

1 Kings 2:10-12

Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. ¹¹ He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

3:3-14

Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

⁴ The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

⁶ Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

⁷ “Now, 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. ⁹ So 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?”

¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.”

What if you could have anything?

So what would you want if you could have literally anything? it's the subject of any number of fairy tales and folk stories, with Aladdin being perhaps the best known. So what would it be? Great wealth? Health and long life? Power? Love? An incredibly hot prince or princess to fall in love with you? Fame? Popularity? Peace in our time? Olympic levels of fitness, strength and skill? Wisdom?

My favourite genie in a lamp story was the one where the genie said “You may have anything you want at all! But know this — your worst enemy will receive a hundred times what you receive.”

The man deliberated for some time. How could he get what he wanted without his hated enemy benefiting? What frustratingly Machiavellian goodness on the part of the Genie! Wealth was out, fame was out, a beautiful princess was out... Eventually he replied, “I should like... a very mild heart attack.”

Solomon chose wisdom. Actually when we read that he said ‘give me a discerning heart’ — he is asking more literally for a ‘hearing heart’. Think of that — a heart that listens. More of that later.

I think Solomon's choice of wisdom is interesting because he does not already think he is wise. And that humility that he might need wisdom as a king is pretty wise.

Now, what do we mean, and what did he mean by wisdom? Wisdom is normally understood to be knowledge, understanding, experience and good judgement. Perhaps wisdom is planting shady trees under which we know full well we will never sit? Perhaps wisdom is knowing how to win friends and influence people? Wisdom might be how to be a good leader (and that's certainly what Solomon is after), it could be financial wisdom, from 'look after the pennies' to how to play the stock market. Proverbs says that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. Perhaps, like Solomon's example, it is wisdom simply to want always to increase our levels of understanding, and doing something about it, through reading and study.

Solomon's experience is that wisdom comes from God. The Old Testament wisdom literature comprises the books Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Three of these are traditionally attributed to Solomon, though their characters are such that they seem unlikely to come from the same author. But these books do contain a common literary idea — that of Lady wisdom. Proverbs chapter 8 says: "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" and the passage goes on to talk of wisdom urging the simple to gain prudence, for her instruction is better than silver or gold, and by wisdom kings carve out law and rule wisely. Wisdom goes on to speak of being there in the beginning, before the world was made. Wisdom was there when God set the land above the seas, and the heavens over all. She concludes that 'those who find me find life and receive favour from the LORD.'

If you compare this passage with John's gospel chapter 1, you quickly realise that John knew this passage, and see that where Proverbs speaks of Wisdom, John sees Jesus: the Word of God, God's embodied wisdom.

Jesus was Solomon's descendant, and there is a contrast to be made between them. They are both the 'son of David'. Where Solomon is the obvious and literal son of David, Jesus is the son of David in the prophetic sense. He is *that* son of David, the king who will really sit on the throne forever. Solomon is offered any thing he wants by the Lord, and Jesus is offered the world by the devil, but of course refuses. Solomon eventually turns from wisdom: he is led astray by his wives and concubines. Wealth corrupts him. Jesus, by contrast, hardly seems to own anything at all, and is faithful to God even at the cross. Solomon has his famously wise 'cutting the baby in half moment'. Jesus often questions why he should judge, when people take judgements to him — an example is in Luke 12, when someone in a crowd asks Jesus to tell his brother to share his inheritance with him. Jesus just refuses, and then tells a parable about a fool building bigger barns. Another example is the woman caught in adultery. The crowd demand that Jesus should judge. Jesus suggests that the one who is without sin should cast the first stone.

So what is wisdom for us then? Has it changed? The wisdom of the world says you only live once. It says the more money you have, the more choice you have. It says live for today.

But Christ's wisdom says that the love of money is the root of much evil. Christ's wisdom is humility, love, trust in God, integrity, honesty — keeping close to God. Christ's wisdom is enacting what Solomon failed to: a listening heart: listening to God, of course, but he is also listening well to others. Jesus shows us that loving our neighbour as ourselves is the deepest wisdom, and he even extends it by giving a new commandment, or at least a better version of that one. 'Love one another as I have loved you'.

Now, imagine you find an old lamp in an antique's shop, and when you rub it, a genie pops out and offers you anything you wish. Honestly, what do you choose? If that choice was wisdom, what are you going to do about it, given that you don't need a genie to grant you that?

Amen.

SDG.

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Hear from Graham Miles Lightwave Rural and
Agricultural Chaplain for Suffolk, who will talk
about the effects of climate change on farming
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