

A Listening Heart

2nd Sun. after Christmas – 01/04/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Kings 3:4-15 Pastor Keith Besel

[Literal translation from the Hebrew]

v. 9, [Solomon responds to God's offer and says,] **"Give to your servant a listening heart to judge Your people; to discern regarding good and evil, for who is able to judge this massive group of Your people?"**

v.11-12, [God responds to Solomon's request,] **"And God said to him, 'Because you asked this, for yourself discernment to listen to justice, I have done according to your word. Behold I have given to you a wise and discerning heart, so that no one like you has been in your past and after you no one will arise like you.'"**

Introduction

✧ Take just a moment and think: Who is the wisest person you know today? The wisest person (besides Jesus) in history? Your mother or father? A sibling? A friend? A college professor? Historically in science, was it: Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Galileo, or Copernicus? Or in philosophy, was it: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Confucius? And in theology, was it: Athanasius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Chrysostom, Martin Luther, Johann Gerhard, or C. F. W. Walther?

➔ Whoever you have settled upon, I'm sure that you have a good reason for choosing that person; probably because of the way he/she has influenced you, inspired you, helped you to open your eyes to something you hadn't realized before, or contributed to the betterment of society in some unique way.

✧ However, if you have taken the text of our Old Testament Reading today seriously, then you already know the Bible's answer to that question. It is King Solomon. God gave to Solomon such a "wise and discerning heart" that according to verse 12, "no one like [Solomon]" existed in his past and no one like Solomon would exist after him regarding the wisdom and discernment that God gave to him.

➔ But what is it exactly that God gave to Solomon that made him so wise? Verse nine says that God gave Solomon what he had prayed for. Though many Bible translations say it was an "understanding mind" (ESV) or a "discerning heart" (NIV), the original Hebrew text literally says it was a "listening heart." In essence, a heart that listens first to God's Word and then to His people's issues and finally acts in a way that is both faithful to God's will and serves the needs of God's people in a loving and truth-filled manner.

I. Solomon prays for a "listening heart".

✧ But why is it so important that we understand what Solomon actually prays for here? Because, the people of Israel; who by Solomon's time had grown to be a "massive" and very influential group of people under the rule of Solomon's father, King David, had a well-documented history of not listening to God's Word. We could spend the rest of the day looking at all of the examples of this, but let's consider a few of the highlights for just a moment.

➔ Soon after God saved the people from their 250-years of slavery in Egypt; leading them through the Red Sea on dry ground and declaring them to be His Chosen People (Deut. 7:6); God then told Israel to enter the Promised Land and take possession of it. But they would not listen to Him. So they were forced to wander for 40 years in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula (Num 14:1–39).

- When they finally did enter the Promised Land, they still didn't listen to God. They disobeyed God's First Commandment that "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3, Deut. 5:7). They abandoned Yahweh and worshiped Dagon, Molech, Baal, and Ashtoreth on 12 separate occasions over a period of three hundred years. You can read all about that in the book of Judges.
- ✘ And it wasn't only the people, but Israel's kings who also did not consistently listen to God's Word.
- King Saul rejected God's Word when he refused to execute God's judgment of death upon the pagan nation of Amalek (1 Sam. 15:1–20).
- King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murder against her husband Uriah through an appalling military scheme (2 Sam. 11).
- And right before today's text, in 1 Kings 1–2, one of David's sons, Adonijah, tried to subvert David's God-approved vow that Solomon would become king after David, when Adonijah attempted to seize the throne by force and tried to kill his brother Solomon.
- ✘ This you see, is why Solomon prays for a heart that will listen to God's Word and faithfully serve God's chosen kingdom of people. And when you and I try to place ourselves into the culture of God's people 900 years before Jesus' birth, then we can see why Solomon prays for a "listening heart" instead of an "understanding mind" (ESV).
- In their day, the Hebrew people understood the heart not only to be the seat of our human emotions, but also the place from where our will, intellect and understanding comes about and is expressed.
- ✘ And so God, in His loving kindness, according to verse 12, graciously gave Solomon a "wise and discerning heart", among many other blessings.
- This concept of "wisdom" in the Old Testament was also unique compared to that of the secular and surrounding cultures in Solomon's time. The Hebrew word translated in verse 12 as "wise" is "חָכָם" (hākām). It represents an entire manner of thinking and attitude concerning life's experiences. Wisdom is the teaching of a personal God who is holy and just and who expects those who know and follow Him to exhibit His character in the many practical affairs of life. It is the perfect blending of the revealed will of a holy God with the practical human experiences of life. The emphasis of this godly wisdom is that the human will, in the realm of practical matters, must always be subject to divine causes. This means that for Hebrew believers, wisdom was not simply theoretical and speculative. It was practical; based on God's revealed principles of right and wrong and expected by God to be lived out in daily life.
- This wisdom of God is not founded in man's speculation but always comes from the one true living God who alone is holy, righteous, and just. Its purpose is not only to make one humanly wise, but also to lead us to fear Yahweh as the beginning of all wisdom (Job 28:28). This is why all people are to "listen" to the wisdom of God with attentive ears. Proverbs 2:2 says, "...[make] your ear attentive to wisdom and [incline] your heart to understanding."
- So, this is the "listening heart" for which Solomon prayed and the "wise and discerning heart" that God graciously gave to him.

