

Wisdom of the King

I Kings 3

I would rather be judged by God than by you, or by any man other than Jesus Christ. The heat of God's holiness burns much hotter than that of any man, so how can I say such a thing?

There are many good reasons.

Some of those reasons will come out in our passage today.

We ended last week with God having established the kingdom in the hands of Solomon. He has also been charged by his dad to "be strong and courageous and to walk according to the Law of God.

Now, David is dead and buried.

And the responsibility for overseeing God's people is in the hands of Solomon.

What sort of leader will he be?

In answering that question, it is easy to look at Solomon from the perspective of his later fall into idolatry. If we are not careful, these later failures may cause us to be overly critical of his early years. When we do this, we place a cloud over Solomon's early years that is unjustified.

As I studied this passage, I came to realize that I have been more critical of Solomon than God. That shook me.

The writer assumes that his hearers already know of Solomon's later failures. It is his intent to help his hearers truly see Solomon's greatness, while not denying what will come later.

Just as we must look at Solomon in real time, so we must look at his kingdom in real time. The author knows that his hearers are suffering because of the collapse of the kingdom. But at this point in the story, he wants to remind them of the glories of the kingdom.

As New Testament Christians, we know that Solomon's kingdom does not compare to the kingdom we will have in Jesus Christ. But the author wants us to put ourselves into the story. We are to live with Solomon and his subjects.

We are to enjoy the kingdom that the LORD builds through Solomon.

There will be time enough in the rest of Kings to experience our disappointments.

It is not today.

Today we are to be filled with exuberance and hope.

Let's look at the text. (V. 1)

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 own house
and
the house of the LORD
and
the wall around Jerusalem.

How should we think about Solomon's alliance with Pharaoh?

If you look at this marriage from the perspective of Solomon's future fall into idolatry, all you will see is Solomon's compromise.

Is not Pharaoh the epitome of evil?

Should not Solomon only marry within the covenant?

Is this not an indication of how Solomon is already far too enamored with the beauty of Egypt?

Maybe... but this is not the author's intent in telling you of this alliance.

He is making a different point entirely: This alliance makes clear that Israel has arrived as a legitimate nation in the larger world of nations.

Remember how God had chosen Abraham and promised to make him into a "great nation"?

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God is fulfilling his promise to Abraham through Solomon, at least partially. Israel has now become a great nation, so great of a nation that the largest nation of the world desired an alliance with her.

Will Solomon's future alliances ensnare his soul? Yes.

But we are not to read back into Solomon's heart these future failures.

We are also told that Solomon marries Pharaoh's daughter.

Again, it is easy to miss the point of the author.

This is not Solomon's first wife. When Solomon was still very young, David had arranged a marriage for Solomon with an Ammonite princess named Naamah.

But an alliance with the tiny kingdom of Ammon is not nearly as impressive as an alliance with the mighty kingdom of Egypt.

As hearers, we are to be impressed that Israel has arrived on the list of “great nations.”

We are told that Solomon brought her into the “city of David”. It is possible to see this in terms of corruption.

I think this may be the angle that the writer of Chronicles takes.

ESV 2 Chronicles 8:11 Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the city of David to the house that he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall not live in the house of David king of Israel, for the places to which the ark of the LORD has come are holy."

I still have questions about this because the house that Solomon built for Pharaoh’s daughter was technically still in Jerusalem, the Holy City.

The mention of the city of David requires a geographical comment. The expansions of Solomon’s reign were so extensive that people began to refer to the “city of David” as the old portion of the city. If you look at a map, even the Temple was not located in the “old city of David.” It was further up the hill.

Solomon’s palace, the Temple, other government buildings, and the house of Pharaoh’s daughter, were all built outside of the “old city of David.”

So, it makes perfect sense that when Pharaoh’s daughter first came to Jerusalem, she would have to live in a temporary residence, until Solomon could build a fitting home for her.

Solomon will eventually build a grand house for Pharaoh’s daughter. And the building of this house is not portrayed as an abomination. Rather, it is included in the long list of great accomplishments of Solomon.

