

The Right Foundation

1 Kings 3:1-28

You'll remember last time that we looked at the way that David charges his son Solomon along the lines of "don't do what I did, but do things as I tell you". The principle one was to follow God and to obey His commands. The others were about clearing up David's mess and showing honour to those who deserved it.

Solomon got two out of three right. The latter two were no problem. Benaiah quickly dispatched Joab and Abiathar and Shimei was dealt with. The sons of Barzillai were honoured and the land was at peace.

That's two covered but what about the most important - following the Lord's commands? *3:1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem. 2 The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. 3 Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.*

Oh dear. He makes an alliance with Egypt, marries a foreigner and sacrifices at high places. However, despite this we find this remarkable offer made by God to Solomon to have whatever he wished. This is quite a heartening passage, because we have the Lord still wanting to bless a man who was flawed from the outset.

This is a picture of grace. Solomon is flawed, yet God pours out blessings on him anyway? Why? It's the answer Solomon gave to the offer made to him: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." We know what it was: "give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

It was the best answer as he was already heading off in the wrong direction! Solomon asked wisdom to go in the right direction! I find this an encouragement. Solomon's response to grace was a willing heart. And God blessed him richly.

It's an encouragement to us because we know how flawed we are - we regularly have to come in confession to God for our sins. We know how damaging sin is in our lives - yet we still do it. But it's because Solomon was flawed and we are flawed is why God shows His grace. It's a key principle. This morning we saw how that as Christians we let our diversity divide us rather than see it as something that can build us.

Down the centuries Christians have divided themselves from others and then judge the others and say "how can God possibly bless them?" Yet God is blessing them! Why? They say "surely we are doing things far more scripturally than them. How could He possibly be pouring out blessings on them?" And they look and see their faults and just can't understand how people are still coming to Christ.

Oh dear. We're all sinful and flawed. God blesses us despite of who we are, not because of who we are. What He requires is an open heart. One that's ready to listen, ready to hear, ready to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

What was so simple about Solomon's answer was that he accepted he was less than perfect. He could see the problems of ruling his people and was already aware of his weaknesses: "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

He needed help and help is what he got. It's a reminder to us as we contemplated this morning our own role in this local expression of the body of Christ that God doesn't want perfection, or a certain standard before He can work through us. All he needs is a ready heart, recognising our weakness and a willingness to allow Him to use us.

This isn't a simple story about God's grace, but an exciting story about the extravagance of God's grace. Because this man came to God asking for the wisdom to rule, God blessed him for all those things one might expect a king might ask for. His kingdom was established, his wisdom and reputation were unrivalled, his wealth increased. God blessed him.

My experience of God is just that. When I've let go of my ambitions and said to the Lord "I'll follow You" - then He always blesses in ways I'd never imagined.

Personal testimony.

So Solomon wakes up from the dream and realises that he's been speaking with God. He gave thanks to God and shared what had been said with his court.

So how was that wisdom going to be expressed? We know that he was responsible for many wise words - there is scripture attributed to him. But the first test of his wisdom would come with this strange dispute between two prostitutes. We read what the outcome was. We could see this story as a simple and clever ruse to expose the child's real mother.

But it was more than that.

1. Solomon was prepared to treat two of his subjects of low repute even though most rulers would have them thrown out and left to sort themselves out. Why? Because he reflected the compassion and grace that he had experienced.
2. He was prepared to hear a case involving ordinary people. He could have pushed it down to the local elders as it was something they could have sorted out. But he had the means to act swiftly and justly and he took the opportunity to do so.
3. He used the power he had as an absolute ruler to get to the truth. He had the authority to have anyone killed on the spot if he was so minded. So to get to the truth here was quite a high risk strategy by threatening to cut a baby in half! Did he intend to actually do it? Or was it an inspired piece of wisdom to call their bluff in order to pull out the maternal instinct in the real mother to plead for the life of the child even if it meant she lost him? The whole thrust of this story was it was the latter.

To people witnessing it, it revealed him as a just and compassionate ruler who was prepared to use his authority for people's good. It showed that the violence at the beginning of his reign was clearing up David's mess and his intention was to be a different kind of ruler.

Our challenge this year as a church starts with our intent. What do we want to see happen here as we contemplate the work of this church in the next few years? Step 1 is to realise that we should be people ready and willing to follow our Lord, who has shown us grace in Christ and continues to show us grace.

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