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“Getting What You Want from God?” **Sermon on 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14**

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King David has died. The king is dead. His son, Solomon, through a little family politics mixed with bloodshed, has become king. Long live the king.

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

¹⁰ Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹ The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

³ Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴ The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” ⁶ And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, 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 today. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or

riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.”

“Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David.”

The statutes, the law, the measure, the motion of his father David.

Solomon’s mother was Bathsheba. You may remember the story of David and Bathsheba. It is a story full of lust, deception, murder, cover up, sin! “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David...” Some statutes! Do you think the writers forgot about all that? Or maybe David loved the Lord, and loved the mercy. “Create in me a clean heart, O Lord. Renew a right spirit within me.” And God did, and David loved the Lord.

“Solomon loved the Lord, walking the statutes of his father David, only, but he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. That is to say, “he loved the Lord”, but he was seeing someone else, worshipping other gods.

We do that. We love the Lord, but the world is full of gods that demand our attention. Love the Lord, but we worship the golf game. Love the Lord, but worship the next thing on our agenda, building the house, moving up the ladder, getting into the club. Love the Lord, but our online time is way up this year. Love the Lord, but worship the news media.

It’s not that we don’t “love the Lord,” we just offer the sacrifice of our lives at other locations. And often, life can go a long time without any Thanksgiving to the Lord, without any prayer. Life doesn’t have a moment when we might stop what we’re doing and give of ourselves. Pick up a cross. But if someone asked, “Do you love the Lord?” “Yes, of course.”

“Solomon loved the loved the Lord, only, but he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.” Maybe he did that for political reasons. You don’t have to travel too many miles outside of Jerusalem before you start hearing people reference Jerusalem as the “swamp.” “It’s all about the big city. Nobody cares about the little people.”

Solomon loved the Lord, but maybe he had to offer the sacrifices in those places just to be liked. We know this. It’s why politicians go to Iowa. Who else would go there only to sit, eat fried Twinkies and watch a combine derby demolition? Nobody would do that! We love the Lord, but sometimes we just have to immerse ourselves in the worship of other gods just to be liked. Offer up a little gossip to keep the friends. Laugh at the joke that hurts another to stay in the crowd. Sometimes you have to deny Jesus so you can support the anger and meanness of politics. We sacrifice things just to be liked.

Solomon loved the Lord, only, but he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places - a thousand burnt offerings on the altar. That's a lot. That's excessive. That's saying something. What's it saying?

I don't know. It could be that king offered a thousand burnt offerings to the gods because he wanted to get the attention of something that was bigger than him. He loved the Lord, but whatever he wanted from the Lord, the Lord wasn't delivering. When the Lord doesn't deliver, you move on to other things!

I think of a woman in Durham who had migraines on top of migraines. She went to the healing service. We prayed over her countless times, laid hands on her. She suffered so. Doctors did no good. So she went to a guy who told her to put magnetic balls in her ears and put a screen around her bed to deflect some undetectable rays. I mean, when you're suffering, you'll do anything.

Solomon's father died. His mom was pushing, always pushing to make sure her son would be king. Those verses we skipped were all about the family political struggles, that is to say, the killing that had to happen so that Solomon could be king.

Now he's king. And he hasn't a clue. Can you imagine any political figure running on the platform of "I don't have a clue!"? No. They have a plan, and it's only after they're elected to office that they unveil they haven't a clue.

This week, the Biden administration said, "We had no idea the Taliban would be so successful so quickly. No idea."

The Governor of Arkansas said just last week, "I made a mistake."

And yet, it seems like we worship these people. We give them money, shout their support, root for them like they're our favorite team, and defend them like they're gods. We don't want to hear about their failures. We love the Lord, only, but we worship at the high places.

Solomon hadn't a clue. He needed some help. One thousand sacrifices to somebody.

But, up there on the mountain, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob said to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you...".

If God asked you that question - "Ask what I shall give you..." - what's your answer? What do you want from the Almighty?

Is what you want something just for you? Or for someone else? It can be both. It is often both. The prayer to heal the cancer is the prayer that says, "I want to be healed so that I can continue to be the lover. To be the mother. To be the grandmother. To be the friend. To give. Because I love life, and because I can do things in my life for you, for someone else, for God, all at the same time. I have more life to give."

God said, "Ask what I shall give you..."