1 Kings 7:7-9 ⁷ And he made the Hall of the Throne where he was to pronounce judgment, even the Hall of Judgment. It was finished with cedar from floor to rafters. ⁸ His own house where he was to dwell, in the other court back of the hall, was of like workmanship. Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter whom he had taken in marriage. ⁹ All these were made of costly stones, cut according to measure, sawed with saws, back and front, even from the foundation to the coping, and from the outside to the great court.

In chapter 9, it seems that it was a big deal when Pharaoh’s daughter took up residence in her permanent home that Solomon had built for her.

1 Kings 9:24 ²⁴ But Pharaoh's daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her. Then he built the Millo.

Solomon is doing what a good husband, who also happens to be king, should do: he is providing a glorious home for his bride.

It is better to think of Solomon's city as "under construction" or "incomplete" than to find fault with Solomon at this point.

And dare I say, Solomon's actions foreshadow those of King Jesus. Is it not true that Jesus has gone to prepare a home for His bride?

(Pause)

Just as Solomon would build a home for his wife, so Solomon is also called to build a permanent home for the holy presence of the LORD.

² The people were sacrificing at the high places,
however,
because no house had yet been built
for the name of the LORD.

It is easy to hear of people sacrificing at the high places, and be appalled, "Evil abounds! Corruption is everywhere! **Isaiah 6:5** ⁵ ..."Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

But this is not the reaction that the author wants you to have. Of course, technically speaking, the book of Romans tells us that this perspective is true.

Romans 3:10-12 "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

But this is not the point being made in I Kings 3.

Even though, worship at the "high places" will lead to the judgment of Israel, at this point God even looks at their presence as "understandable". He is not blind to the fact that God earlier commanded that they be taken down.

Deuteronomy 12:2-5 ² You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. ³ You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. ⁴ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way. ⁵ But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go,

But notice, the taking down of the “high places” is combined with “seeking the place that the LORD will choose.”

The writer’s intent is to prepare us for the building of the Temple. It is not to emphasize the evil of Solomon, for in just a moment, we will see that he too makes sacrifices on the high place at Gibeon.

The writer even tells us why the people are still sacrificing at “high places”. They are doing so “because no house had yet been built.”

In other words, God is far more understanding of the situation than most of us. We are ready to condemn Solomon and all the people with him.

Seeing this convicted me.

What does it say about me that I am more quick to judge Solomon than the LORD?
How often am I quick to judge the hearts of those around me from a quick glance at the externals?

What sorts of activities might be inserted for “high places”?

I do not have the time to explore all the ways that we do this. But you ought to give this serious self-reflection.

Attending worship on the LORD’s Day is a fundamental command of Scripture. To ignore the Fourth Commandment is sin.

But it is wrong for us to quickly judge a person when they are not in worship, especially when we know nothing of the context for their not being in worship. It might be direct disobedience. But it might not. How often are we as God’s people more inconsiderate of the context than our God?

Do you have any fear of making a wrong judgment?

The older that I get, the more fear that I have.

It does not mean that we are never to make a judgment. It just means that we must be very careful to make a right judgment and to do so with great humility.

How many of you have already judged Solomon?

How many of you have already labeled him as a scoundrel for sacrificing at the “high place” in Gibeon?

If you have, then you are guilty of making a judgment that goes directly against the Judgment of the LORD.

God, through the perspective of the author, gives us His assessment of Solomon.

3 Solomon loved the LORD,

While we are judging Solomon as an idolater, God explicitly tells us, “Solomon loves me!”

Does that statement grab you?

It should.

Of course, all the great characters of Scripture are given such assessments, right? We have such statements about Abraham and Moses, right? Nope.

Of course, we are told that David was “a man after God’s own heart”. This implies that David loved the LORD.

But as far as I have found, Solomon is the only person of whom we are explicitly told, “He loved the LORD.”