II. Even wise men fall into grievous sin.

- ✘ But sadly, the reality is that even wise men still fall into deep and grievous sin. And that's exactly what happened to King Solomon. He didn't continue to listen to God's Word.

- ➔ God told Solomon not to marry women from foreign nations because they worshipped idols. But Solomon did not continue listening to God's Word and he ended up with 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs. 11:1–3)! Talk about letting your sin get the best of you.
- ➔ Instead, Solomon's "listening heart" was now listening to his wives and the false gods that he began to worship (1 Kgs. 11:4, 9–12).
- ✘ Well, I'm sure you're thinking right now, "At least you and I aren't that dumb are we?" On the contrary! We may not have 700 spouses, but we still break the First Commandment; abandoning God in many more than 700 ways with our love and devotion every day to the false gods of money, relationships, health, pleasure, status, possessions, just plain selfishness and more.
- ➔ Yes, our hearts so quickly become hard as well so that, just as Jesus said in Mark 7:21-22, "Out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness."
- ✘ My dear friends, we are no different; no better than that wisest of all human men, King Solomon. For our wisdom is never enough to overcome and keep us from the dreadful results of our sin. It can never gain us heaven.

III. We need the true Wisdom from on high.

- ✘ For that, we need the true Wisdom from on high. John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."
- ➔ Yes, the truest and the fullest expression of God's perfect wisdom is a person. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:24, "Christ, the very power and wisdom of God."
- ✘ Jesus listened perfectly to the Father's Word and He humbled Himself to take on our human flesh – conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; laid in a manger, worshiped by angels, shepherds and even "wise men" from the east.
- ➔ In today's Gospel Reading, where is it that Mary and Joseph find Jesus? In His Father's house, the Temple; faithfully listening to and studying the Scriptures (Lk. 2:46). Luke 2:52 even says that Jesus, the very wisdom of God in human flesh, set aside a part of His divine wisdom so that He could "increase in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." There He is at the age of 12, leading us; setting the example for us; loving His family and neighbors with "a wise and discerning heart."
- ✘ When Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness, notice that He will not abandon the Father to serve Himself. He remains faithful; He confesses that "man shall not live by bread alone" (Lk. 4:4); that "you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Lk. 4:8).
- ➔ And when Satan tempted Him again; issuing words of insult and mockery from those next to Him and in front of Him on the cross, Jesus would not come down, even to save Himself. No, Philippians 2:8 tells us that He "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
- ✘ In fact, Jesus hung there on that cross, because He listened to the pleas of those truly in need; to the pleas of all repentant and sin-filled souls and He acted in love for us all.
- ➔ He was bruised with whips and crowned with thorns for our iniquities. He was pierced both by nails and a spear for our transgressions. For six hours on that cross, Jesus bore our grievous sins of idolatry. He even pleaded from His heart for you and me, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

➔ Yes, Jesus hears us along with all sinners when we cry out like the tax collector in Luke 18:13, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” While we are faithless, Jesus remained faithful; listening to the Father and loving Him with “all His heart, soul, and mind.” And then, listening to the needs of His people; He loves you and me, His neighbors, more than He does Himself (Mt. 22:37, 39).

- ⌘ All of this Jesus does so that you and I might gain the kingdom of heaven; being redeemed; bought back, from sin, death and the devil by His holy precious blood and now given the promised inheritance as God’s chosen and adopted sons (and daughters) of faith (Eph. 1:3, 5, 13–14).

Conclusion

- ⌘ How truly blessed you are here today; to be God’s gifted people. In fact, you know what? You are some of the wisest people I know. And I say that not because of some marvelous bit of knowledge or insight that you have or because you’ve accomplished some major societal contribution.

➔ No, I know that can’t be the case because I heard you all say when we began this worship service, “We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment” (*LSB*, pg. 151). Clearly it can’t be about anything you have or haven’t earned.

- ⌘ Instead, you are wise because you fear the Lord; because your boast is in Him, Who is the true Wisdom from on high; in Jesus who has washed you in His blood; cleansing you through the water and Word of baptism; adopting you into His family, His chosen people and giving you the listening heart of faith in Jesus.

➔ May God in His mercy and grace sustain you in that listening heart; making it a heart of repentance and faith; a heart that loves God and that loves your neighbor as yourself each and every day into eternity. Amen.