

## SOLOMON'S WISDOM

### I Kings 3

On April 12, 1945 Harry Truman ascended to the presidency following the unexpected death of Franklin Roosevelt. Shortly after taking the Oath of Office it is recorded that Truman prayed, "*Give me an understanding mind to govern, that I may discern between good and evil.*"

Truman borrowed the words of his prayer from Solomon who became King following the death of his father David.

According to today's scripture God comes to Solomon in a dream and says, "*Ask what I shall give to you.*" Listen as I read Solomon's response to God and his request of God. **(Read verses 6-9)**

Solomon is most likely around twenty years old when he becomes king. So what then does he mean when in the dream he says to God, "*...I am but a little child...?*" When Solomon refers to being a child he is humbly recognizing his inexperience. Which is further noted when he says to God, "*...I do not even know how to go out or to come in.*" Further, Solomon's reference to being '*but a little child*' emphasizes his sense of a divine call to a more than human task—"*...for who is able to govern this...great people?*"

According to today's text, God is pleased with youthful Solomon's humble and mature request for, "*...an understanding mind...to discern between good and evil.*" In Solomon's dream he hears God respond like this—**Read verses 11b-13.**

Solomon requests, and God grants to him, an '*understanding mind.*' What is an understanding mind?

What is that Solomon asks for? I believe that above all an understanding mind involves the ability to put oneself in the place of others, to imagine what it might be like to walk in another's shoes, to see life from the perspective of the other person. So an understanding mind involves compassion and empathy. Yet, an understanding mind also requires the ability to not get caught up in the drama, to be able to stay objective instead of becoming a part of the problem.

This brings us then to the most known of the stories of Solomon; to the story that recognizes and highlights his understanding mind, his wisdom. **(Read verses 16-28)**

Imagine for a moment what the drama must have been like when these two women showed up both claiming to be the mother to the same child. It had to be chaos. Yet, Solomon was able to hear both sides of the story and then propose a solution that led to the discovery of the true mother. Solomon knew that the real mother would rather give up her child than to see him killed. Solomon's understanding mind led him to seek the truth through the test of love.

My friends, I pray for leaders like Solomon. Our world desperately needs leaders with understanding minds; those with compassion and empathy, those who do not get caught up in the drama. We need in all areas—government, business, economics, and religion—leaders who seek not riches and the defeat of their enemies or competitors but rather an understanding mind to discern between good and evil.

Now my friends, I want us, you and me, to imagine being asked by God, “*What shall I give to you? What do you want most from me?*” How will we answer this question? Let’s consider the kinds of things that we request from God. Are they things that lead to an understanding mind to discern between good and evil? Do we request the defeat of our enemies, or do we request the insight so that we might better understand our enemies and therefore be able to make peace? Do we request the removal of all pain and problems from our lives, or do we request insight into understanding how the pain and the problems might work to make us stronger more mature compassionate individuals?

The spiritual truth my friends is that God does and is asking of us as God did of Solomon, “*What shall I give to you?*” It is true that Solomon was responsible for ruling an entire nation and that his response would affect many people. But none the less, we are each responsible for ruling our own lives, and we are responsible for how our lives effect the lives of others. Unlike Solomon we may not be confronted with the kinds of decisions that will impact an entire nation; yet, we are all, at certain points in our lives, presented with complex decisions and choices that truly require an understanding mind.

Solomon saw standing before him two very desperate women. Both are mothers. Both are hurting. Unfortunately, one mother’s child has died which has led her to attempt to steal the child of her friend. Her plight is sad; yet her plan is unacceptable—even evil. Solomon with his understanding mind knows how to resolve the terrible situation—he seeks the truth through the test of love.

Last week we looked at the life of Samson; an individual who had been gifted by God with a special strength. However, instead of using his strength for good, and in service to God, Samson used it for destruction, for lust, and for revenge—which made him a weak man and leader, a tragic figure! Nothing could have stopped Samson—he stopped himself! Samson had a careless disregard of the gifts that God had given to him.

It is agreed by most theologians and biblical scholars that Solomon was the greatest of all the kings of Israel. During his reign magnificent buildings were erected. There was commercial expansion, and the advancement of the arts. Solomon, unlike Samson, used his gift from God for good.

*“Ask what I shall give you Solomon!”*

*“Give me an understanding mind to govern...that I may discern between good*

*and evil...”*