

Seeking Wisdom

Topical Lesson from the Bible

I. Solomon's Unusual Request

- a. Read **1 Kings 3:1-15** (designated **3 Kingdoms 3:1-14** in translations based on the Septuagint).
- b. Summary of the story.
 - i. (Background) Solomon was appointed king by his father David, while David was still alive. David has now died, and Solomon is king over Israel.
 - ii. The Lord appears to Solomon in a dream and asks, "What do you want?"
 1. Imagine if God asked you that. What would your first response be?
 - iii. Solomon's response tells a great deal about his heart at this point early in his life.
 1. Solomon is aware of the great responsibility entrusted to him as king.
 2. He is also aware of his lack of the degree of wisdom that this role demands.
 3. He is concerned about the people he will be governing.
 - iv. Solomon asks for wisdom, to hear God's people and judge them righteously. He also wants to be able to discern between good and evil.
 - v. God's response:
 1. God is pleased and impressed that Solomon asked for wisdom, out of concern for others. It showed unselfishness and humility. It also showed Solomon already had unusual wisdom!
 2. God gives Solomon more wisdom than anyone who had come before, or who would come after. There would be no man like him among kings.

II. The Demonstration of Solomon's Wisdom

- a. Read **1 Kings 3:16-28** (designated **3 Kingdoms 3:15-27** in the LXX).
 - i. This is the most famous story illustrating Solomon's wisdom.
 - ii. Solomon knew the real mother would be the one who loved her child so much that she would rather give him up to another, instead of having him killed. The false-mother was motivated by envy.

- b. Read **1 Kings 4:29-34** (designated **3 Kingdoms 5:5-10** in the LXX).
 - i. Solomon had greater wisdom than all the famous wise men of the ancient world.
 - ii. He composed thousands of sayings (parables or proverbs) and songs; and had knowledge about plants and animals.
 - iii. People came from great distances to hear Solomon's wisdom, and foreign kings sent him gifts.
- c. Read **1 Kings 10:1-9** (designated **3 Kingdoms 10:1-9** in the LXX)
 - i. Queen of Sheba comes to visit Solomon, to test his wisdom.
 - 1. Where is ancient Sheba? There are different legends about its location, including from southern Arabian Peninsula or northern Africa (Ethiopia). Jesus refers to her as "the Queen of the South" and says she came "from the ends of the earth" (**Matthew 12:42, Luke 11:31**).
 - ii. Solomon answers all her tough questions. She is amazed at his wisdom; and she finds Solomon's wisdom to be *even greater* than the reports she had heard of it in her own land.

III. Lessons from Solomon's Wisdom

- a. Read **Proverbs 1:1-8**
 - i. Proverbs written for Solomon to pass his wisdom to others.
 - ii. That the simple may become wise, and those already wise may become wiser still.
 - iii. The ungodly despise wisdom.
 - iv. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.
 - 1. **Question:** Why did Solomon consider fear of God to be so important?
 - a. Read **Deuteronomy 5:22-29**.
 - i. This is right after God descends on Mount Sinai in fire and thick darkness, trumpet blast, thunder, lightning, mountain completely enveloped in smoke. People are trembling (**Exodus 19-20**).

- b. The Lord knew: fear of God would cause them to keep His commandments. He knew this was a good thing that would keep them from sin; and He wished that they would *always* have this fear of Him!
 - i. A casual attitude about God and disobedience would later lead to their downfall. It certainly can lead to ours as well!
2. **Question:** Are we supposed to fear God like that today, still? Or should we be motivated *only by love*?
- a. Some think of fear as something that is debilitating and overwhelming. However, fear can save your life (avoiding cars in crossing a highway, evacuating a house or building when a fire alarm goes off, not touching something that says 'Danger, High Voltage', etc.).
 - b. Jesus was the greatest preacher of the fear of God, of all time. He used fear of judgement and hell fire as a powerful motivator to avoid sin.
 - i. "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (**Matthew 10:27-28**, NKJV)
 - ii. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." (**Matthew 5:27-30**, NKJV)
 - iii. "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck,

and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’” (**Mark 9:42-44**, NKJV, where Jesus is quoting **Isaiah 66:24**)

