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1 Kings 3:1-15
Where is the One Who is Wise?

There's a difference between intelligence and wisdom. At a Bible school, a football player nicknamed "Meathead" took a New Testament course where there was no homework, reading, or tests before the final. For 25 years, the professor asked a single question for the final, "Describe the Missionary Journeys of Paul." Hoping for an easy "A," He spent all semester studying Paul's missionary journeys in preparation.

When the final exam was given, he was stunned to find a different question, "Critique the Sermon on the Mount that was preached by Jesus." The shock was felt across the room. One young man threw his test on the professor's desk empty of any content. One by one, each left empty test on the professor's desk, except for Meathead who wrote for hours.

That afternoon, the professor had two stacks of tests. On his right was a tall stack of blank tests, all with the grade of "F." On his left was a single test with a giant "A+" at the top. It was Meathead's whose opening line read, "Who am I to criticize the Sermon on the Mount? Instead, let me tell you about the missionary journeys of Paul." And so he did!

Meathead had discovered wisdom.

First Kings 3 is perhaps the best-known narrative in the life of Solomon. It is here Solomon receives wisdom from the Lord. If the previous chapter had not made it clear enough, the opening verses remind us of the need for political leaders to possess wisdom in abundance. This is **Wisdom Announced** (vs. 1-3). In a pithy summary, we are given insight into the burdens and cares of civic leadership. To begin, Solomon needed *political leadership* as demonstrated in his marriage to Pharoah's daughter. Political marriages were common in the ancient world – something Egypt at their apotheosis rarely practiced. This marriage showed both the power of Solomon and the faithfulness of the Lord. It is striking to discover that Pharoah is forced to give his daughter to the nation whom they used to enslave. Regardless, through this alliance, Israel announced itself on the world stage.

Likewise, civic leaders like Solomon need *economic wisdom*. In connection with his marriage is a reference to both his palace and the temple. Both demonstrate Israel's political and economic strength. To build these magnificent buildings required an abundance of gold, lumber, and other materials which required the overwhelming financial blessings of God.

Finally, Solomon needed *religious wisdom*. Although there is debate regarding the reference to "high places" (a term that suggests idolatry) the text wants us to see this as a positive. Despite not initially having a temple, Israel, under the leadership of Solomon, worshipped the Lord in contrast to Saul.

This leads to **Wisdom Asked** (vs. 4-15). In this recognizable story, Solomon is invited by the Lord to ask anything, and it would be given to him. Although we may have requested financial freedom, great health, or an abundance in other ways, Solomon requests unrivaled wisdom (vs. 8-9). The language he uses ("discern between good and evil") echoes the Garden of Eden where our first parents foolishly chose destruction over intimacy. Pleased, the Lord delivers on his promises in abundance leading to Solomon becoming the wisest of leaders in the history of Israel.

The chapter concludes with **Wisdom Applied** (vs. 16-28) wherein Solomon authenticates his divine wisdom. Two prostitutes are brought to him following the death of one of their children. The robbed mother responded by switching her deceased baby with her colleague's. Without the aid of DNA, Solomon must determine who the real mother is. The king wisely understood human nature knowing that every mother was willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their child. One may recall Afghani mothers giving their babies to American soldiers as they left the country. Though tragic, it is consistent with a mother's love.

Knowing this Solomon threatened to severe the child in half. The false mother agreed to the terms due to bitterness and envy. In contrast, the real mother offered to surrender her baby for the sake of their life. That singular, and natural, act was enough for Solomon. Clearly, Solomon was a wise king who ruled with divine wisdom and knowledge. At this point in the narrative, he is the hero Israel had been waiting for.

Taken together, there are a few points of application worth considering. First, we ought to SEEK WISDOM. It is worth noting we are never given details regarding Solomon's education. No doubt he benefited from a royal education that set him apart from the average ancient Hebrew, but the text highlights wisdom. In Scripture, knowledge and wisdom are not synonyms though they are often associated together. Education does not make one wise. Likewise, some of the least educated people are wise. Instead, we are invited to seek wisdom like Solomon which begins with one's devotion to God.

Secondly, we are invited to SAVOR WISDOM. How can we find wisdom if we do not know where to search? My advice is to look at Solomon. His journey toward wisdom began with faith which was deep and abiding. He genuinely loved the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. A faith limited by our conveniences or bound by our prejudices is a faith that will never produce wisdom. Divine wisdom begins with the Divine. Find wisdom, therefore, in Scripture, the gospel, and in fellow believers. Ultimately, if you seek wisdom, you will find it in the one who is greater than Solomon.

Finally, we are invited to SHARE WISDOM. Throughout the early chapters of Proverbs, Solomon speaks as a father to a son. It concludes with a final poem from a father to his son regarding the ideal wife (Proverbs 31). In other words, divine wisdom is not to be privatized but shared. This is the beauty of the local church and of the Kingdom of God. If we walk in humility, we will grow in wisdom … together.