

Transformed By Wisdom

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Preacher: Mark Norman

[0 : 0 0] But what I'm going to do today is something very, very different. Today we're going to look at the wisdom that should flow from this new life. Now you might ask yourself, well, what is wisdom?

Well, before we come to our story, our passage, wisdom is simply the practical ability to apply the teachings of Christ, the teachings of the Bible, to the challenges and the struggles of everyday life, whether in the workplace, whether in the home, family, the church and so on.

How do we apply this new life in our world? That's essentially our theme today. But we're going to go a bit further than that because I want to talk about two different types of wisdom.

I want to compare worldly wisdom to godly wisdom. And I want to talk about how Solomon grappled with both.

In his life. And in order to do that, we're actually going to take a quick overview of the first three chapters of 1 Kings. The first three chapters of 1 Kings.

[1 : 0 8] And it's quite a story. So we have murder. We have mayhem. We have intrigue. And what we're going to do to start is I'm just going to summarize the first three chapters very, very, very quickly.

And then we'll go into a little bit more detail. Now, I understand that you haven't had an opportunity to read all of those three chapters in advance before the service. So we're going to take a quick snapshot of the first three chapters.

And then I'm going to concentrate a little bit more on chapter 2 and that wonderful chapter, that section where Solomon asks for wisdom in chapter 3.

The more I read the Bible, the more I come to realize that probably the books in the Bible were written to be read in one sitting.

And because we're too busy to do that, sometimes we miss the little gems and all the treasures that God has in store for us. So we're not going to read all of 1 Kings, thankfully, today, but we're going to take quite a big chunk.

[2 : 1 7] So let's have a look very briefly at the first chapter. It's a turning point in Israel's history. The great king, the power of stability in the kingdom, the kingship is under threat.

David is no longer the man he used to be. He's depicted in the story as a somewhat passive, powerless king.

He's old. And he's made a great mistake that a lot of leaders do today. He has failed to put into place succession plans for the kingdom.

It's always a dangerous thing. Passive leadership is always a dangerous thing. And what has happened in the meantime is two factions, two political power factions have risen up in his court.

One surrounding the oldest son, Adonijah, who should, in theory, be king. And Adonijah has gathered around him some very powerful influential military figures, leadership figures, politicians.

- [3 : 31] And on the other side is the underdog, Solomon, the younger son, who's also got a group of supporters. Now, we know that God's hand is on Solomon.
- But that's only because of the benefit of hindsight. This is a very, very, very scary, it's a very precarious situation. And each group, we read, faces off against each other and each attempts to wrestle power from the other.
- What is going to happen? What is going to happen to the church? What is going to happen to the people of God? It's an uncertain time.
- Until finally, David decides to end his passiveness and weigh in, thank God, in God's providence on the issue.
- And David sides with Solomon. And we can breathe a sigh of collective relief. By the end of the first chapter, we read in verse 46 that the kingdom had been established in Solomon's hands.
- [4 : 41] Of course, we know God is working behind the scenes all the time. But from a human perspective, it's quite scary. Once we've read chapter 1, we then move into chapter 2.
- Now, we're going to look at chapter 2 in some detail. But before I do that, just a quick idea of what's going on in chapter 2. It's really about advice. So King David is old, but thankfully he's weighed Solomon.
- He's come behind Solomon. He supports Solomon. And now he proceeds as a father to give Solomon advice on how to be king. If you look at chapter 2 from 2 to 9, for example.
- And on the surface of things, now we know that Hebrew narrative is subtle. We know that. Because God wants us to think about what it is we're reading.
- Sometimes stories in the Old Testament appear very straightforward. But the more you ponder these stories, the more you realize God wants us to think there's something going on here that is more than meets the eye.
- [5 : 57] So on the surface of things, David, like any good father, gives his son advice on how to be king. But I'm going to suggest that in reality, his advice is not as sound as it seems.
- There are a few disturbing, ambiguous elements about David's advice. Because having received his father's advice, once he's become king, in the first verses of chapter 2, he then murders two people and saves the life of another.
- So there are two incidents then in chapter 3, which are also going to need our attention. So chapter 1, Solomon becomes king.
- In chapter 2, dad gives him some really disturbing advice that leads to murder. And then chapter 3, we have the famous story of how Solomon asked God for wisdom.
- And how he then exercises this new found wisdom in intervening in this dispute between the two prostitutes. We know chapter 3 quite well.
- [7 : 17] We know the stories fairly well. But what we're going to see today is that when you read the famous story, Solomon asking for wisdom in chapter 3 alone, but you don't put it into the context of all the funny shenanigans that have been going on before, you lose out on a lot of teaching that the Lord has for us today.
- So again, chapter 1, a reminder, what do we have in chapter 1? We've got this portrait of David. We've got these two parties that are vying for political power.
- We realize that even the church is hardly a perfect place. If you're involved in church ministry, you come to church, you're part of a church family, you soon realize that the church is full of sinners.
- God's kingdom is hardly a perfect place. And again, we observe that when it comes to church leadership, when there's no real strong leadership speaking into the crisis, chaos results.

