

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

### **Second Sunday After Christmas**

**January 2, 2022**

#### **Psalms 119:97–104 (ESV):**

97 Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,  
for it is ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,  
for your testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the aged,  
for I keep your precepts.

101 I hold back my feet from every evil way,  
in order to keep your word.

102 I do not turn aside from your rules,  
for you have taught me.

103 How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through your precepts I get understanding;  
therefore I hate every false way.

#### **1 Kings 3:4–15 (ESV):**

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. 5 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. 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. 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."

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.

### **EPISTLE: Ephesians 1:3–14 (ESV):**

#### **Spiritual Blessings in Christ**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also,

when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Gospel: Luke 2:22–40 (ESV):**

### **Jesus Presented at the Temple**

Luke 2:40–52 (ESV): 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

### **The Boy Jesus in the Temple**

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

### **Sermon 1 – Second Sunday After Christmas**

#### **"Given Wisdom"**

#### **1 Kings 3:4-15**

Dear friends,

How does God give? That is the question that kinda hit me out of nowhere as I was mulling over things this week. We all know God gives good things, we know about the Sacraments, we know about His Word, we know about all the miraculous ways that God

gives. But what about the mundane ways? God seems to love the mundane at times, He loves working through people and circumstances to bring about unexpected blessings for His people. This Old Testament lesson today helps us understand the answer to that question. How does God give to Solomon? You can see two different ways, and I think it is important to understand both. God provides for His people through His people, and God provides through His Word. God can provide miraculously, we never dispute that, but this Old Testament lesson shows us how God prefers to work.

This is the very beginning of King Solomon, a good start to what will become a bad story. King Solomon is where it all starts to fall apart for Israel, but it hasn't yet, in fact it starts better than any other part of Israelite history. Solomon is supposed to usher in Israel's golden age, and he does for a while, the description of the kingdom in chapter 4 is one of complete, universal peace and plenty. However, how this starts is actually by killing, as it so often is for humans. The first two chapters of 1 Kings are a description of King Solomon starting his reign as king. How does he start? By killing, banishing, or otherwise removing threats to his rule. Kingship is a game played for keeps, and Solomon is playing well. He isn't on a rampage, he's just trying to clean up the mess that David left him, and those messes have names. By the end of the chapter, most of those names are dead, and a very lucky few are under house arrest or banished. God doesn't say anything to Solomon about this, so I'm guessing this was what Solomon had to do, but it still startles to think that this great golden age gets its start by Solomon clearing the deck and making sure he is the only one fit to sit on that throne.

So after the housecleaning is done, Solomon goes to do church. That's really what he's doing, this isn't a big ceremony or anything fancy. It says a thousand burnt offerings, but do remember just how much Solomon had. That was probably a tithe for him, a tenth of his herds. So Solomon goes to worship His God, and His God reaches out. **“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. 5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.”** Best I can tell, God rarely if ever does this. God will often offer to show signs, He does that to Ahab at

one point, basically tells him to name his miracle. But this is just so much more straightforward than God usually is. Say what you want from me, Solomon.

This is often posed like a riddle, but I don't think it is. I think God means this sincerely, He doesn't have some kind of ulterior motive for Solomon, I don't think He's testing Solomon. If He is, He doesn't say that. That's what it seemed to me for years. Solomon answered just the right way, asking not for wealth but for wisdom, and this made God so happy that He gave Solomon extra. Kinda like hitting the unexpected combo on the slot machine, where you double your payout. Solomon saw through the test, hit the right note. That's really what it seems like, but that is not what God is like. Find me that God in the rest of the Bible, a God who is like a genie, and if we answer the riddle the right way we get the biggest prize. That's not what God is about, you know it and I know it, so why is this happening and why is this in Bible?

One of the keys to understanding this, I think, is found next. I'm not going to quote all this, because Solomon kinda goes on for a while, but I'll zero in on what I think is important here. Verse 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?”** I choose to take this at face value. God cannot be fooled, you know that, God knows our hearts and minds. And the way God responds indicates to me that God takes this at face value. Solomon says that he is young, best guess is that he's in his early twenties, so he's younger than me. Solomon knows that he's in kinda over his head, and he wants some help in being a good king. Look at what God says. **“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.”**

It's not that Solomon passed the test, it's not that Solomon plugged in just the right answer for the biggest prize. God knows our hearts, He knows Solomon's heart, and He sees that Solomon is sincere. Remember what I've told you before, brothers and sisters.

