

10.28.14

1 Kings 3:4-9

The Wisdom of Solomon?

Next Tuesday, November 6, is Election Day.

Let's get out and do our civic duty.

For indeed we, as Americans, are privileged
To be able elect our government leaders.

Let's not take it for granted
Or feel our vote won't count.

There are millions in the world today,
That wish for the same opportunities,
We have as citizens of the United States.

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The wisdom of Solomon is our subject today.

Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba
Takes the throne after his father's death.

He builds a magnificent temple
And then a lavish palace to reside in.

He has all the power, fame, and fortune
His father had and that much more.

But he has attained all this splendor
On the backs of the people of Israel

He taxed them in extremely excessive ways
To fund his various government projects

He drafted them into service
As soldiers for his army

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And enslaved them as builders
For his building projects.

He married women from other nations
Not only to satisfy his appetite
But for his political ambitions.

1 Kings 11:3 (NIV) He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines

Makes you wonder just how wise Solomon was.

And I'm not the only one wondering.

There's this wonderful debate in
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Between the two main characters,
Huck and the runaway slave Jim.

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The argument goes something like this:

Huck is telling Jim
That when things get a little dull
And they tire of whacking people's heads off
Kings go hang out at the harem.

To which Jim asks what a harem was.

Huck said that was where kings kept their wives.

"Solomon had one; he had about a million wives."

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Jim said it must have been some rackety times
In the nursery.

And he reckoned the wives argued considerably.

Jim then questioned Solomon wisdom.

He asks Huck if he knew the story about Solomon
Going to chop a child in two?

Huck says of course he did.

Jim says now, take that stump over there
Let that be one of the women.

Let you, Huck, be the other one.

And this here dollar, let it be the child.

Jim says, I'll be Solomon.

Both you and the stump claim the dollar.

Do I go around and ask the neighbors
Which one of you owns the dollar?

And then when I find out who the rightful owner is
Hang the bill over safe and sound?

No, Jim said, I take and whack the bill in two
And give one half to you
And the other half to the stump.

Jim says, what good is a half a dollar bill?

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You can't buy anything with it?

And what's the use of a half a child?

Jim wouldn't give anything for a million of them.

Huck jumps in and says

"But Jim, you've missed the point!

You've missed it a thousand miles!"

"Go along with your points.

I know sense when I see it

And there ain't no sense in this."

The real point Jim says is further down.

The real point is in the way Solomon was raised.

Jim says

You take a man that's got one or two children

Will that man be wasteful of them?

No, he can't afford to.

He knows to value them.

But you take a man,

That's got about 5 million children

Running around the house and it's different.

He'd as soon chop a child in two as a cat!

There's plenty more where that came from!

A child or two, more or less,

Wasn't a concern to Solomon!

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1 Kings 3:4-9

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Huck says you just can't talk sense into Jim.

But of course, we can Jim's point, don't we.

His harem of wives and concubines,
Eventually led Solomon to worship other gods.
And things quickly fell apart.

And though he may have been
The most powerful king of Israel ever.

And he may have been
According to the Bible
The wisest man who ever lived

Following his ruthless reign
The kingdom split in two
And Israel never returned to its former glory.

~~

Our lesson today takes place
At the beginning of Solomon's rule.

Solomon has this dream.

And in the dream
God invites him to consider
What God might give Solomon.

Find it in verse 5.

NRSV "Ask what I should give you."

Compare this with 2 other translations:

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CEV "Solomon, ask for anything you want, and I will give it to you."

NASB "Ask what *you wish* Me to give you."

Now, my question to you is this
How do you interpret this?

Is God's offer like the genie in a bottle?
Your wish is my command.

Is it a blank check? A carte blanche?
Like the CEV translation proposes?

Or is it more like the NASB translation?

Does the offer seek to test Solomon's heart?

Is it God's way of discovering
Solomon's fitness for the throne?

Ask me what you wish I would give you
Doesn't necessarily mean God is going to give it.

Solomon's response is found in verse 9:

⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

Solomon's answer pleased God

God not only gave him wisdom

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But blessed him with riches and honor.

4:29-30 God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.

However, as I said earlier, over time

Solomon no longer listened with a discerning heart.

He, instead, began to listen to his many wives.

11:4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

11:9 The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel

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As so often is the case

Power, prestige, and position

Gets the very best-intentioned leaders.

God was able to endow Solomon

With a discerning heart

To govern the nation.

But over time the cacophony of voices

Many from his wives

Overpowered God's voice

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And Solomon's wisdom was swallowed up
 By the differing interest groups he catered to.
 And Solomon's wisdom was lost in the shuffle.

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Speaking of wisdom

Did you know the Supreme Court ruled
 There couldn't be a Nativity scene
 In Washington, D.C. this Christmas?

It wasn't for religious or political reasons.

They simply could not find
 Three wise men and a virgin
 In the nation's capital.

However, they had no problem finding,
 (what's another word for donkey?)
 Yea, they found plenty of them!

~~

When President Roosevelt died
 Vice-president Truman became president.

In his first address to Congress, Truman said this:

At this moment, I have in my heart a prayer. As I have assumed my duties, I humbly pray, Almighty God, in the words of King Solomon:

"Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad, for who is able to judge this thy so great a people."

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*I ask only to be a good and faithful servant
Of my Lord and my people.*

~~

It is my prayer our candidates
Coming into this election
Might embrace the humility and earnestness

To discern what truly is right from wrong
To truly serve the interests of the common good
And not get caught up in partisanship.

~~

William McKinley, William Howard Taft
And Lyndon B. Johnson all

Used Solomon's prayer
In their presidential coronation events.

~~

This prayer for wisdom . . .

Was it a prayer for Solomon alone?

Or can anyone can pray it?

**James 1:5 (NIV) If any of you lacks wisdom,
you should ask God, who gives generously to
all without finding fault, and it will be given to
you.**

Wisdom, then, is available to all who seek it.

James goes on to explain,
That there are two kinds of wisdom;

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James 3:13-17 (NIV) ¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

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¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

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Earthly wisdom

Produces jealousy and selfish ambition.

We see a lot of this kind of wisdom.

And, unfortunately, we see of lot of this,
In our elected government officials.

According to James, this wisdom,
Is unspiritual and of the devil.

But James says true wisdom comes from above.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

In today's politically divisive atmosphere
We could do with a bit of heavenly wisdom.

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And may our prayer
 For our newly elected officials be
 That they might seek the wisdom
 That comes from above.

That they might discern between good and bad
 Right and wrong

That they might be open to reason
 Filled with mercy
 Impartial and sincere.

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So get out and vote on November 6
 Your vote counts!

And may all of us
 Pray to God for a discerning spirit
 In all of our endeavors in life . . .

For all that we say and for all that we do
 For the glory of God
 And our neighbors' good.