You may tell yourself that every true Christian loves the LORD. This is certainly the goal for which every true Christian should strive. And I hope that in some degree God will say of me, “Mike loves me.”

But there is a reason why John, the apostle who probably had the closest relationship with Jesus while he walked the earth, wrote:

ESV 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The truth is that true acts of love toward God are rare.
And Solomon receives a truly rare commendation.

And, the text tells us that Solomon’s love was expressed in submission to God’s law.

walking in the statutes of David his father,

This too is extremely high praise. Far from being a scoundrel, we are to be impressed with the tremendous work of God’s grace that is being wrought in Solomon.

The fact that Solomon sacrificed on the high place at Gibeon is viewed as an exception, but an understandable exception.

only
he sacrificed
and
made offerings at the high places.

This exception is not given to tarnish what has just been said of Solomon. Remember, it is Solomon who will build the Temple in Jerusalem. We are to see Solomon’s worship as coming from a good heart. The exception is that the one place where God’s name will reside has not yet been built.

This incompleteness will be fixed in the coming chapters.

But it is not a criticism of Solomon at this point.

4 And
 the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there,
 for that was the great high place.
 Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

In I Samuel 9, the prophet Samuel ate at a high place.

In I Samuel 7, we are told that Samuel built an altar of his own. (Technically, this would have been defined as a “high place”.

“High places” are places of worship. Some of these places were clearly meant for worshipping false gods. But sometimes God’s people would make altars to worship Him.

For reasons we will find out, God instructed His people that He was working to make all their worship of Him centralized into one location – the Temple in Jerusalem.

But we should not read back some form of open rebellion in Solomon’s current worship at Gibeon. We are explicitly told that Solomon loved the LORD, and that he walked in the statutes of David his father.

Why does Solomon choose Gibeon to offer his worship.

Gibeon was the place where the Tabernacle was kept.

David had brought the ark up to Jerusalem. But the rest of the Tabernacle was still in Gibeon.

It is likely that the altar that he used, was the altar of the Tabernacle.

Solomon expresses his devotion by sacrificing 1,000 burnt offerings.

That is a tremendous act of devotion.

A burnt offering is the foundational offering of Leviticus. The entire animal is consumed in the fire of the altar. It symbolized one’s need of atonement as well as one’s attitude of devotion.

God is truly pleased with Solomon’s worship. It is in response to Solomon’s act of devotion that the LORD appears to him.

5 At Gibeon
 the LORD appeared to Solomon
 in a dream by night,
 and
 God said,
 "Ask what I shall give you."

The LORD promises to give Solomon anything he might ask.

This is an incredible promise.

Imagine God coming to you and offering you such a promise.
What would you ask?

King Jesus does offer his disciples a similar promise:

John 16:24 ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

God wants Solomon to know His great generosity.
But God also wants us to see the true desire of Solomon's heart.

Will Solomon ask something for himself?
Or will he ask for the good of the people over whom he is king?

6 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,
 and
 in uprightness of heart toward you.

Solomon knows the failures of his father.
But he also knows that his father was a man after God's own heart.
He also knows that God made covenant promises to David as a reward for his loyal service.

Even though David's obedience was not perfect, it is presented to us as perfect because it foreshadows the obedience of Jesus Christ.

The LORD gives the kingdom to Jesus for His loyalty and obedience as he walked the earth and went to the cross.

Solomon then sees his own rise to the throne of Israel as the outworking of God's covenant love to his father.

 And
 you have kept for him this great and steadfast love
 and
 have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.

It is God's faithfulness to His promise to David that has made Solomon king.
Solomon's heart is full of thankfulness rather than arrogance.

7 And now,

O LORD my God,
you have made your servant king
in place of David my father,
although
I am but a little child.
I do not know how to go out or come in.

Solomon is 30 years old. He is not a child. But when it comes to having experience in governing a great nation, he is a child.

The phrase “go out or come in” is an idiomatic expression meaning to rule or govern. (Deut. 31:1-2 and 2 Chron. 1:10)

Solomon is humbly admitting that he does not have the wisdom to govern God’s people.