For Solomon, it was that he was king, and he hadn't a clue. He said, "I'm in the midst of a people. A great number of people. They're your people, God. But I'm the king and I don't know what I'm doing. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

The prayer was for him. The prayer was for the people. The prayer was for God. God granted him his request! Pleased. With wisdom came fortune from God, too.

How did Solomon do? He did write some great proverbs. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding!" That's a good proverb.

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." That's a good one.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." That'll preach.

How did Solomon do? He did have spectacular moments of wisdom. Do you remember the story of the two women fighting over a child? Surely, you know that story. If you don't, look it up. It's a great story!

How did Solomon do? He constructed an amazing temple and had a huge palace. Only, he had 700 wives; that's about 699 too many, don't you think? Aside from that, he had 300 other women he kept around to do his bidding. What was he doing? He put up altars to other gods. He had wealth, but he didn't want to use it to pay for all the stuff, so he bled the people.

How did Solomon do? He was supposed to have helped those people, but all that wisdom just went to his head. He hadn't a clue. And when Solomon died, the country split in two in heartbeat, or for the lack of one. After that, it was just one disaster after another.

After one of those disasters, nearly 500 years later after Solomon, some people stood in the ruins and rubble of Jerusalem that was once Solomon's temple, and tried to figure out what went wrong. How did a great nation lose its way? They tried to assemble their history and stories and write it down. And they wrote down this story of Solomon. They were the ones who wrote that Solomon loved the Lord only, but he worshipped in the high places. They wrote down that he was king, but he hadn't a clue. Don't worship a king. Worship God. But the people wanted a king.

They wrote down that God answered Solomon's prayer, and gave him wisdom to know good and evil. Isn't that interesting - the wisdom to know good and evil. Those are the words that are tied to that tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. You weren't supposed to eat from that tree. But, the snake said, "You will not die, you'll be like God knowing good and evil."

And that's what happens. All that wisdom goes to your head, and you think you're God.

About 500 years after those people stood on that pile of rubble, there was a man who went to a high place to worship God. That man was God, and he humbled himself. Then in the high place on the Mount of Olives, he said a prayer. "Take this cup from me. It's what I want." Only... but... then he said, "not my will, but your will be done." And maybe that's the only thing we can want from God. That thy will be done.

The other day I was getting some physical therapy done on my elbow. I had tennis elbow. I bravely hid that pain from all of you. Unless you asked me. I love sympathy.

Anyway, whenever I visit Vanderbilt to see someone, I always park in the children's hospital parking lot and just walk from there. It's just easier. As I was heading outside on that second-story walkway, I stopped to check my phone to find out where my appointment was. And when I looked up, there were two Amish men, with their beards, and in their white short-sleeved shirts and straw hats, looking over the overpass at something obviously interesting. I didn't know what they were looking at.

And then I saw that they were looking at a woman in a wheelchair, leaning over, trying to pick up a mask with a crochet needle, and it was interesting. She was leaning over and stretching, and then she'd move her chair a little bit and try again. All the while, there was a woman who was seated on a bench beside her who wasn't doing a thing to help her. She was just watching. I was ready to go down there and pick it up myself. The woman kept stretching out, leaning in. And then she snagged it. It was if she snagged a hundred-dollar bill.

She held it up with a big smile, and the woman next to her got up and did a shimmy dance. It made me smile, and I looked over and saw the Amish guys smiling, too. There were two or three other people who also had watched and now were smiling.

Then the woman who snagged the mask, dropped it on the ground. And the shimmy woman slapped her own forehead and sat back down. A look of determination came over the woman in the wheelchair, and once again, she started leaning in. And the Amish men and all the people on overpass, they all leaned in.

And I was amazed by the wisdom of that moment. The older woman had the wisdom to know that a party was just a reach away. I don't know if she thought the party was for her or for the woman who danced. I thought, "That's God." In the midst of all the hurt in the world, the will to reach, to lean in, to connect, was there.

And that shimmy-dancing woman with the patience of Job, who didn't care what anyone else thought, was there to wait and watch as this person in her care went reaching for a party. And I thought, "This is God." This is the will of God to wait and celebrate that desire to reach for the good thing. Not my will be done, but thy will be done.

And the people, all the people who leaned in during this time of crazy politics, hurricanes, meanness, we're all smiling. We're all leaning in from the high places, so hungry and thirsty for a smile and a laugh, just a touch of humanity that seems like it's from above. We're all leaning in. It's all we could ever ask for, and oddly, we already have it.

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