

WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY

1 Kings 3:3-15

The end of David's life had been marked by turbulence that was a consequence of his sin with Bathsheba. Several of David's sons were a disappointment to him with Absalom having killed one of his brothers and then he led a revolt against his father. Another son, Adonijah, was at the point of declaring himself to be king before David died since David had not named a successor to the throne. David had promised Bathsheba that he would pick her son Solomon and this move was endorsed by Nathan the prophet.

David's charge to Solomon was to be strong and to be mature. Being a leader requires strength of character and character that is exemplary of our being made in the image of God. Many leaders today have trouble taking a stand on issues or avoiding selling their allegiance to the highest bidder. It takes integrity to do the right thing and not be influenced by pride or greed. David had a formula for Solomon to follow that would insure his success. That formula was fairly simple and it still works today for it is *to find out what God wants and then do it*. If people would do this, then they would be able to enjoy the blessings that God has promised to each Christian just as David's descendants could enjoy the blessings God promised to him. Those promised blessings were conditioned on "taking heed to their way, to walk before God in truth with all their heart and soul."

Where Do You Go for Help? 3:3-5

³ Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. ⁴ The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what *you wish* me to give you." 1 Kings 3:3-5 (NASB95)

I can remember many years ago when I was a youngster in Sunday School Class at the Second Baptist Church in my hometown and the teacher asked the question, "If you could ask for anything in the world and have it, what would you request?" Some of the guys wanted a new bicycle or something similar. I knew that was not the "right" answer. I said that I wanted to go to Heaven when I died. After all, was that not what I prayed for each night before I really learned to pray? "Now I lay me down to sleep, . . ." If that was not the most important issue that was facing me as a little boy, then why was I taught to pray that prayer? At the time, my answer was pooh-poohed by my classmates as being the "textbook" reply; however, as I look back on that incident, I have trouble (some 60+ years later) coming up with a better answer. I can remember about two or three years after I had (at the age of 30) made a serious adult commitment to God in an encounter that I shall never forget, I was in an opening assembly session in Sunday School and the moderator asked the question, "What is the most important thing we can do with our lives?" Several people suggested things such as helping the poor, raising their children properly, and other worthwhile things. My response was to "bring glory to God." Again, that was pooh-poohed as being a textbook answer; however, I believe that within the framework of "bringing glory to God" that whatever we do takes on importance and has an appropriate priority of its own.

In a sense, we answer the above two questions each and every day of our lives and in each and every situation that we face. Another way to ask these questions is "**What** do you want out of life and **how** do you want to do it?" The actions we take in situations that we face answer those two questions in a way that we really do get exactly what we ask for. We may not realize that for which we are asking, since we may not really understand cause and consequence.

We read the account of Solomon in the Old Testament and we see that God gave Solomon the chance to ask for anything he wanted, we secretly wish for that same opportunity. We find ourselves in Solomon's situation one situation and one decision at a time and in doing so, we work out a lifestyle and destination as we establish our value system. The problem is that many people do not even consider God or what He wants in these decisions.

The first thing we see about the character of Solomon is that he loved the Lord. The evidence given for this love was that he walked in the statues (or manner or way) of King David. How did David walk? We see in 1Kings 9:4 “and if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments:” What is the New Testament parallel passage that relates to evidence that we love the Lord? In John 14:15, Jesus said “if ye love me, keep my commandments.”

The next thing we see regarding Solomon appears to be a negative comment in that the writer used the word “except” in telling us that he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. Why would this be considered to be an exception to the very positive observation that Solomon followed David's example? The “high places” were used for pagan idol worship throughout that area of the world. In this case, there was good reason for Solomon to go there to make a sacrifice. In 1 Chronicles 21:29 we see that the tabernacle and the brazen altar that Moses had made were there.

The sacrifice that Solomon made was “a thousand burnt offerings.” The immediate question that came to my mind was “Why so many?” We find an answer to this in 2 Chronicles 1:2-3, where we see that all the leadership of the nation was with him for this sacrifice. It was probably a time of one of the three major feasts which would explain why it was such an immense undertaking. (What were the three major feasts? Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles)

That night when they were still at Gibeon, Solomon had a dream in which the Lord appeared to him. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him to ask for what he wanted from God.

What Is Your Biggest Challenge? 3:6-9

⁶ Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. ⁷ “Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ “Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. ⁹ “So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” 1 Kings 3:6-9 (NASB95)

It is interesting that Solomon did not have to think about what his response should be. Most people (when faced with the enormity of such a choice) might want to have some time to weigh the options or as we might say, “I need some time to pray about this.” Why do you think Solomon was able to respond immediately?

Solomon realized that he needed help. Many people would have been overwhelmed with the sense of honor of having become king, but Solomon was overwhelmed with the sense of responsibility such a position brings. He had already seen that the task before him was greater than his capabilities and he was quick to admit that reality. This is true humility. Solomon was about 20 years old and he knew that was relatively young to take on the responsibilities of being king. He also was inexperienced and that if he was to succeed, then he would need wisdom beyond his years and experience.

