



Use Responsibly 1 Kings 4:24-38

You've all come across the piece of advice in books, adverts and cartons – drink responsibly, drive responsibly, gamble responsibly, eat, responsibly, use responsibly. It's the advice we are always given when something we use is legal but incorrect use may adversely affect us or others.

You'll remember from last week that when Solomon was asked what he wanted, he accepted his weakness as a king and asked God for wisdom. He recognised his weakness, the needs of his people and his dependence on God – a wise choice in itself. Because of his willingness not to put himself first but ask God for wisdom, he got all the things that ordinary people might ask for when posed with the question that Solomon faced in his dream. God blessed him because he didn't put his own needs first. He received God's grace in huge measure.

I've seen in one or two sermons or commentaries that therefore this shows us how we must pray for wisdom. Actually, Solomon was blessed, not for the asking of wisdom, but for the attitude that got him to that point. It was a request that would allow him to rule his people and he knew God could only enable him to do this. Blessings come out of a willing heart towards the Lord, not some formula for asking for wisdom or anything else.

So we read this evening how God was faithful to His word and Solomon got his wisdom, a peaceful kingdom, massive wealth and all the rest of it. The trouble is that with all that came a responsibility that not just for his own end but for the nation – after all the gift of wisdom he revived should have made that obvious.

There is a sense in which he did exactly that – he used the wisdom and this passage suggests that it benefited the nation and allowed Solomon to rule in a manner quite different to his predecessors.

A Peace Dividend First of all, the peace that came as a result of his consolidation of his kingdom resulted in a peace dividend. You'll remember that term from Northern Ireland. When peace comes, the country needs no longer invest in security, so money gets into the economy as taxes decrease. Since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland has prospered considerably. Let's look at the passage.

24 Solomon ruled over all the land west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphshah on the Euphrates as far west as the city of Gaza. All the kings west of the Euphrates were subject to him, and he was at peace with all the neighbouring countries. 25 As long as he lived, the people throughout Judah and Israel lived in safety, each family with its own grapevines and fig trees.

People were able to live in peace and they were able to live on their own land – a mark that they were not oppressed by others or in slavery to another people or nation. Having their own lands meant that no-one was enslaving or controlling them – they were free men and women.

But there was more than that, it allowed Solomon to develop a side of himself that kings didn't usually do - God gave Solomon unusual wisdom and insight, and knowledge too great to be measured. *30 Solomon was wiser than the wise men of the East or the wise men of Egypt. 31 He was the wisest of all men: wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame spread throughout all the neighbouring countries. 32 He composed three thousand proverbs and more than a thousand songs. 33 He spoke of trees and plants, from the Lebanon cedars to the hyssop that grows on walls; he talked about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish.*

He was a learned man. He wasn't just skilled in politics but a poet, writer, musician, scientist. I rather like the sentence: He was the wisest of all men: wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol. The question springs to mind "who"? A few commentators try to suggest who they were

but in truth we don't really know. They were famous wise men of their day – but the truly great one is the only one we still know something about – Solomon. The rest are forgotten about. They are just names in 1 Kings. But Solomon is the one with literature remaining and has a history written about him and we still have it in the Word of God.

So he was given wisdom and at least at the start, he used it responsibly. Over the past few weeks I spoken much of the way in which as God's people we have been made part of the body of Christ. Our peace dividend is that we are at peace with God and He wishes to pour out His gifts on us. We can be and should be skilled in what the Spirit has given us. These allow us to do different things to the world around us: to be different people. And that difference should be what spiritually enriches the lives of others – in bringing Jesus to them. We have been given the Spirit and the gifts He brings – the instruction to the grace given us is now “use responsibly”.

Benefit to Others

In the last verse we read - *Kings all over the world heard of his wisdom and sent people to listen to him.* Solomon could have used his wealth as an oppressor, but instead, he didn't expand his kingdom beyond dominating the surrounding Semitic nations like Aram (Syria), Moab, Ammon, Edom, Tyre, Sidon and Philistia. He didn't try to expand beyond the Euphrates into the civilisations such as Assyria and he made a treaty with Egypt to stay at peace. Instead he used his knowledge and wisdom for the benefit of others. People were attracted to him and in return he was showered with friendship gifts. He was given these great skills and at least at the beginning, he used them responsibly for his people and for himself. His greatest single achievement was almost certainly the construction of the Temple. He built up the infrastructure of the city and of the country.

God has given us much in Christ. We thought of that this morning. The responsible thing to do with our faith is surely to benefit others. The wealth imparted to us by God in Christ should be something we seek to share with others. It isn't cash but wisdom, so that they might become wise to salvation.

To link back with this morning. It's so obvious that God has plans for our lives – and that is that we must be Good News to others we come across. We live in a society today where the desire is to always get something out of the system or other people. But the wisdom that comes from this passage and from the Word of God is that we have something that is God News and we give it freely to others because God wants to bless them with it. As we heard in the Matt Redman song this morning, our desire is to see our friends, our family, people we don't know all uttering the praise of God:

*You should be the praise of every tongue, Jesus
You should be the joy of every heart
But until the fullness of Your kingdom comes
Until the final revelation dawns
Send us out*

That's the unique wisdom that we have in Christ and like Solomon, we need to use what we have responsibly and bless others with it. Use responsibly!

Before we praise Solomon too generously, this passage also indicates Solomon's flaw. We saw it in the beginning – a tendency to do as he please even though it was forbidden of God. Here it is: *26 Solomon had forty thousand stalls for his chariot horses and twelve thousand cavalry horses. 27 His twelve governors, each one in the month assigned to him, supplied the food King Solomon needed for himself and for all who ate in the palace; they always supplied everything needed. 28 Each governor also supplied his share of barley and straw, where it was needed, for the chariot horses and the work animals.*

Now turn please to Deuteronomy chapter 17: *14 "After you have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is going to give you and have settled there, then you will decide you need a king like all the nations around you. 15 Be sure that the man you choose to be king is the one whom the LORD has chosen. He must be one of your own people; do not make a foreigner your king. 16 The king is not to have a large number of horses for his army, and he is not to send people to Egypt to buy horses, because the LORD has said that his people are never to return there. 17 The king is not to have many wives, because this would make him turn away from the LORD; and he is not to make himself rich with silver and gold. 18 When he becomes king, he is to have a copy of the book of God's laws and teachings made from the original copy kept by the levitical priests. 19 He is to keep this book near him and read from it all his life, so that he will learn to honour the LORD and to obey faithfully everything that is commanded in it. 20 This will keep him from thinking that he is better than other Israelites and from disobeying the LORD's commands in any*

way. Then he will reign for many years, and his descendants will rule Israel for many generations.

It all sounded good, but it was the thin end of the wedge. It started with horses, went to wives and in the end he ignored the book of the law. This passage could have been written just for Solomon. Solomon was ostentatious and he had no problem showing everyone that. He's got all this from God, but it wasn't long before he was up to his old ways of doing as he saw fit and it was the eventual undoing of his nation as we shall see in a following week.

We can't cover up the old man underneath. He's still bubbling under there. Solomon was still flawed. Underneath the wisdom and the blessings, Solomon still possessed the ability to throw it all away. Began to become ostentatious. We have a wonderful faith, a wise faith, a rich faith, a faith full and free. But it only gets to be all those things when we impart that which has been so freely to us. Use responsibly? That's our challenge!

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