The church council is not composed of strong men and women. The church doesn't have a good, solid pastor like Nick. You're going to have problems when challenges strike the church.

[8 : 27] But I want us now to think about David because David again appears as a somewhat powerless elderly king and a shadow of what he once was.

Now again, have a look briefly with me at chapter 2 because I want us to take a little bit of time now and consider this advice that David gives to Solomon.

Now if you have a look at chapter 2 from verse 3 to verse 4, you'll observe that the first part of David's advice to his son, the new king, it's pretty positive.

So I read as follows. David says, Keep the charge of the Lord your God walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules and his testimonies as it is written in the law of Moses that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.

Well, that's not bad. I mean, these verses are pretty good. It's great advice for a young ruler. In fact, it's the kind of advice that any good Christian parent would give to their child.

[9 : 31] But the interesting thing is what David says after urging Solomon to keep the law. And you will observe that the writer simply rather coldly in a matter-of-fact way just lays out what happened.

That fascinates me. The writer doesn't decide to bring a comment of his own. The writer doesn't insert an editorial comment.

The writer just puts it out there. Because we've got to ponder what this is all about, you see. So keep the law. Okay, that's fine.

And then David proceeds to suggest that Solomon treat Basilei and his sons kindly as king, which is fine.

But then from verse 5 to verse 9, Solomon must take up the sword and kill two people. Bang. Basilei the Gileadite, 2 verse 7, he just gets one verse.

[10 : 42] David doesn't say much about Basilei and his sons. the real emphasis on in David's advice is Joab first and then Shimei who comes last.

So keep the law, but my son remembered Joab, the son of Zuriyah. So after ordering Solomon to keep the law, which of course, by the way, includes the commandment thou shalt not murder, you'll observe, by the way, that when you read these stories in the Old Testament, the writer assumes on the part of the reader intelligence.

The writer assumes on the part of the reader that the reader knows the Old Testament fairly well. The reader knows Exodus chapter 20 verse 23, thou shalt not murder, you see.

Keep the law, kill your enemies. I mean, that's really what David is saying to his son. Keep the law, kill your enemies. Eliminate Joab.

Now, Job had a long checkered career as David's hit man, David's hatchet man. As in the Mafia movies, if David wanted to put a whack out on somebody, if somebody had to get whacked, okay, Job would do the whacking.

[12 : 02] Job was an unscrupulous thug, but a sophisticated thug, and the kind of guy that David I don't think really liked, but felt that, well, we'll keep him around.

Job was useful to have around because Job would do David's dirty work. The problem with a guy like Job, of course, is when he goes off on his own and doesn't want to listen to David, which he did quite frequently.

In fact, Job was a murderer. He murdered two very prominent Israelite leaders, Amasa and Abna, formidable men, leaders in their own right. So Job, fair enough, is not the most guiltless godly guy, but if Job is this guilty, I mean, Job has been up to his nonsense for years, for over 20 years.

Now, if Job is as guilty as David suggested this particular occasion, why has David not chosen to take action against him earlier? But then we think a little bit further and we realise, ah, in chapter one, you see, Job had supported Adonijah's bid, Solomon's brother's bid for the throne, not Solomon himself.

So why must Job die? Well, of course, it's in the name of politics. It's in the name of political expediency. It's, as I said in the eight o'clock service, it's Vladimir Putin wisdom.

[13 : 32] Vladimir Putin wisdom, get rid of your enemies. So Job's decision to align himself with Adonijah is a threat for Solomon's kingship.

And so David is essentially saying to Solomon, listen, you know, you've got to get rid of the guy. You want to be king, keep the law, but, you know, you've got to kill a couple of people as well.

Now you've got the other guy, Shimee, in 1 Kings 2 verse 8. we have David's suggestion that Solomon now eliminate another guy, a guy called Shimee.

