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God's precious promises Part Three - "Wisdom/Discernment"

Have you ever stopped to think how many times during your lifetime you have found yourself in a situation and not knowing which way to turn? What course of action to take? It is all too easy when problems crop up to switch off, draw the blinds and sink into a downward spiral of doubt and despondency. Here in the book of 1 Kings we find Solomon in such a situation.



Rodney Burge

1 Kings – Chapter 3 Verses 1-9 "Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom"

¹ Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt. He took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. ² The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD. ³ Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. 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?"

On the death of his father David, Solomon had been made king rather than his older brother Adonijah, this in itself had caused him problems. Solomon however had not disposed of the "High Altars". However, God had made a promise to David and He was going to keep it. When Solomon had gone to Gibeon and sacrificed a thousand offerings we read that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. In it, God told Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted from God. Remember, God had faithfully led David and now that promise was going to be kept, and the reply God received from Solomon we read was very pleasing to God.

In asking for an “understanding mind” and “discernment”, these were two very important attributes to enable him to govern God’s chosen people well.

In 1 Kings chapter 4 and verses 29 to 30 we read ²⁹ *And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore,* ³⁰ *so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.*

God in his infinite grace and wisdom not only bestowed on Solomon what he had requested, but the other things he could have asked for but didn't, both riches, honour, and long life. God inspired Solomon to write and or collect proverbs calling readers to wisdom, discipline, and insight. Read in solemn assemblies or shared person-to-person, the gathered sayings of Solomon and other wise Jewish leaders disclosed God’s will and purposes to hearers throughout generations.

So, we read in **Proverbs Chapter 1 verse 7**

⁷ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Reverence and awe for the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God is the chief part of knowledge. Knowledge here is more than a recognition of God. It is recognition of Him as the self-revealing One, the Lord of grace and history. Fools live without taking God into account and become morally corrupt. Those who fear God see Him as the most important part of all knowledge. The saved are the wise ones so committed to God as the source of all wisdom that they could never become fools and act as though God did not exist. God is the starting point for the education that leads to wisdom.

True knowledge, in the biblical sense is something more than a collection of factual information. It includes knowing how to conduct oneself in the practical affairs of everyday life, to make wise choices, to do the right thing in relation to others, and to have insight into the true nature of things. Wisdom of this kind can only grow out of an awareness of God and His purposes in the world. Fools may acquire encyclopaedic information, but they cannot attain wisdom because they failed to take God into account.

The ability to make wise decisions was underlined by Jesus in the parable of the wise and foolish builders in *Matthew chapter 7 verse 24*. There He emphasised the importance of discernment in all of life’s decision-making.

In his pastoral letter to a confused early church, James takes the opportunity to unpack some sound advice. In *James chapter 1 verse 5* he states:

⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

God wants to supply what we lack. We should confidently ask Him. Doubts hinder our prayers from being answered. We cannot expect to get things through the world's way and through God's.

Total dependence on God is the way of prayer. Wisdom differs from the modern technical knowledge people prize. True wisdom enables us to do the right thing in the face of moral dilemmas and to interpret life's experiences in the light of eternal values. God is the source of this wisdom, and it is acquired through prayerful communion with Him.

In *James Chapter 3 and verses 13-18 Wisdom from Above* we read:

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

In this chapter James contrasted traits of earthly and heavenly wisdom. Through dedication to God one can live a good humble life, this is the picture of wisdom. Wisdom is God's will in action, not human knowledge in competition. God's wisdom saturates life with qualities which cement good relationships with other people.

For additional encouragement we should read Ephesians Chapter 5 verses 6 -10 and 1 John Chapter 4 verses 1 to 3.

Ephesians Chapter 5 verses 6-10 - Walk in Love

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

1 John Chapter 4 Verses 1-3 "Test the Spirits"

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Both Paul and John are guiding the recipients of their letters to seek God's wisdom and discernment, particularly when faced with difficult decisions. Something we all need to take on board.

We have a general election coming up in a few weeks, what is God's will for this country? We need to be much in prayer over our response to this and many other situations.

Praise be to OUR God and Saviour.

Transcript of the presentation given by Deacon Rodney Burge and discussed at the church home group on Tuesday 28th May 2024. All scripture references are from the ESV Translation