God is not interested in your answers, God is not a test that you have to pass. God is interested in where your heart is. He cares so much less about what you do than why you do it, that is what truly matters to God. I think God sees that Solomon's heart is in the right place. Solomon wants to be a good king, God likes that, because this is the kind of thing He expects from His children. Furthermore, this is exactly the kind of promise that God makes to you and I. He promises to be our teacher, our guide, showing us what good and evil is, nurturing wisdom in us.

Back to what I asked at the beginning. God says He will do this, He will make Solomon wise, but *how* does God do it? This is what struck me as I was thinking of this. You can find it in the Bible, it's all there, but not how you might think. Solomon doesn't just wake up one morning with a big powerful brain. Solomon doesn't have a lightbulb moment. What does Solomon proceed to do after this story? He rules Israel, he kings. He practices. What else is in the Bible that Solomon did? Proverbs. Ecclesiastes. The Song of Solomon. There's your answer, folks. How does Solomon become wise? By devoting himself to the study of God's Word, by meditating on God's ways. By committing Himself to writing down what He has learned for future generations. By practice. He becomes a good king by practicing kinging. He becomes a wise man by practicing wisdom, by looking to God, the source of wisdom.

Why am I telling you this? Because it is so easy, at least it was for me, to think that Solomon was given something special. He was given extra IQ, or some kind of gift of insight that you and I just won't ever have. He wasn't. God gave Solomon wisdom exactly the same way that He gives you and I wisdom. He gave it through study, prayer, observation, and practice. I say this to encourage you. Solomon isn't special. He is just another child of God, and God promises to give all His children wisdom and insight. Solomon just shows us how its done. You may not be one for books, you may not be able to write new proverbs. That doesn't matter. There is only one book, the Scriptures, that truly makes us wise. You may not like reading and you may not like writing or study, but you can sure as heck either read the Bible or have it read to you. God wants to make you wise, and He has given you the same tools He gave King Solomon: Faith, brain, and a heart

to hear His words. We may not feel much wiser after church, but we know that He is doing it anyway.

This question begs another. How did God make Solomon rich? He promises Solomon riches, and I always had the impression that Solomon kinda woke up and found his stock options skyrocketing or something like that. **“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.”** This is recorded in the next chapters. If you read the story, you can see how Solomon got all his wealth and his honor. He made good treaties, kept his neighbors happy, and was a good king. He was wise. That wisdom got Solomon his wealth. When God says that He will give what Solomon has not asked, He's not kidding. Solomon's riches and honor were the byproduct of the first gift God gave, wisdom. Solomon's riches didn't come because God teleported talents into Solomon's treasury, they came from Solomon's wise ruling, good diplomacy, ultimately his hard work in becoming a good ruler.

This is how God helps. The saying is that God helps those who help themselves. There's truth in that, but Solomon shows us a new angle to it. God helps people through people, and God provides things through the hard work and efforts of others. If Solomon hadn't been wise, he wouldn't have earned a tenth of what he died with. If Solomon had sat on his laurels, he would've turned into a very different king. God does not provide with miracles, not usually anyway, God does not provide in a vacuum. God uses kings, societies, and families to provide for the needs of his children. He heals your diseases through doctors. He uses the government to protect you from foreign wars. He takes those who have much in our communities and uses them to provide labor and pay for those who do not. God's way is people helping people, people providing for people. He can do it other ways, but that's what He prefers.

God takes credit, though. Remember, Solomon needed his wisdom from God. If he didn't have wisdom, he didn't have nothing. James says that every good gift comes from above, God is the source of all good things. Without God, we have no wisdom, and without wisdom, we have no society, no family, and fools running the show. Don't ignore the tools God has put in front of you to bless you, and those tools are sitting right next to

you. You and I are not kings, but we are children of God, and God has promised to provide for us just as much as He did for Solomon. We praise God for the blessings of food for our tables, heat for our homes, health for our bodies. Never forget, though, that those blessings usually come through the work of others. We can be a blessing to each other with the work we do, and we can seek God's wisdom and learn better how to bless each other.

Just like Solomon, God promised to teach you. Just like Solomon, you learn by doing life, by hearing the Word of God, and you can rest assured that God is in all of it. God will care for your body through the hard work of your neighbor. God will care for your daily bread, your economic needs, through your own hard work. In it all, God will teach you wisdom through His Word. We are all bound together by it and through it. Solomon teaches us that wisdom comes from God, and that God uses the wisdom He gives to bless each other, in our work and in our lives.

Amen.