

The Right Choice

“Choose wisely.”

I Kings 3:4-14

Heart Strings: Lessons for relationships from the Ancient Heroes #8

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Can There Be a Lesson Here?

One of my friends had a group of children gathered in the front of the sanctuary for the children's time in the worship service. He said that once they were settled he asked them a question: "Who was the wisest man to ever live? Then, without missing a beat, one of the children answered, "Jesus!"

Well, ok, even though Solomon was told that he would be the wisest of all time, Jesus would still top him. But outside of Jesus – Solomon: your dad or grandfather, or the pharmacist who used to talk to a gathering for hours, giving sage advice; the voice of the walls of this church we called *Old ROFUM* a few moments ago: who's the wisest one? And, if you were to be asked who is wise, why wouldn't you ever say it was you?

Stories of Solomon aren't there just to tell the tale of a hero, after all. They are there to give you examples of how to run your own life and how to make choices that will work. For as much as people say that church is out-of-touch and the Bible is a book that went out-of-date a hundred-fifty years ago, religion is really very practical.

So there's plenty that an ancient king living in the Middle East could teach you about being wise.

The Heart of Wisdom

And this is the most important of his lessons. It was the key to every one of Solomon's judgments.

Even though he says, "I am only a little child," he is at least 20 years old.¹ It isn't as though he needs some schooling. He's probably already the most educated person in Israel. Yet, here it is, *I am only a little child*. It is as though he admits he knows nothing and he needs God's help.

Grant me a wise and discerning heart so I can judge my people, so I can lead them, so I can serve them and serve you faithfully. This is where Solomon starts out.

Wisdom is not in the end a body of knowledge or even a quick wit. If it's going to be anything that makes a difference, it can only be something that is given as a gift of God.

He has an overwhelming responsibility and in the face of it he simply admits his need. That's the key lesson.

20 or so years old, and as much as he has it made in terms of power and fortune – amazingly he understands it's not all about him. So he doesn't ask for riches or long life or vengeance against his enemies. The world is not his for the taking.

Give me a wise and discerning heart...grant me wisdom: young Solomon positions himself to listening for understanding. He takes his own need and desire out of the equation so that he will not be swayed by what is popular or what is expedient to his own ambitions. As long as he relies on the wisdom God gives, he'll make decisions that are *right* rather than pleasing.

Jesus put it this way, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness and all these things will be added to you."

I saw this put to practice in a bishop I served. It was a marvel to watch him dealing with a perplexing issue. He'd talk to anyone; it seemed everyone, asking their understanding. How did they assess the situation? What are they hearing others say about it? What do they think? And he'd go from one person to the next and then he'd take the problem to God and pray about it, mulling over all that he heard. Then he'd come to some clarity and take a stand.

Wisely.

I think Solomon must have been like that: coming to a place to see through a crisis and peoples' pretenses and determine what is really at stake. It's something practical and, at the same time, something godly.

And it starts by not thinking you already have all the faculties on your own and that you don't have all the answers already and that you can ask questions and you can pray.

It's Fathers' Day: what if we who are fathers made our choices that way? What if we based our parenting on the wisdom God gives? And what if moms did the same?

What would happen if, in business, leaders and workers put the mission of their business above their personal gain? What if it wasn't all about them?

What if leaders of churches and each of their members sought first God's Kingdom and God's righteousness: then, what would the walls of the church say about us decades later?

Give me a wise and discerning heart, O God, because it's not all about me. It's all about you.

Seek first God's Kingdom and God's righteousness and look what gets added in the process!

Wise Choices

I have a water color and ink painting of an owl on the branch of an oak tree hanging in my office. It's something that was given to my dad by my great aunt for his 21st birthday and I remember it hanging in the front entrance of our house when I was growing up. The words of a poem are written underneath:

*The wise old owl lived in an oak.
The more he saw the less he spoke.
The less he spoke the more he heard.
The wise old owl was a wise old bird.*

I'm moving closer to that time when I will be an old bird. Some would say I'm already there. But wise?

Who's the wisest person who ever lived...except for Jesus, that is? The truth of it is that you can be wise as Solomon if you listen and put your love for God very first.

REFERENCES

- [1] Claude F. Mariottini, "Annotations to the Books of First and Second Kings" The New Interpreter's Study Bible (NRSV). Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press. © 2003. p 488.
- [2] A variation of a nursery rhyme. See Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Wise_Old_Owl