Solomon has both devotion and humility. A rare combination.

8 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.

Solomon also sees the nation that he is over as a great nation that God has formed in response to his covenant promise to Abraham.

They are not just any people. They are the people that God has chosen.

The fact that they cannot be counted reminds us of God’s covenant promises.

Genesis 13:16 ¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

Solomon has a sense of the magnitude of the responsibility laid upon him. And he knows that he needs help to fulfill that responsibility. And so he asks.

9 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?"

Solomon asks for “an understanding mind” to govern your people. Literally, the Hebrew reads “a heart that is listening.”

In this context, “heart” refers to the totality of man’s inner being. (Heart, mind, soul, spirit are all words used to describe “heart”)

“listening” in this context refers to a teachable spirit that is submitted to the goal of true justice.

God is presenting Solomon as a foreshadow of his chosen king.

He wants wisdom, but not simply for himself.

He wants wisdom to govern God’s people well.

Solomon cares about God’s people.

This is the gold standard for every King of Israel.

Solomon also asks that the LORD might instruct him how to discern what is truly good and what is truly evil.

This is insightful and instructive to us.

Knowing how to judge what is right in every situation is terribly difficult.

If you believe that it is a simple matter, then ask yourself, “Why is it that Solomon needed great wisdom from God to be able to discern between good and evil?”

The Law of God is the objective standard of right and wrong.

The king is commanded to meditate upon the Law.

But to meditate upon the Law is more than to memorize the Law.

It is to reflect upon its purpose and its application in every situation.

As king, Solomon must understand the written law of God.

Then, he must be able to correctly evaluate the situations and the people over whom He must judge.

Then, he must apply the law correctly to these situations.

This is all incredibly difficult.

The sad truth is that we are far more quick to judge than Solomon.

Matthew 7:3-5 ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

John 7:24 ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

We all could benefit from Solomon’s humble attitude.

And the LORD is truly pleased with what he sees in Solomon’s request.

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

¹¹ And

God said to him,

"Because you have asked this,

and
 have not asked for yourself
 long life
 or
 riches
 or
 the life of your enemies,
 but
 have asked for yourself
 understanding
 to discern what is right,
 12 behold,
 I now do according to your word.
 Behold,
 I give you a wise and discerning mind,
 so that none like you has been before you
 and
 none like you shall arise after you.
 13 I give you also what you have not asked,
 both riches and honor,
 so that no other king shall compare with you,
 all your days.

God gives to Solomon both what he asks for, and what he has not asked for. In addition to wisdom and a listening heart, God will also give Solomon riches and honor.

When it comes to wisdom, no other king will exceed Solomon. Except the LORD Jesus Christ. In wisdom, Solomon will positively foreshadow the Messiah to come.

In addition to wisdom, God will also bestow on Solomon riches and honor. These too are a foreshadow of the riches and honor of the eternal kingdom.

As citizens of God's kingdom, we are to rejoice with Solomon. We have been given in him an ideal king.

And when we come to verse 14, we have every expectation that Solomon will continue down the path of obedience and will therefore receive the promise of a long reign.

14 And
 if you will walk in my ways,
 keeping my statutes and my commandments,
 as your father David walked,
 then I will lengthen your days."

At this point in the story, we do not know if Solomon might be that Chosen Son. So, Solomon is told, "If you meet the gold standard of David, then I will "lengthen your days." This seems to be a way of saying, "You might be the one through whom the eternal kingdom is established."

Even though we know that Solomon is going to fail "big time", we are to see him as potentially being the Messiah at this point.

We are excited for Solomon.

We are happy, not only for him, but for the entire kingdom. The kingdom will rise or fall with the king.

15 And
 Solomon awoke,
 and behold,
 it was a dream.
 Then
 he came to Jerusalem
 and
 stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD,
 and
 offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings,
 and
 made a feast for all his servants.

Solomon awakens from the dream and is happy.

He worships the LORD by offering burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Burnt offerings are the foundational offering that you always give in approaching God.

