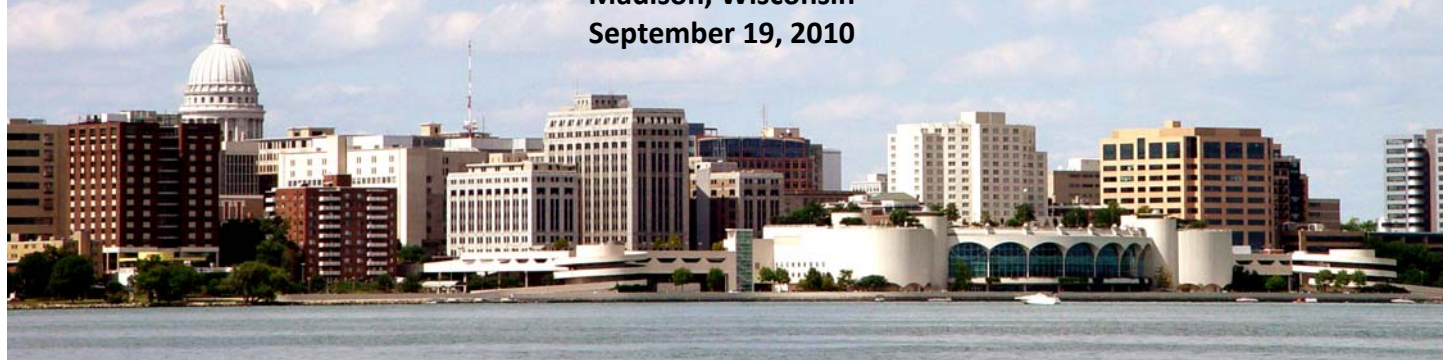


“Two Prostitutes, One Baby, and a Sword”

1 Kings 3:16-28

Baxter T. Exum (#1084)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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Introduction:

If you were here with us last Sunday morning, you might remember that we started looking at the wisdom of King Solomon in the Old Testament. We were studying this in response to a request from one of our members, and we discovered last Sunday morning that as Solomon took over as king, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and offered him anything he wanted. So there he was, confronted with a huge buffet. Solomon could have asked for absolutely anything, and yet instead of asking for riches, or power, or for a long life, or for the death of his enemies, the Bible tells us that Solomon asked for an ***“understanding heart”*** so that he would be able to judge God’s people and that he would be able to ***“discern between good and evil.”*** We discovered last Sunday morning that Solomon was able to make such a wise decision because he loved the Lord, because of the good example that had been set for him by his father, King David, and because he approached the situation with great humility. And then at the end of our study last Sunday morning, we discovered that we also have the ability to follow King Solomon’s example. As the Bible says in James 1:5, ***“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*** And so, like King Solomon, we can also ask God for wisdom.

This morning I would like for us to conclude our two-part series by looking together at one of the most famous examples of King Solomon’s wisdom. And like last Sunday, this morning’s text is also found in 1 Kings 3. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on page 546. We are about to find that as soon as King Solomon is blessed with this wisdom, he is given the opportunity to use it. And so, if you will, please look with me at 1 Kings 3:16-28...

16 Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. 17 The one woman said, “Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. 18 “It happened on the third day after I gave birth, that this woman also gave birth to a child, and we were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us in the house. 19 “This woman's son died in the night, because she lay on it. 20 “So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead son in my bosom. 21 “When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, behold, he was dead; but when I looked at him carefully in the morning, behold, he was not my son, whom I had borne.” 22 Then the other woman

said, "No! For the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son." But the first woman said, "No! For the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son." Thus they spoke before the king. ²³ Then the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! For your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.' " ²⁴ *The king said, "Get me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵ The king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." ²⁶ Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king, for she was deeply stirred over her son and said, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him." But the other said, "He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!" ²⁷ Then the king said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother." ²⁸ When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.*

As we look back over this paragraph of Scripture, I would like for us to apply it to our situation today by considering several aspects of what happens here.