- c. The apostles taught the same thing: we *still* must fear God.
 - i. Peter said, “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. *Fear God*. Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
 - ii. Read **Hebrews 12:14-29**.
 - 1. Those who abandon seeking peace and holiness are like the fool Esau, who for a little short time pleasure of the flesh sold his birthright.
 - 2. We are to serve God with reverence and godly fear; our God *is a consuming fire*.
 - 3. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; maintain it is essential to our ultimate salvation.
- b. Read **Proverbs 3:20-33** (designated **Proverbs 3:20-35** in the LXX).
 - i. Wisdom invites everyone; however, many refuse to heed the call.
 - ii. The ungodly reject the invitation and will be destroyed in the end as a result. They will cry out when it is too late.
- c. **Question:** Why do people reject wisdom?
 - i. **Answer:** Wisdom requires us to take the more challenging path of righteousness and self-control, *in order to gain the greater prize* (unlike Esau, who sought short-term pleasure of the flesh).
- d. Solomon points his listeners to two specific areas where wisdom is needed.
 - i. Sexual temptation (Read **Proverbs 5:1-23**).
 - 1. Holding fast to wisdom will keep you from immorality.

2. Immorality does provide short-term pleasure; however it will drag you down to destruction and death in the end.
 3. “Don’t go near the doors of her house.” Avoid temptation; stay away from it.
 4. Remember that God is watching us at all times.
 5. Challenges for us today include: internet, other media and the workplace.
- ii. Laziness (Read **Proverbs 6:6-11**; or in the LXX **Proverbs 6:7-16**.)
1. The ant is wise; study it and become wiser.
 2. He is not lazy, but works hard throughout the summer.
 3. He has provision when he needs it, in the winter (does not consume it all).
 4. He is concerned about the future, not just immediate gratification.
- e. From these examples, we see that wisdom involves:
- i. Having the right priorities (long term, big picture)
 - ii. Seeing the impact of our actions before we dive in; thinking things through.
 - iii. Self-control.
 1. Apparently, these kinds of challenges scared Felix away from following Jesus, when Paul preached to him.
 - a. “Now as he (*Paul*) reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time, I will call for you.’” (**Acts 24:25**, NKJV)
 2. Many today avoid wisdom and following Jesus for the same reason. *They simply do not want to say ‘no’ to the flesh and live a life of self-control.*

IV. Importance of Wisdom *in the New Testament*

- a. Note that the New Testament contrasts *worldly wisdom* (which is not good) with *spiritual wisdom* (which is extremely valuable); for example, in **1 Corinthians 1-3**.

- i. Whenever you see the word “*wisdom*” in the New Testament you need to discern from context which type of wisdom is being referred to.
 - ii. Similar to how when we see the word “*works*” it can either refer to following the requirements of the Law of Moses (which is no longer required) or it can refer to obedience to the commands of Jesus (which is essential for salvation).
- b. Jesus uses four animals to communicate the importance of his followers being wise:
 - i. “Behold, I send you out as *sheep* in the midst of *wolves*. Therefore, be wise as *serpents* and harmless as *doves*.” (**Matthew 10:16**, NKJV)
 - ii. Jesus knows that this world is full of crafty evil people, “wolves”, who will be out to destroy his followers. He calls us to be “wise as serpents”.
- c. Jesus also pointed to the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba to communicate the importance of seeking wisdom.
 - i. Read **Matthew 12:39-42**.
 - ii. Jesus says He is a greater preacher than Jonah (who single-handedly called the entire pagan city of Nineveh to repent in sackcloth and ashes, in **Jonah 3**); and He *has even greater wisdom than King Solomon!*
 - iii. Even better than studying the proverbs written by Solomon, we can go to an even greater teacher of wisdom, Jesus, in the gospels.
 - iv. Jesus points to the example of the Queen of the South (= Queen of Sheba), who sacrificed to travel great distances in search of Solomon’s wisdom. He says that she will rebuke the people of His own generation on the Day of Judgment, who did not make similar effort to seek the wisdom of Jesus.
- d. Paul also calls us to be wise.
 - i. “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,” (**Ephesians 5:15**, NKJV)
- e. **Question:** Do you *really* want to become wise? (Most people do not want to embrace the Lord’s wisdom.)