Can you think of times when you were put into a position of having a job to do that was

beyond your ability to handle? What did you do when you found yourself in “over your head?” You probably looked for some help. There was a quiz program on TV several years ago and it would allow the contestants who need help to “phone a friend.” Today we can use Google search to find information. When you are in Solomon’s situation, to whom do you go to for help? The questions for which he needed answers were beyond the pay grade of all his friends. When Solomon said that he did not know “how to go out or come in” was equivalent to saying, “I don’t have a clue of what I should do next.”

Solomon simply wanted the tools to do a good job in the assignment that he had been given to do. The thing that Solomon needed was an “understanding heart” and the ability to “discern between good and evil.” Every one of us could pray that same prayer. Since Solomon has the reputation of being the wisest person ever, perhaps these two qualities or abilities are all that is needed to make a person wise. The word that is translated “understanding” in the Hebrew is “shama.” It is the same word that we find in Deuteronomy 6:4 that is translated as “hear.” What Solomon was actually saying was that he wanted a heart that could hear or listen. That raises the question: “to what or to whom should our heart be listening if the process is going to result in being wise? Look at 2 Timothy 3:15. Here we see that the Word of God is powerful (able) to cause us to become wise. The ultimate expression or result of wisdom is embracing salvation through faith in Christ. In Mark 12:29 we find that Jesus said that the call to “listen with the intent of obedience” was the chief or most important commandment. The key in making the transition from just knowing facts to being wise is the intent of the heart to faithfully follow the facts. This part of Solomon’s request essentially establishes a basis or standard by which we are to go about our daily walk or in Solomon’s case to judge the people.

The rest of the request is translated as “to discern between good and evil.” In a sense, making a distinction between right and wrong is what we do when we judge. Solomon realized that he would be making life and death decisions as part of being king and he sensed a burden of responsibility to do it right. We make decisions many times a day. Most of them are not the life and death variety but we can develop a pattern of making small decisions that can add up to significant consequences if we are not examining every decision in light of the standard of what the Scriptures teach.

I see two things at work in what was behind Solomon’s request. First was his respect for the position of being the king of a people whom God claimed as His own. In the past several decades, we have witnessed several different people who have been president of our country. Some have shown great respect for the office of the presidency and have conducted their affairs in a manner that was in keeping with great respect. Others have failed in this by doing things that would not be appropriate for anyone. It is very likely that none of us will be president or king. However, we do have a position of being a husband, a father, grandfather, a member of our church or even a citizen of a great country. We should have respect for the position in which God has placed us. The second thing that was in play for Solomon was that he had respect for himself in that he wanted to do the very best he could so that he did not bring any disrespect upon himself. This sense of responsibility to yourself used to be a good driving force or motivation for excellence in whatever task a person undertook. As in the case of Solomon, we all need some help in accomplishing this. You can have such an attitude and approach to life without any concern beyond the immediate or beyond ourselves; however, if the basis or standard of what we do is not based on the principles of the Scriptures, there will be eventual failure.

Whom Do You Seek to Please? 3:10-14

¹⁰ It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. ¹¹ God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, ¹² behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. ¹³ "I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. ¹⁴ "If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days." 1 Kings 3:10-14 (NASB95)

Can you imagine a parent's delight if a child is offered a choice of vegetable or dessert and the child chooses vegetable because he believed that it is better for him? God was more than delighted with Solomon's choice. There was nothing selfish in Solomon's choice and self is the main obstacle in our way when it comes to pleasing God. Godly love thinks of others rather than self, it makes the sacrifice to get the job done rather than pleasing self.

The choices of many people (if they were to ask God for something) in that day and in our time would be a long life (and the health that would enable one to live a long time), material possessions and the ability to succeed in any endeavor or competition. We only have to look at the prayer list for our church to conclude that health is a major concern. It is the predominant request for prayer. Economic or material issues are a distant second and every now and then we will have a request for success in a conflict in which someone may be engaged.

Wisdom would teach us that it not "long life" but "eternal life" that we must desire. Wisdom would teach us that true wealth is not in material possessions, and that, in interpersonal relationships, we don't have winners and losers, either everyone wins or nobody wins.

God had no problem granting Solomon's request and because of the rightness of the choice, God provided all the other things that Solomon might have asked for but didn't. Notice that God told Solomon that he would have a "wise and discerning" heart. Solomon had asked for a "hearing" heart that would be attuned to the word of God and this was equated with being wise.

The Bible tells us that God does not change. The things that delighted God about Solomon's choice will delight Him today if we make the same choices. We can be assured that God will always answer "YES" to such requests.

How Do You Show Commitment? 3:15

¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants. 1 Kings 3:15 (NASB95)

In response to God's graciousness and generosity, Solomon was drawn even closer to God. The Ark of the Covenant was representative of the place where God dwelt in the midst of His people. In a demonstration of his devotion to God, Solomon presented offerings to God and reached out to those who were close to him to participate in the celebration of God's grace. It was somewhat of an announcement of the way he would govern and judge the people and his commitment to follow the Lord. (This is somewhat similar to what Matthew did when Jesus called him to "Follow Me." Matthew had a dinner for all his friends so they could meet Jesus and the other disciples. Matt 9:9-10)

Do those who are closest to us know where we stand and what is the basis of how we conduct our affairs? Does anyone ever wonder if you can be trusted or if you are telling the truth or it is abundantly clear where you stand and what standard you use to guide your life?