

**Where is Wisdom to Be Found**  
LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church  
May 14, 2023 PM Sermon  
Reverend Peter Jonker  
1 Kings 3:3-14

How about that Solomon? What a lucky guy! God comes to him and offers him anything he wants. God comes to him and effectively says I will give you one wish! How great is that!? It would be OK with me if God showed up in my dream tonight and made me a similar offer; I could live with that. Unfortunately, God hasn't come to me in the middle of the night with such an offer, and I haven't heard that he's come to any of you, in fact the only person I've ever heard getting such an open ended offer from God was Solomon. And when the time came for him to make his wish, Solomon didn't ask for wealth or long life or the death of his enemies, he asks for wisdom. Solomon asks for a discerning heart and the Lord was pleased with his request.

Wisdom. What exactly is this gift Solomon asks for? What is wisdom? Most of us have heard about how Solomon was a wise king, but what exactly does that mean? What was it about him that made him wise? Tonight, I want to see if we can find the root of Solomon's wisdom together. I want to find that root not only so that we can learn about wisdom, but so that we can become wise Christians ourselves.

If I were to ask most of you, where is Solomon's wisdom displayed, I think the first thing that would come to your mind would be the book of Proverbs. Some of you know that Solomon was one of the chief authors of that book. He didn't write them all. Proverbs is a collection, so there are other wise men who have contributed, but Solomon wrote many of the Proverbs in the Bible.

When you read Solomon's proverbs you are amazed at the breadth of the king's knowledge. Solomon knew a little about everything: He knew about how to be a good king: "If a king judges the poor with fairness," he writes, "his throne will always be secure." (29:14) He knew about agriculture and business: "Know well the condition of your flocks, give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever (27:23)." He knew about civic relations: "When you bless your neighbor early in the morning with a loud voice, your blessing will be counted as a curse. (27:14)" He knew about the psychology of grief: "Like vinegar on a wound is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. (25:20)" He knew about loneliness: "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy." (14:10) He even ventures into the area of marital relations: "It is better to live on the corner of the roof than to share a house with a contentious spouse (25:14)." (The original version is slightly less inclusive) Solomon's intellect ranges far and wide. He seems to know about everything. He has great knowledge.

So, as we look for the root of wisdom, we see: part of wisdom is knowledge. In verse 9, when Solomon asks God for wisdom, the actual words of the request are, "Give me a discerning heart." A wise woman, a wise man is a person who discerns things, who seeks to understand things. Wisdom and understanding are connected. If you want to grow in wisdom, you must grow in knowledge. A wise and faithful Christian has a lively, curious mind. A wise and faithful Christian never stops trying to learn more about God's world.

This needs to be said because Christianity has an unfortunate history of anti-intellectualism. At various times, and in various places learning and study have been seen as the enemy of faith. The study of philosophy, the study of history, the study of archaeology, and the study of biology have been seen as dangerous to the faith. I remember when I was about ten years old sitting through a congregational meeting in my home church. We were considering the call of someone to be the campus minister at the university in the town where I lived. As part of the meeting the calling committee presented the fact that the candidate had just received his doctorate from Purdue University. It was a doctorate in Philosophy. The floor was opened and old mister VanderTol stood up. "Mr. Chairman!! I don't know about this candidate. He has a PhD. What is this, this PhD?! It is a dangerous thing! When I hear PhD I think of a snake in the grass!! A snake in the grass Mr. chairman!!!" Don't you just love congregational meetings?!

There has always been a kind of fear about scholarship and learning. These days, science is particularly under suspicion. Many Christians willfully ignore the best scientific work of today because they don't like the conclusions. That is unwise. We don't need to swallow everything every study says without question. Science is done by fallen human beings; people with biases, people who make mistakes. We need to be mindful of those

things. But when practiced well, science is a godly pursuit, because, after all, it is seeking to discover the intricacies of God's handiwork. God wants us to be curious about his world. "Pay close attention to the book of my creation. Read it. Study it. Delight in it. Love me with your mind, and grow in knowledge."

So knowledge is important to wisdom, but is knowledge the root of wisdom? I don't think so. Bare knowledge does not make a person wise. History is littered with geniuses who behave like fools. Nobel prize winners who are impossible to work with. Intellectual giants who don't know how to relate to their children. Brilliant academics who are morally bankrupt. Respected scholars who can't manage ordinary household bills. A few years back a classic mathematical problem was solved. A brilliant Russian mathematician solved Poincare's Conjecture. I'm sure you all know Poincare's Conjecture. It's a very difficult mathematical problem, and it was solved by Grigory Perelman, a genius who has a stunning mathematical mind. He also happens to live like a hermit with long hair, and long fingernails in the Russian woods. No one seems to be able to get a hold of him. Great knowledge, but not exactly a model of wisdom. You can't grow in wisdom without growing in knowledge, pursuit of knowledge is vital for Christians today, but knowledge is not wisdom's root.

Maybe the root of wisdom is a special kind of knowledge? Solomon asks for an understanding mind, but then he goes on to specify that he be able to discern between good and evil: moral knowledge. Moral knowledge is obviously terrifically important to wisdom. Regular old knowledge can figure out all sorts of things, it can split the atom, it can create human embryos, it can clone animals; but regular old knowledge can't tell you whether we should do any of these things. Regular knowledge doesn't do "should." It specializes in what can be done, not what should be done. We need to be able to discern between good and evil when we decide how to use nuclear fission, we need to have moral knowledge when we consider the use and production of embryonic stem cells, we need, we desperately need, to have moral knowledge when we consider how to use artificial intelligence. Wisdom will not be found without a clear knowledge of good and evil.