V. How to Become Wise (or Wiser) – Practical Steps

- a. Meditate on the Scriptures. (Read **Psalm 119:97-104**, designated **Psalm 118:97-104** in the LXX)

- i. Meditate on Law of the Lord *all day long*.
 1. “How I love Your law, O Lord; It is my meditation the whole day long.” (**Psalm 118:97**, LXX, OSB)
- ii. Meditating on God’s Word daily can make us wiser than our enemies and wiser than the elders.
- iii. Several early Christian writers saw in the Old Testament directives regarding clean animals (which the Jews were allowed to eat) vs. unclean (which the Jews prohibited from eating) as foreshadowing important spiritual lessons for us.
 1. Read **Leviticus 11:1-9**; similar to **Deuteronomy 14:3-8**.
 2. Pigs (unclean animals) eat anything, including garbage.
 3. Cows and sheep (clean animals) are much more selective in their diet. They eat only grass. In order to get all the nourishment out of it, they regurgitate what they ate earlier and “chew the cud” all day long.
 4. Early Christian writers said this was a lesson for us: eat the pure food of the Scripture (not the garbage of the world) and meditate on it all day long.
 - a. They saw the grass eaten by sheep and cows as being like the pure word of God.
 - b. They saw “chewing the cud” as providing a picture of someone mulling the word over in their minds, literally “*ruminating* on it” throughout the day.
 - c. The challenge for us is not only to be devoted to reading the word of God every day (**Deuteronomy 8:3**), but to meditate on it “the whole day long”.
 - d. Early Christian writers who made this connection (that *chewing the cud* corresponded to *meditating on the word of God*) include:
 - i. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 9; in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 534.
 - ii. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 3, chapter 11; in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 289.
 - iii. Novatian, *On the Jewish Meats*, chapter 3; in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 647.

- iv. By meditating on the word of God, a person can become unusually wise for their age; a young person *can understand more than the teachers and elders*.
- b. Ask for more of the Spirit of God that is within us.
 - i. The Holy Spirit dwells within Christians (**John 14:16-17, Romans 8:9-11, 1 Corinthians 6:19** and **Galatians 4:6**).
 - ii. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is described in **Isaiah 11:1-2**. The very first attribute mentioned there: He is "*the Spirit of wisdom*".
 - iii. In **Luke 11**, after telling His disciples how to pray, Jesus calls them to persevere in prayer and concludes, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (**Luke 11:13**, NKJV)
- c. Pray for wisdom.
 - i. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (**James 1:5-8**, NKJV)
- d. Choose your companions carefully; they will influence the kind of person you become. Walk with the wise if you want to become wise yourself.
 - i. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed." (**Proverbs 13:20**, NKJV)
- e. Be *even more selective* in choosing your advisors and mentors.
 - i. "Let those who live at peace with you be many, *but let your counselors be one in a thousand.*" (**Sirach 6:6**, LXX, OSB)
 - ii. Note that the **Wisdom of Sirach**, sometimes called **Ecclesiasticus** (not to be confused with the book of **Ecclesiastes**), is included in modern Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. Also, it was included in the original King James Version (1611) and remained in the KJV through most of the 1800's.

VI. Conclusions

- a. Seek wisdom always. If you have some, seek more.
- b. God was pleased that Solomon unselfishly asked for wisdom, and He appreciates those who seek it today.

- c. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It is a very good thing. It will keep us out of all kinds of sin. Jesus preached fear of God more than even Solomon and Moses. We are still called to serve God with love as well as with fear.
- d. Don't be a fool like Esau, who for a little short-term pleasure of the flesh forfeited his birthright. Wisdom calls for us to look at the end result, and to value our salvation above a little short-term pleasure that will end in death. Spiritual wisdom also requires self-control, which is why so few seek it. Do whatever it takes to avoid sexual sin and laziness, for starters.
- e. Imitate the Queen of Sheba in your desire to go to great lengths seeking spiritual wisdom. Don't be rebuked by her on the Last Day!
- f. Read the Word of God every day, and meditate on it all day long, like the cows and sheep chewing their cud.
- g. Choose your companions carefully; those who run with the wise will grow wise. And be even more selective with your counselors and mentors.
- h. Christians have the Spirit of God living within us, the Spirit of wisdom. Ask for *even more* of that Spirit!