say, hopefully, perhaps, one wonders.

[15 : 29] But that love has not been directed by clear thinking. Because clear thinking would have told him that he should never have done that. As we read in Deuteronomy 7, the very law that God says that kings are not allowed to marry outside the people of God.

And yet here we have a king doing that very thing. You see, his heart is not cooperating with itself. The heart is a combination of both affection and thinking.

Put it this way. As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is. Well, no, shouldn't it be feeleeeth? No. Feeling? No. Shouldn't it be affect? No. As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.

Okay, there's a combination in the heart of both loving and thinking clearly. And they're supposed to work in cooperation. But what happens in Solomon's life is that they're not working in cooperation.

And the division is a division in his heart. It's not a division in what he's facing. Rather, the division is within his very heart. He has a divided heart, not because he loves God and loves something else.

[16 : 37] That's the outworking of it. But rather, the division in his heart is a division between true affection and clear thinking. The wisdom that he's about to ask for.

Jesus put it this way, that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart. Strength, mind, thinking, everything.

Very, very clear. Solomon has a divided heart and this is what leads him astray. And this is why he thinks it's acceptable to worship God in high places, open places, public places, when God has made it very, very clear that God is not to be worshipped in that way.

That God is not to be sacrificed to in that way. In other words, it's the lordship standard. By what standard will you worship God? By what standard will you marry?

By what standard will you live your life? It's the lordship question over and over again. Okay, you're making all these decisions, but by what standard are you measuring those decisions?

[17 : 43] So when God comes to Solomon at Gibeon, he comes to a man who's utterly caught up in his own foolishness.

And thankfully, Solomon recognizes this in verse 7, where he recognizes the greatness of his father David, but he comes before God and he simply says that I am but a little child.

I'm but a little, I'm a king. I'm a king. I'm the king of Israel. But I am like a little child. I don't know how to go and I don't know how to come. I'm like a little child before you.

Solomon loved the Lord, okay. He loved the Lord. But his love was without any direction. And it was without any sort of consistency.

It was from a divided heart. It could never be consistent. You know, divided houses can't stand. Jesus taught us that. And so here we have Solomon really in the thick of it.

[18 : 50] And by the thick of it, I mean really in the most foolish to foolish things that he has got to. So what is his greatest need? Well, his greatest need is, of course, wisdom. He needs a heart full of wisdom to instruct a heart full of love.

There's no doubt about that. So this is the next thing that we need to notice, that Solomon has been asked by God, ask anything that you like and I'll give it to you.

You say, well, that was Solomon. What about me? Okay, Jesus says to you, ask and it shall be given. Now, here's the test. Why do you ask God for the things that you do?

It'll only ever come down to two things, whether you realize them or not. Here's the first thing that it'll come down to. How well you know yourself. That's the first thing that it'll come down to. The second thing that it'll come down to is how well you understand your responsibility before God.

And that'll determine what you ask for. Every time. Now, if you don't understand your responsibility before God, you're going to ask, but you're not going to ask wisely. You're not going to ask informally.

[19 : 58] If you don't know yourself that well, and true wisdom, John Calvin pointed out, is not only to know God, but it is to know yourself well through the scriptures. To know you as God knows you.

That's what it means to be wise about yourself. Well, Solomon has already indicated before God that he's like a little child. In other words, I'm the king of Israel, but I'm like a little child.

I understand. I can see myself. I can see where I am. And I know that I need wisdom. I know I need to grow up. I know I need to be mature. Because I'm not being that. I'm like a little child.

I don't know how I'm going or coming. I need help. Okay, that's a good start. That you would be able to recognize where you stand before a holy God. Very good start. But then he says this, you know, but I am the king.

Now he begins to realize his responsibility and how the two don't fit together. An immature child doesn't make a good king. So he both understands his position before God, and then secondly, he understands his responsibility before God, and he puts the two together and go, those don't fit.

[21 : 06] What I need is wisdom. And he asks God for wisdom, and God gives him that wisdom.

Otherwise, when you pray to God, and Jesus has already said to you, you can ask for anything that you like. Ask and it will be given. It will be given. Ask and it will be given.

Okay, God knows how to give and when to give, but ask and it will. What do you ask for? Well, number one, do you understand yourself well enough to know what you need?

God understands you perfectly well, but do you understand yourself well? And secondly, do you understand your responsibility before God? It seems to me that only when you've understood what responsible, what you are responsible before God, only then are you going to be able to figure out, these are the things that I need to ask for.

In other words, you know, before God, I'm a husband. I know the kind of things that I need to ask for in order to be a faithful husband. I'm a father. Therefore, I know that as I stand before God, because I've got, God's given me this responsibility, I've got a whole load of things to ask for because I'm now a father.

[22 : 17] I'm a pastor, right? Now I've got additional responsibility, which means that I've got a whole other list to ask God for. In other words, the more you consider your responsibility before God and all the spheres that God has given to you, this informs everything that you should ask for.

Everything that you should ask for. So if you're impatient, I'm like a little child, of course you pray for patience. Okay?

If you're immature in wisdom, you pray for wisdom like Solomon does. In other words, the more you know about yourself and the more you know about your responsibility, the more informed your praying will be when it comes to asking God for anything that you would like.