And the advice regarding Shimee is just as ambiguous and as disturbing as the command to kill Job. Now again, you might want to argue and say no, but, you know, superficially speaking, it might be suggested that David was justified in ordering Shimee's death because Shimee was a little bit of a scoundrel too.

And again, if you know the story, if you know the books of the Bible before Kings 1 and 2 Samuel, you'll remember that there was a story about Shimee because what happened was that Shimee cursed the king.

[14 : 47] We see that in 2 Samuel 16 to 19 as outlined in the second book of Samuel. So David deliberately chose not to take action against Shimee at that particular time, swearing that he would be spared.

In 2 Samuel 19 verse 23. So years and years ago, there was this incident where Shimee cursed the king, but David said, I won't take action.

I'll forgive you, you see. Years ago, now that David's son Solomon has come to power, David says, don't forget that unsurbing scrupulous scoundrel, you've got to bump him off as well.

Now again, I think that David's motives for eliminating Shimee have got nothing to do with justice. Again, it's politics.

It's political expediency. He wants his son to be established on the throne. And hey, everybody knows, all leaders know, you've got to get rid of your enemies, my son.

[15 : 55] So Shimee is a threat, just like Joe. Get rid of him. And again, in his description of all these cold-hearted events, the writer doesn't present his own opinion on the state of affairs.

Just lays it out there, coldly, and we've got to draw deductions. Basilei, he's okay, but the other guys are going to go.

Benaniah is the new hatchet man, he's the new executioner. So Solomon says to Benaniah, pull out the sword and kill these two guys.

Strikes Joab down with the sword, 2 verse 28. Now, remember the word sword because the word sword is going to come back again in chapter 3 in a very, very interesting way, in a different way, you see.

But when we ponder David's wisdom, presented to Solomon in the advice that Solomon has given in chapter 2, there are one or two other little things that we need to think about because in considering David's advice to Solomon, twice he calls Solomon a wise man.

[17 : 19] 1 Kings 2 verse 6. Act therefore, says David to Solomon, according to your wisdom, but do not let his grey head go down to shale in peace.

In other words, this is the kind of wisdom that wipes out your enemies. It's very, very obvious that Solomon was a genius even as a young man. I mean, he was probably 25 or 30 years old at this time when he became king, but I think it's pretty clear that Solomon was brilliant.

I mean, Solomon was without a doubt a child prodigy, that he was naturally gifted. He was naturally a politician. He was a guy who was just endowed by God with great leadership qualities.

Even his father David knew that. Already in chapter 2, David twice says to Solomon, you're wise, you got wisdom. Now, do what your wisdom tells you.

Whack that guy. Take that guy out. Have a look at 1 Kings 2 verse 9. Again, in the context of political murder, David says, now, therefore, do not hold him guiltless for you are a, can you believe it, wise man.

[18 : 40] You will know, you see, this is the kind of wisdom here, you will know, this kind of wisdom says, you know what you ought to do to him, you shall bring his grey head down with blood to shale, to the grave.

But what strikes me is that already in chapter 2, Solomon is wise. Now, when we get to chapter 3 in a minute, what's Solomon going to do?

He's going to ask God for wisdom. So isn't it interesting that already in chapter 2, in the context of political murder, well, Solomon is regarded as being wise.

The kind of wisdom that is necessary to eliminate the enemies, just as Solomon did. Now we come to the chapter we know so well. Now we come to the story we know so well, chapter 3, where Solomon asked God for wisdom and a discerning mind.

Now, we need to look at this story in a fresh way because of what we've just read. So many sermons that just look at chapter 3 on its own but doesn't put it into all the shenanigans that have been going on before.

[19 : 49] So let's have a look again at 1 Kings 3 from verse 7 to verse 9. Here comes that famous passage. Solomon is praying to the Lord. And now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child.

Isn't that interesting? After everything that he's done, he's just killed a couple of guys. Doesn't strike me as a little child. I do not know.

What? I do not know how to go out or come in. I mean, come on, Solomon. He's been doing a lot of going out and going in. Well, Ben and I have been doing the going out and the going in with a sword.

And Solomon has been anything but passive. He's been very, very decisive in chapter 2, bumping off his enemies. How about 3 verse 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. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people that I may discern.

[20 : 59] You see the connection to Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve. that I may discern between good and evil for who is able to govern this your great people.

Now, in the light of what we've just seen unfold in chapters 1 and 2, well, the well-known events of 1 Kings 3 just take on deeper significance.

