

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

⁶ Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

⁷ "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 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?"

¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. (1 Kings 3:5-12 NIV)

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." 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. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. 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. 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. 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?"

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. (1 Kings 3:5-12 ESV)

Do You Have a Wise Heart?

This morning, we have before us the famous account of Solomon asking for wisdom. Solomon was a young man. His father had died and he had inherited the throne. God came to him and gave him a chance to ask for anything he wanted. Solomon didn't even hesitate. He asked for wisdom to rule his people well. Even in America where we elect our rulers, not everyone we choose does a good job. Kings inherited the throne and many did a terrible job. Young King Solomon didn't want to be one of those kings. God was very pleased with that request. He made Solomon the wisest man who would ever live, except for Jesus, of course.

But every time I read this account, I'm struck by how wise Solomon already was. He was already smart enough to realize that he was unprepared to rule. He was already insightful enough to realize that ruling God's people well was far more important than any wealth or personal glory or even long life that he might ever have. God took a gift that Solomon already had and he consecrated it and magnified it. Sometimes, that's how God works. Of course, none of us is ever going to be a Solomon. But do we share the gift he had before God magnified his wisdom? My friends, **do you have a wise heart?**

I.

There's a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is how you use what you know. I've known many Christians who never had the chance to go to college, but who were very wise; they could apply what they did know very effectively. In this account, God gives us insight into what true wisdom is. The NIV Bible that we've been using for the last couple of decades translated Solomon's request as, **"Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people."** The translation that I read this morning rendered it differently: **"Give your servant ... an understanding mind to govern your people."** Is there a difference between a

discerning heart and an understanding mind? The Hebrew literally says, **“Give your servant a listening heart to judge your people.”**

A wise heart is a listening heart. Wisdom is not determined by how many degrees you have or even how old you are. Rather, a listening heart pays careful attention not just to what is said but to how and why it’s said. It listens for motives and for reasons, as well as for arguments and explanations. A listening heart has a tremendous advantage in searching for what’s true and what’s false. Do you have a heart like that?

Why did Solomon want such a heart? To discern between good and evil. Sometimes, when my wife and I watch the news we get into a discussion about what we’ve just seen. Now, we’re so close in our opinions most of the time that differences can actually surprise us. But sometimes the issues are so complex that we do disagree about what the government should or shouldn’t do. Sometimes, even the basic question of whether something is right or wrong is difficult for us to agree on. In a sinful world, right and wrong can be very hard to distinguish. Sadly, so often in our national discourse, that isn’t even what we’re talking about anymore. Right and wrong, good and evil, are replaced with questions of practicality. What’s going to work? Certainly, government has to ask that question. But practicality should be the servant and right should be the master. Too often in our society, too often in our personal lives, too often in our congregations, practicality is the master and principles only come in at the end to justify what we think is going to work.

But Solomon wanted a listening heart. What did he want to listen to? First of all, he did want to hear the realities of life. He wanted to base decisions on a clear understanding of his people and what they did and did not face. But what lifted his desire above mere practicality was the desire to listen to God’s Word. To discern good and evil means to know what God says and what he commands.

Do we have a heart like Solomon wanted? Do we have a heart that listens? I often find it hard to listen. When you get paid to talk like I do, you always want to get your two cents in. I have to work at listening to what people are saying. Why is it so hard? In my case, there’s a little sinful pride involved. I think what I have to say is every bit as important as what anybody else had to say. Am I alone in feeling that way? Am I alone in talking much more than I listen? Or do you have to admit, too, that it’s hard to listen carefully to what people are saying and to how they’re saying it in order to learn why they’re saying it? Wisdom is about listening first – so it’s not about me, it’s about the people around me.

And a wise and listening heart hears the word of God. It judges all things on the basis of what God says, not on the basis of what I think or what I like or what I want to be true. Does your heart do that? Sometimes, that’s even harder than listening to other people, because what other people do and say is not that different from what I might do or say in the same situation. But what God says and what God does quite often flies in the face of all human reason and understanding. Again and again, God disagrees with our hearts. Again and again, God says something different than our friends or even our families say. To have a wise heart, we must listen to him.

Do you have a wise heart? A wise heart is a listening heart.

II.

Before God ever gave him famous wisdom, Solomon made this very wise request for a listening heart. Where did that initial wisdom come from? The Bible says that the fear of the Lord – which is another way of saying faith – is the beginning of wisdom. That’s what led to so much more wisdom for Solomon. Where does faith come from? It comes from knowing what God has done for us. It comes from the gospel.

And you see that in Solomon’s case. Before he asked for anything, Solomon reviewed God’s great acts of love for him and his father. God had shown great kindness and love to Solomon’s father David, because David had loved and trusted in God. God had promised David that he would always have a son on his throne until the greatest descendant of all came, Jesus. Solomon recognized that he was king of Israel because God was keeping his promise. And all that he says here shows that he understood that God did all this out of grace, out of love for us that we can never earn or deserve.