I. And one of the first things we notice is King Solomon is presented with what appears to be an UNSOLVABLE DISPUTE.

Here are two prostitutes living together who each gave birth to baby boys within three days of each other. But in the night, one mother accidentally rolled on top of her baby and smothered the baby to death. She then switched babies in the middle of the night, giving her roommate the dead baby and taking the living baby as her own. But when the other woman woke up to nurse her son, she then realized that the dead baby was not her own. Now of course as a man, I have no idea how she could do that, how she could recognize a 3-day old baby as being different from her own. Maybe I'm just speaking for myself here, but when I see a 3-day old baby, there isn't a whole lot of recognition there. Even today, when I see the birth pictures of our two children hanging on the fridge, I cannot tell which is which. To me, they are both small and purple without much hair. But somehow their mother is able to tell the difference. Mothers have the ability to do that. And that is exactly what happens here in 1 Kings 3. The first mother realizes that the babies have been swapped in the night.

But at the same time, the other mother continued to strongly insist that the living baby was hers. In fact, as we find out toward the end of the story, the second woman was so insistent that she was even willing to lie to the king, to commit perjury—even to the point where she would allow her roommate's child to be butchered right there on the spot. We would say: This is messed up! There is so much that is wrong with this situation, we hardly know where to start. Two prostitutes living on their own! We can imagine that they probably have no idea who the fathers are, and so there is no one they can call in to testify that they recognize one of the children. They were not living with family, and so there are no witnesses to what happened. And since both women are prostitutes, it was not as if you could call in any character witnesses to testify that one of the women was an upstanding member of society, but they were both of questionable character. And then, of course, this takes place in the days before DNA testing. There were no CSI teams to come in and take swabs to sort out the truth here. On top of that, it appears that both women were too poor to have attorneys, so they end up appearing before King Solomon, arguing back and forth with what appears to be an unsolvable dispute.

As we let this sink in a little bit, we realize that sin can lead us into some really messed up situations. Sin has the ability to warp the truth even to the point where it seems impossible to sort it all out. Especially when

dealing with families, sin can cause things to get so twisted that we may be tempted to just throw our hands up in despair. That is the kind of situation that King Solomon is dealing with here in 1 Kings 3.

II. **There is a second aspect of this account that I would like for us to consider, and that is: GOD CARES. In fact, we could take it even further and say that God is interested in granting access to justice, even among the poor and immoral.**

So here is Solomon, one of the most powerful kings in the world, and yet he takes the time to judge a dispute between two prostitutes. We have no idea what the mother of the living baby had already tried up to this point. We assume that she appealed for justice locally, perhaps with some kind of local magistrate, perhaps her case was dismissed at several levels due to a lack of evidence, but due to this woman's persistence, eventually the case makes it all the way to King Solomon. And so we find that two prostitutes in ancient Israel had access to their government. They had that access because God has always been concerned about justice. God wanted the truth to come out, regardless of any moral failings that these women might have had.

In the New Testament, you may remember that Jesus also dealt with people of questionable moral character. He spoke with the woman at the well—a woman who had had five husbands, and the man she was with at the time was not her husband. But in spite of her situation, Jesus could see that she was someone who needed to hear the truth. Several weeks ago, we studied the woman who was caught in the act of adultery in John 4. Many people would not have even given her the time of day, but Jesus spoke to her and told her to go and sin no more. We know that the Lord was cut on for even talking to people in those kinds of situations. One of the most often repeated accusations against the Lord was that He was *"a friend of tax collectors and sinners"* (Matthew 9:11). But then in response to that kind of attitude from the hypocritical religious leaders, Jesus replied to them and said, *"Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you"* (Matthew 21:31). Sometimes we may forget this, but there is a prostitute in the Lord's family tree. We remember Rahab who became the great-great-grandmother of King David, which would have made a prostitute the great-great-great grandmother of King Solomon.