The Peace offering is given because Solomon is thankful and believes that God is pleased with him.

Also, the fact that Solomon makes a feast for his servants is an indication that he is functioning the way a good king ought to function.

He is a foreshadow of Christ. Is not Jesus preparing a feast for us, foreshadowed in our sacrament of Communion.

The rest of the chapter is one example demonstrating that God fulfilled His promise to Solomon.

You know the story. The amazing thing about this story is that it does not need much comment. As soon as you hear it, you get it.

My comments will be limited.

Solomon cares about administering justice for prostitutes.

The fact that there are prostitutes in the land is evidence that everything may not be as glorious as the author describes.

But the fact that Solomon does not immediately condemn these women speaks volumes. Think of Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery. I believe that of all the dilemmas that might have been chosen, the choosing of story involving prostitutes was intentional.

Remember, the first audience consisted of spiritual adulterers.

We are to see Solomon's compassion in this story. And in him, the compassion of God.

The main point of the example is that all who heard the judgment agreed with the judgment, and were filled with awe.

28 And
 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.

What other judgment (ruling) can you think of in life that no one challenges?
I cannot think of any.

From the smallest to the largest, every judgment that is made is also challenged by someone.

And as soon as we challenge a judgment, we set ourselves up as judge.
But just as we challenged the judgment others, so others will challenge our judgment.
And the cycle just goes on and on and on.

Kids, how often in your heart do you challenge the judgments of your parents. I have news for you. If God should ever bless you with kids, they will challenge your judgments.

Where does it end?
It ends with the perfect judgment of God's righteous king.
His perfect judgment results in awe, in reverence, and dare I say, "rest".

This story gives us a glimpse at the perfect wisdom of Messiah.
Jesus will be a perfect judge over us at the judgment day, and even beyond that into the eternal kingdom.

We are given in Solomon a glimpse of the peace of having a King whose judgments will never be challenged. They will always be in accordance with righteousness. And they will always perfectly understand the situation and the heart.

I look forward to the judgment of my king. He will perfectly judge the evil of my sinful heart. But He will also perfectly judge the beauty of His work of Grace in my heart. Something I often have a hard time seeing.

Applications:

1. When we are judged by Jesus it will result our being in awe of Him.
 - a. Therefore, welcome God's judgment.
 - b. Cultivate now a better understanding of God's evaluation of you.
2. We should be humble in our present judgments.
 - a. We should have a healthy fear of not judging rightly.
 - i. We are called to make judgments.
 - ii. We are even called to confront sin in ourselves and in others.
 - iii. But having humility in judgment recognizes that we only see dimly now.
3. We should strive to be like God in our judgments.
 - a. "a listening ear"
 - i. Discernment of right and wrong. (Study the whole Word)
 - ii. Understanding the situation and the heart. (Humbly listen to people)
4. There is a correlation between our being quick to judge others and our increasing struggle with anxiety.
 - a. **Matthew 7:2** For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.
 - b. **1 Peter 5:6-7** ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.
 - c. **Matthew 7:1** "Judge not, that you be not judged."
 - i. You will be judged by God.
 - ii. But His judgment will be perfect.
 - iii. And it will be filtered through the perfect love of Christ.
5. Every judgment of ourselves and others must take into consideration that we live under the blessing earned by Jesus Christ.
 - a. No obedience is perfect enough in itself to be pleasing to God.
 - b. Jesus alone makes us and our attempts at obedience acceptable to God.
6. Solomon is a model of the heart that God's grace is working to build in you.
 - a. **Matthew 6:33** ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
 - b. A heart that:
 - i. Trusts God's goodness.
 - ii. Submits to God's will.
 - iii. Loves God's person.

I am so thankful that in the Providence of God, I have been called to study and preach I Kings 3.

For in the example of Solomon, I have been brought to know my God better.

And I have seen in Solomon how I might be more humble in my judgments of others and myself.

And it has helped me to welcome, and to find rest in, the perfect judgment of my King.

Amen.