But even moral knowledge isn't the root of wisdom. Simply knowing the difference between good and evil does not guarantee that you will choose the good. Adam and Eve took the fruit in the garden so that they could be like God, knowing good and evil. But did that knowledge make them wiser? NO. They knew the difference between good and evil but they couldn't stop themselves from choosing the evil anyway. It's been sort of a nagging problem for humankind ever since. It is not a lack of moral knowledge that makes us choose evil. A lot of the time, we know what we're doing is wrong, but we do it anyway. Moral knowledge is critical to wisdom, God bless all those who struggle to grow in their knowledge of good and evil, but moral knowledge is not wisdom's root.

So then, what is the bottom of this wisdom that God gives to Solomon? Let's take a step back and look at Solomon's situation. David has recently died and Solomon, probably still a young man, maybe 20 years old, has ascended to the throne. He has inherited responsibility for an empire. And it's not an empire in perfect shape. The end of David's reign has been on the messy side. There was the civil war with Absalom, and then a little later there was the uprising of Adonijah who tried to grab the throne before Solomon could get it. That turned into a bloody mess too. It was a complicated time to be king.

So there's 20-year-old Solomon sitting in Jerusalem, presiding over this beautiful, complicated people. He's trying to figure out how to govern, and as he tries to make decisions and lead, he is surrounded by people who are pulling him in different directions: One advisor saying 'attack the Philistines,' another saying 'no, make peace.' A delegation of people telling him the only way to grow the kingdom is to raise taxes! Another delegation demanding a tax cut now! The army wants him to go on a troop review, the High priest wants him to come to a conference, a business group wants him to appear at a luncheon, he's got ten heads of neighboring states who want to come visit, and on top of all that his wife is wondering why he spends so much time at the office!!! He's a little overwhelmed, this poor king. He looks at all this and he says, "I can't do it! It is too much for me!"

And so what does he do? He heads for the mountains, he offers a thousand sacrifices to God, and Solomon, the great king, the leader of the greatest empire of his day, falls on his knees and says, "Lord, you have made me king, but I am only a little child. I do not know how to go out or how to come in." "Lord, I am only a little child." Now, here is something closer to the root of wisdom. 'Unless you receive the kingdom of God like a little child, you will never enter it,' says Jesus, and on his knees in Gibeon, that's exactly how Solomon accepts his kingdom. "Lord you have made me king, but I am only a little child."

Wisdom begins in the place of humility: when you recognize your helplessness, when you recognize your weakness, when you realize that, while you might have some knowledge, you're not smart enough to understand it and you're not strong enough to fix it, then you're close to the root. Wisdom begins when you realize that the only one who can possibly deal with that strange, wonderful mess that is your life is your Father in heaven. Wisdom begins when you come like a child to your Father and say, Daddy please help! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Solomon may leave this place and pursue knowledge with all the brain power he can muster, he may become the greatest scholar of his day, he may have built up tremendous reserves of knowledge, but insofar as he is wise, that wisdom is built on the knowledge that he is a child, completely dependent on his heavenly Father.

At its heart wisdom is centered on what you submit to, what you worship. And you know what you worship when you come to the kind of place Solomon finds himself in this passage; that is a place of weakness, a place of overwhelming, an end of your rope place. Where do you put your trust in that place? Do you trust in your own understanding? Do you say, I feel overwhelmed so I'm going to work twice as hard and climb this mountain? Do you trust in your will and your intellect? Do you trust in money? Do you lean on success? Or in the moment of vulnerability, do you give yourself to Jesus. The root of wisdom isn't what you know, it's who you trust.

I think of Frances Collins. Frances Collins is one of the world's leading geneticists. He was the one put in charge of mapping the human genome for the government, his knowledge credentials are absolutely impeccable. Frances Collins also happens to be a Christian. He didn't start out as a believer. He was an atheist until his late twenties, but then a few things started to happen: a woman suffering through cancer in a hospital asked him what he really believed and he sort of stuttered. The knowledge man had no answer. Then he read C.S. Lewis' Mere Christianity and found himself further drawn toward Jesus. And then finally one day on a fall hike in the Cascades he happened upon a frozen waterfall over a hundred feet high, sparkling in the sun. And the man who had all sorts of knowledge about the inner workings of nature was suddenly overwhelmed by the God of nature. The next morning, he got on his knees in the grass and he humbly committed his life to Jesus.

Frances Collins could have done all sorts of things with his knowledge and his brain. He could have become filthy rich, using his intellectual powers to pile up stacks of cash. He could have used it for power, to bowl over weaker minds. He could have used it to impress others, to win fame and acclaim. But he used it for something better, and to me there is no better picture of wisdom than this brilliant man, on his knees like a child, dedicating his brilliant mind to the God who gave it in the first place.

Just out those doors lie the beautiful, complicated mess of your life. Just out those doors lie all those responsibilities and problems and the joys of another week. How on earth are you going to manage? You are only a little child. A good place to begin is here, on your knees, like a child before Jesus; Jesus who made you, Jesus who died for you, Jesus who knows your name, Jesus who knows about the beautiful, complicated mess. A great place to begin is to come to him and say, "Jesus I don't have a clue. I am a child. I don't know whether I'm coming or going." And then, just as he did with the children in the story, he will lay his hands on you and bless you, and he will send you out full of the Wisdom of God.

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