And I think it's going to be worth our while in the minutes we have left just to look at that prayer for wisdom in chapter 3 in a little bit more detail. As we think about wisdom in the world today, as we think about the kind of model of wisdom that you exercise in the home as a father, as a mother, or as you run your business, or as you go out there into the world, as you deal with your colleagues.

What kind, what model of wisdom do you engage in? Because there are only two kinds of wisdom, by the way. There's the wisdom of the cross, there's the wisdom of Jesus, and there's the wisdom of the world, you see.

So, the same Hebrew word for wisdom that has been used by David to describe Solomon in chapter 2 reappears in 1 Kings 3:28 at the end of the chapter.

[22:13] Now, remember in those days, they never had, as I always like to tell you, they never had highlight pens. I use highlight pens when I study. They never underlined. I underline when I study. So, how do they catch your attention?

How does the Hebrew Bible catch your attention? Repeating key words. wisdom comes back in chapter 3. And this time, Solomon is asking God for wisdom.

But, if David had already recognized that Solomon possessed great wisdom in eliminating his enemies in chapter 2 with the sword, why now does Solomon have to ask God for wisdom and discernment here in chapter 3?

There's a lot of wisdom and discernment going on already in chapter 2. Furthermore, after showing much ability as we've seen in the elimination of his enemies, why does Solomon now admit that he lacks the capacity to rule Israel at all?

It doesn't make any sense. He's been doing a lot of ruling. What is going on? It strikes us as being somewhat contradictory to what we've just read in chapter 2.

[23:26] The other thing that is very, very interesting is God's reply to Solomon's request in 1 Kings 3:10 to verse 15. Because he's happy with Solomon's prayer.

You'll observe. And he's going to grant Solomon wisdom. He's not going to give him for what he asked, but he's going to give Solomon that for which he did not ask.

And he's very happy. And what does he say to Solomon? He says, because you did not pray for the death of your enemies, I will give you wealth and a long life.

See the connection? Wealth and long life, but importantly God in answering Solomon's prayer for wisdom does not grant Solomon the death of his enemies.

Now that is very significant, especially in the light of all the shenanigans and the political murders that were going on in chapter 2. So what's the point? Well, I've laid it out for you, but I'm going to lay it out again.

[24:30] What is the point? There are two different kinds of wisdom. That's what the writer, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is sharing with us here in 1 Kings 1 to 3.

There are two different kinds of wisdom. There is the wisdom of the world. It's the wisdom of manipulation. It's the wisdom that manipulates people. You might not murder your enemies.

I hope you don't, but you know what it's like to manipulate other people. You manipulate people in your family. You might manipulate your parents, or we might be jealous of somebody in the workplace and manipulate them so that we get the promotion before they do.

The wisdom of the world is the world that either strongly, obviously, brutally like Putin, or more subtly in the workplace, whatever it is, it's all the same.

The wisdom of the world is the kind of wisdom that actually destroys people. It's the kind of wisdom that pulls people down. It's the kind of wisdom that is essentially based on the will to power, the will for personal power, the kind of wisdom that really just seeks to undermine others and to put the self first.

[25:35] That is the kind of wisdom that David brings to Solomon, you see. That's worldly wisdom. But now, Solomon has got this God-given wisdom, this new God-given wisdom, in chapter 3.

And again, if Solomon has already been portrayed to us as a child prodigy, I mean, if Solomon has already been portrayed to us in chapter 2 as this wise guy, this brilliant young ruler, why ask for wisdom in chapter 3?

Well, of course, Solomon has been given the discernment to realize that the kind of wisdom that he had been adopting and applying in his new kingdom in chapter 2 was destructive.

He instinctively realized that it was the wrong way to go. That he realizes now as he comes to God in prayer in chapter 3 that he can't do it on his own, as clever as he is, and that he needs another kind of wisdom, not the kind of wisdom that pulls people down, that destroys the world, but the kind of wisdom that makes society a better place.

It's the kind of wisdom that loves order and justice and righteousness. It is the wisdom of the peacemaker. It is the wisdom of Christ.

[26 : 53] It is the wisdom of love. It is the wisdom of gentleness. It's not the wisdom that pulls people down. That is why Solomon comes to the Lord in prayer in chapter 3.

This is a new kind of divinely given wisdom. It's not the wisdom of the Vladimir Putins of the world. It's not the wisdom of political expediency and the destruction of one's enemies.

It is the divinely granted wisdom of the godly Christian leader. And so the kind of wisdom that Solomon displayed in chapter 2, well, it's typical of worldly leaders.