God knows what you need. He's asking you if you do when he asks you to ask for it. So what stops Solomon from asking for all the wrong things?

Well, because he knows what he needs. He doesn't ask for riches. He doesn't ask for honor. He doesn't ask for a number of other things. He doesn't ask for things that he thinks that he needs or that he would like.

[23 : 27] What stops him asking? Well, because he knows that what he needs, first and foremost, is to grow up and take responsibility of a king properly. And the thing that he needs, more than anything else, is wisdom to be able to do that.

So knowing yourself and knowing your responsibility before God is the very thing that informs your asking in prayer. The very thing that informs your asking in prayer.

Why is it that Solomon, having received all of this wisdom, of which the people say in verse 28, that the king, they stood in awe of the king because of his great wisdom, at the same time, is followed by such great folly.

Well, here's the reason. It's not because he didn't receive wisdom. It isn't because the wisdom that he received is somehow insufficient, but rather because he has a divided heart.

In other words, the wisdom of God was used on everybody else apart from himself. The wisdom of God was used on these two mothers and the living child.

[24 : 45] Throughout Scripture, it's used everywhere else, but apart from himself. In other words, Solomon is the, as I've said, the epitome of a man who could be so wise for other people and yet so foolish for himself.

Knowing what other people need, knowing the decisions that other people should make, but himself, because of his divided heart, could never arrive at the answer for himself. Could so seek, could so clearly see other people's positions and problems and what they needed to address the situation, but for himself, now this divided heart called him so much, caused him so much trouble, so many difficulties where he didn't know what to do or rather he didn't do the very thing that he ought to have done.

In other words, he had wisdom for others, but unapplied for himself. He wouldn't instruct himself. Here's the exhortation. Love and wisdom or affection and wisdom are a combination influence.

One is meant to instruct the other and the other is meant to instruct the other. They are to instruct one another. And this is what stops us from loving the wrong things and going in the wrong way.

Because we don't just love, but rather we love with clear thinking. And we don't just have clear thinking, but we think clearly with love. But this is a combination that only God can achieve in the heart.

[26 : 17] But again, once he's achieved it in the heart, it must be a combination that we hold on to. We shouldn't have a division between the two. We shouldn't ever try and separate what we feel from what we know to be correct.

And God allows us to receive his word to store it up in our hearts so that it would then influence all the things that we love. Solomon's divided heart caused him so much trouble, caused him to go in the wrong direction, caused him to live a life that was drifting from God.

Solomon needed to be incredibly careful because he was putting everyone else right, it seems, but unable to get himself right before God.

And so there's the temptation to be able to look at a person who's able to do so good for so many other people, who's able to be so wise for so many other people, and then overlook that person's standing before God.

We get carried away by the great things that they have done and yet fail to see that that's not the issue. The issue is where do they stand before God? Okay, you're a clever person.

[27 : 31] Okay, God has gifted you with tremendous amount of gift, but what is your relationship like with God? Okay, I know what God has done for you.

I can see what a great person you are. I can see the great things that you have done for God and that you have done for other people, but what about you and God in relationship? What does that look like? See, no longer will you be thrown off or you ought not to be thrown off by what people do for you and somehow overlook, perhaps on purpose, their standing with God, which you know to be in difficulty.

But it's easily done, isn't it? Easily done. Because it's very hard to judge a person when they've done a great thing for you, even when you know deep in your heart their relationship with God is not good.

But isn't that the thing that we're meant to be questioning? Isn't that the most important thing for them? What they are like with God, not what they have done for you?

Jesus never separates love from obedience, ever. He says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. In other words, he understands perfectly why he's God, that these two are meant to influence each other.

[28 : 56] Love is something which God directs us with and which we are directed by and it's not open to interpretation. It's not open to interpretation.

It's just an interpretation. It's not an interpretation issue. Very clear. We can't get away with that with Jesus. If you love me, you'll keep my commandments. It's not an argumentative point.

In fact, it's very clear. Very, very clear. But here's the point, I think, for all of us that we're going to have to wrestle with.

That despite all the problems that Solomon had, that Solomon knew deep in his heart the thing that he needed the most, wisdom. But the problem that Solomon had was that division.

That division in his heart. Solomon certainly wasn't the wisest man on earth. He may have been the second wisest man on earth. Second to Jesus, of course. But he wasn't the wisest man on earth when you take into consideration all the foolishness that he did.

[30 : 01] Yes, he was the wisest man on earth when it came to instructing others. But when it came to his relationship with God, there was nothing but terrible folly. And so remember, the division here is not between loving God in one moment and not loving God the next.

That certainly is a division. That I love God today and I don't love God tomorrow. That I'm focused on God today but I'm not focused on God tomorrow. That I put God first this morning but this afternoon I'm changing my mind.

Okay, that's not the division. That is the outcome of the division. The division here in Solomon's heart which is a divided heart is the division between affection and clear thinking.

Between affection and wisdom. They were meant to influence each other and Solomon's got a divided heart and so he lives unfortunately a divided life.

And that's why we can clearly say that the wisest man on earth was also the most foolish. Amen.