Solomon was humble before God because he knew who was God and was the lump of clay. Solomon knew who alone could keep the promise to send his Savior and bring him to eternal life. And from that humble faith sprang up the wisdom to ask God to give him a listening heart to discern good and evil and rule God’s people well. Through that request, Solomon became a link in the chain that led to the birth of Jesus 900 years after this happened.

For us to have the beginning of wisdom, we need that same fear of the Lord, that same humble faith in the mighty acts of God to save us. God sent Jesus because none of us has a truly wise heart on our own. By

ourselves, the only thing we're good at is taking care of ourselves. The fear of the Lord is the farthest thing from our mind. So history is full of brilliant men who were too smart for God. Some of the greatest minds our society has produced deny that God exists at all. Many of the heroes of our country's history did not believe in Jesus. So they lacked the wisdom God is talking about here.

When you and I talk instead of listening, when you and I listen to our society instead of listening to God's word, we show that on our own, we would not even have the beginning of wisdom. We prove that we're sinners and we deserve to spend eternity in hell. But God still loves us. He sent his one and only Son into this world to pay for our pride and foolishness. Jesus died because we don't listen to each other. Jesus died because we don't listen to God. He washed all that sin away. Then he rose and declared that we are free from the death and hell our pride deserves. In that message comes faith, the fear of the Lord. In that message is the beginning of wisdom. We'll never be Solomons. But we can have wisdom. **Do you have a wise heart? A wise heart is a believing heart.**

III.

True wisdom changes the purpose of our lives. Once we recognize our sin and hear God's forgiveness, we want something different. You don't have to have the wisdom of the mature Solomon to want that. You only have to have the beginning of wisdom, the wisdom of the humble child of God that Solomon showed when God offered to give him whatever he wanted.

Solomon shows the change. He was the king of Israel. That made him the supreme court, the president and the congress all rolled into one. So if he made unjust or stupid laws, other people suffered. If he spent the nation's tax money on foolish things, the people would suffer. If he didn't care about justice in court, if he took bribes and showed favoritism, justice would perish. So instead of making some selfish request, Solomon asked God for a listening heart that could discern good and evil so that he could rule in his people well.

In the same way, God calls us to put others ahead of ourselves. But to our sinful heart, that seems foolish. Even we Christians who know better, often struggle with selfishness. I wonder how many of us would've asked for the wisdom to be good rulers instead of long life or great riches or personal glory? But you know what? Christians are not the only people who recognize the value of selfless service to others. Lots of people who are not Christians speak against selfishness. They don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God or that he died to save us. But they still say that greed is bad and helping others is good. Helping others makes you feel good about yourself and it helps the people around you.

That's not the same thing as what we're talking about, although sometimes, it may seem like it. The difference between the service that comes from a wise heart and the service that comes from an unbelieving heart is who we are serving. God does call us to serve others. But when we do that, first and foremost, we are serving him. When Solomon asked for wisdom, he said, **"For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"** True wisdom said, "This is God's people. I must do right by God by doing right by them."

That's the key difference between just being nice and being a Christian. A Christian loves his neighbor because God loved us and sent his Son to die for us. A Christian forgives those who hurt him because God forgave me for all the sins that I commit over and over again. A Christian wrestles with his conscience because he knows that God is in his heaven. Even if I get away with sin here, I still have disappointed the God who sent his Son to die for me. A Christian realizes that when our society says that we're all good people and we shouldn't feel guilty, that's just not true. A Christian knows that doing the right thing for the wrong reason is still sin.

But a Christian also knows that God works every day through his word to renew our hearts and to change our lives. He gives us wisdom. Compared to Christ or even King Solomon, we have only the beginning of wisdom. And for as long as we live here, we will need to grow in that wisdom. But the good news of Christ, dying and rising for us and the promise that the Holy Spirit lives and works in our hearts, give us wisdom. So God leads our hearts to serve him by serving the people around us. **Do you have a wise heart? A wise heart is a serving heart.**

The miracle of God's grace is that you do have that heart, because you do trust in Jesus as your Savior. It may not always feel like your heart is all that wise. If you're like me, every time you do something stupid, you beat yourself up for it! But God has given us faith through the gospel message. So he has given us a new heart. That new heart does listen to his word and to the people around us. That new heart does believe in Jesus as our Savior. That new heart does want to serve God by serving the people around us. The more we grow in

our faith, the wiser our heart becomes. So the wisest thing you can do is to keep coming and hearing the gospel and keep feeding your faith. Grow in grace and in knowledge and you will grow in wisdom. Amen.