

**1 Kings 3:5-12****Praying For Wisdom**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the prayer of the church on Sundays, we often pray for our leaders. We pray for leaders of the LCA, the elected leaders of our state and country, or leaders around the world. This is a good and fitting thing to do as the people of God. St Paul, when he wrote to young Pastor Timothy, said:

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

(1 Timothy 2:1-2)

Pray for those in authority that we may live peaceful lives. Pray, because if we Christians aren't praying for them, then no one is. That is something unique we can give to this world. And as we pray, often the thing we ask for is wisdom, that they may lead justly.

This topic of wisdom comes up all throughout the scriptures and it's about more than just knowing the right stuff. In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is always contrasted with folly. It's the wise who live their lives according to God's ways, and it's the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God". Here in First Kings, when Solomon prays for wisdom for himself as the king, it's more about making rulings and judgments that are in accord with God's will. Perhaps Solomon's prayer for his own leadership can inform our prayers for our leaders and authorities. And a more literal translation of what he asks for is 'a listening heart to judge your people'.

We see four important things here in what Solomon prays. The first is an acknowledgement that a leader needs to listen. And it's a listening heart, which tells us that it's about something much deeper than simple straightforward facts. According to the ancient world, the heart is treated not as the place of feelings like we do, but as the centre of understanding and will. The outcome then of this listening heart is to be able to make a decision or judgment based on sound understanding. And finally, Solomon acknowledges that the people he is listening to and judging over are God's people. They are not his. He is serving God as he rules as king over God's people.

Asking for a listening heart is a good starting point because firstly he should want to listen to God. And in the Old Testament, to listen, to understand, and to obey all come from the same base word. You haven't really listened if you haven't understood. You haven't really listened if you haven't obeyed. And so here, as Solomon obeys the Lord by keeping his commandments, his heart is then prepared to lead the kingdom by listening to the people and truly understanding their needs. Listening to God will enable him to truly listen to the people of God.

Solomon's desire for this obedient, listening heart is based on his wish to administer justice in Israel. And justice can only emerge when the king is able to distinguish between right and wrong, which of course takes us back to listening to God, and his commandments. Only knowledge of what God considers fair and unfair can guide the king to act justly with any degree of consistency. But justice can also be a quite complicated goal. The next passage in First Kings chapter three is the story of the two women arguing over who was the real mother of a young boy, and Solomon provides a wise judgment. It is somewhat surprising that the king would be called to judge over such a matter. There were the equivalent of local magistrates in the towns and cities to handle such disputes. But it does give us an example of the type of justice the Solomon delivered to his people.

This chapter suggests that Solomon wanted to serve God by being truly receptive to the needs of the community. This portrayal of Solomon as the 'ideal king' here in this text offers a close parallel to the ideal king held up in Psalm 72—a king who will rule in justice and righteousness, paying special attention to the poor and needy. But the full story of Solomon is not one of a perfect king. He allows the people of God to turn to idols. He himself is led astray and no longer listens to God, no longer obeys God. It is significant that it's God who first approached Solomon, regardless of his failures and frailties as a human being. God comes in grace to offer Solomon whatever he thinks he needs to be king. And it's God's grace that first breaks into the midst of our everyday realities of life too.

Solomon's response to God is quite interesting. Before he actually asks for anything, he acknowledges the continuation of his father David's covenant with God. In light of the greatness of the Lord's relationship with David, Solomon humbles himself before the Lord. He admits that God is the cause of his rise to power. He also says he is but a small child who does not know how to carry out his duties, though he was most certainly a grown man at this point. And the fact that he now rules Israel comes from David's faithfulness and a special decision not to pass the crown to the firstborn. God had other plans. And God would give the people the king that he wanted to give.

The faithfulness of his father David's reign before him, and the wisdom of Solomon's reign are all just shadows of Jesus who is the true King sent by God. Neither David nor Solomon nor any king after them were perfect. Some were certainly far worse than others in rejecting God's ways and chasing after idols, but all strayed in some way. But not Jesus. He is our true eternal king, who rules with perfect justice and mercy and compassion and wisdom.

But what about our leaders? What should we expect of those in authority over us, over our country? And, more importantly, how should we pray for them? Of course, asking for wisdom is a great starting point. And we know that what we mean by wisdom is firstly that they would know God and God's ways, and not be the fool who rejects God. You could just leave it at that. Knowing God and God's ways is such a good foundation for life and everything that we don't need to get more specific than that. But if you want to, we can add the wisdom to navigate a society with demands in every direction. There are so many situations that are not simple, not straightforward, and require careful consideration if one wishes to uphold God's will and God's ways. So, we can pray for wisdom in that sense, having the ability to make those tough decisions that do provide justice even when it seems out of reach. And I think Solomon's example of a humble heart is a good one to take. When we pray for our leaders, we can ask that God would not let them think their authority means they can use and abuse the people under them. Again, we think of how Jesus led, humbly washing the feet of his disciples, serving them, not demanding that they serve him.

So, let us serve our community by coming to our heavenly Father in prayer. Let us pray for kings and all those in authority as St Paul instructs us. Let us ask that they too may have a listening heart like King Solomon. A heart that listens to God and listens to the people. And let us pray that we may therefore live in a society where peace and justice reigns, and where all people may be wise and know that the Lord is God, and that he rules as our good and perfect king for all eternity. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.