You know, all you've got to do is you've just got to look at the newspaper. You've just got to look at what's going on in the political front, even in our own country and all over the world. But chapter 3 teaches us that true wisdom, the wisdom of Christ, the wisdom of the gospel, allows us to see deeply into the human condition and discern what is just, what is wise, what I can do to build somebody up, to love them.

It's a supernatural gift. It's a supernatural gift. You know, I think that one of the reasons why Solomon would fail later on in his life, because we know Solomon failed, despite this magnificent prayer of chapter 3, and I believe that one of the reasons why Solomon failed later on was because of the rot that was planted in his heart by his own father, David.

[28 : 24] Because of ambiguous parenting, David offered Solomon good things, but also very bad things.

And I believe that tragically, partly because of a bad childhood and an absent father and bad fatherly advice, Solomon later would fail.

And we see how this tragedy works itself out later on in Solomon's life. And so we need to remember practically as Christian leaders in the home, in the workplace, in the church, we will be judged against God's standard of wisdom, not the standards of the world.

And as I said in the earlier service, sometimes being gifted is not always a good thing. Now, don't get me wrong, gifts are very, very important in the Christian life, but sometimes if we are not godly, we fall back on our gifts.

we depend on our worldly gifts and our natural abilities and we don't turn to the Lord for help and for prayer. See that, I've seen that in the ministry, I've seen that, we see that with the Corinthians, they were very gifted people but they were arrogant.

[29 : 50] That's what happens sometimes, very, very gifted leaders don't trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his wisdom. We land up like Solomon at the end of the day, letting go of God's wisdom and falling back on the model of the world.

And the challenge to you from the Bible today is don't you do that wherever God takes you. But finally, what does this wisdom actually look like in practice, this godly wisdom?

Well, the Bible shows us this in 1 Kings 3 from verse 16 to 28 in this famous passage, this dispute between the two prostitutes. Remember that there were these two women and they were disputing over a child?

Now what comes back in that story of the two prostitutes? Answer, the sword. Isn't that interesting? Ben and I were using the sword in chapter 2 to do what?

To kill people. Now Solomon calls for the sword. And the sword is now used for a very, very different purpose. It's used to heal.

[30 : 55] It's used to bring about peace and reconciliation and love. life. It's a whole new life. It's a whole new model of leadership. It is a whole new way of looking at the world that we discover in chapter 3 compared to chapter 2.

It is the sword of love. It is the sword of justice. It's there to help people to get to the truth and not to eliminate the opposition. And look at 1 Kings 3 verse 28.

As the chapter is wrapped up, we read this, And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in order of the king because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

So as we conclude, we realize that we're all gifted naturally. Those are wonderful things. But we need the gift of supernatural wisdom, and as the letter of James tells us in the first chapter, we must ask God for wisdom because we are hardly perfect.

It seems to me that at some point in Solomon's life, he stopped praying for divine wisdom. As I read the rest of the story of Solomon's tragedy, his fall into sin and idolatry, there came a time where he wandered away from the Lord, and I suspect it came when he stopped asking God for wisdom in prayer.

[32 : 18] He stopped praying, and he wandered from the narrow road that leads to life. And of course, as we look at the story from the perspective of the New Testament, we are reminded that there's going to be a perfect Solomon is going to come.

We know that the real Solomon of the Bible is Jesus. And we know that Solomon's great successor who succeeded where Solomon failed is Jesus Christ.

Messiah who would come, and instead of possessing an ambiguous combination of good and bad qualities, like David and tragically like Solomon, would only demonstrate perfect justice, perfect love, perfect goodness that led him to the cross.

If there was any ambiguity in Jesus Christ, we would not be here today. It was only his perfect love, his perfect grace, justice, love for wholeness and peace and reconciliation, that took him to the cross.

That's God's wisdom. It is embodied for us in the person of our great example, not Solomon, but Jesus Christ. That is the Jesus we worship.

[33 : 38] It's not a political, realpolitik wisdom. wisdom. It's a message about turning the cheek, that despite the scorn of the world, it is a wisdom that insists every day on turning the cheek, a wisdom that is not rude.

It is a wisdom that is always gracious, gentle and kind. It is a wisdom that always endures. It is a wisdom that hopes until the end. And it is the kind of wisdom that will contribute to the arrival of a new world in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Let's bow our heads as we ponder the model of wisdom that we follow in our lives, to our families, our children, and the world.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved it is the power of God, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning, I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

[35 : 03] For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

Amen.