As human beings, sometimes it is easy to make judgments based on a person's background and maybe even to avoid talking to certain people in certain situations. I don't know about you, but personally I cannot remember ever talking to an actual prostitute. Maybe you have, I don't know, but I don't think that I have. And yet we find in this passage God cares for all people—regardless of income or background. God does not ignore our problems, but God is concerned for us because of our problems.

In the same way, there are so many other things that Solomon could have been concerned about as king, and in the big picture, nothing really bad would have happened to the nation if Solomon had not stepped in here, but Solomon was concerned that justice should be carried out, just as God was concerned and blessed Solomon with the wisdom to handle this particular case.

III. **There is a third basic idea for us to consider from this passage in 1 Kings 3, and that is: In his God-given wisdom, KING SOLOMON PROPOSES A TEST TO PROVE THE LOVE OF THE REAL MOTHER.**

As Solomon looked at this situation, he knew that somebody was lying. Either the story was true that one mother had switched the babies, or one mother was lying to try to get a baby that was not hers. One way or the other, somebody was not telling the truth. And so faced with this case, Solomon starts to figure that one

mother truly cares for her son and one mother is merely cold-hearted and selfish, grasping for a child that was not truly hers. Instead of giving her child a decent burial, one of these women was a selfish kidnapper who was trying to steal a child and was willing to lie about it all the way to the top.

Solomon, therefore, in an effort to cut through to the truth, calls for a sword and orders that the living child be cut in half so that each mother could have a piece of the boy who was left. Immediately, of course (in verse 26), we find that the real mother is ***“deeply stirred.”*** I did the best I could to look up those two words this week, and they come from two words in Hebrew—one word that traces its origin back to the word “womb,” and the other that refers to “getting hot.” And so when she hears Solomon give the order to have her son sliced in two, she is ***“deeply stirred,”*** she gets hot on the inside, she has a gut feeling that only a mother could have, she gets “hot in the womb,” and she says, ***“Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him.”***

And then, as we might expect from a lying, selfish, kidnapper, the other woman says, ***“He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!”*** Now, we know that it makes no sense to divide a child. And yet when greed and envy get involved, we know that making sense is not really a part of the equation anymore. I am thinking of the young punk who robbed the Speedway gas station out near our house late this past Thursday night. He went in there, jumped partway over the counter, put his hand in the cash drawer and pulled out what amounted to less than a dollar before running off into the dark. And then on top of getting less than a dollar for all of that effort, the police said that the young man lost his hat in the process. Well, that was pretty stupid! But those who do evil do not always make sense. Solomon knew this, and so he used this knowledge to his advantage, and his threat of using the sword actually worked. The real mother spoke up and asked that her son be spared. Instead of watching her son be sliced in half, the real mother was willing to give him up; she was willing to let her son be raised by another woman. We cannot imagine what a difficult decision that must have been, to think that she would allow her son to be raised by an evil, conniving fellow prostitute. How hard that must have been. But it fits in with what we know, that being a parent is hard work. There are some difficult decisions involved, and sometimes it’s not fair, especially to parents. In fact, someone once made a statement which I suppose could be applied to parenting, “It’s a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don’t quit when you’re tired, you quit when the gorilla is tired.” How is that for an interesting mental picture of what it means to be a real parent? It involves sacrifice even when we do not feel like it.

Nevertheless, by using this test, by threatening with a sword, the case was solved, and Solomon demonstrated the wisdom of God, giving the boy back to his real mother.

IV. As we come to the end of this passage, we see another basic idea in verse 28, as we find THE END RESULT OF SOLOMON’S JUDGMENT.

The Bible says that, ***“When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.”*** The end result was that the nation saw that Solomon’s wisdom was from God, and so they ***“feared the king.”*** They saw that Solomon was presented with an unsolvable dispute, they saw that he cared about those who were least in the kingdom, and they saw God’s wisdom displayed in this test of love for these two mothers. As has been said many times, “People do not care how much we know until they know how much we care.” And with this display of wisdom, the people knew that Solomon was going to be a king who ruled with compassion.

Conclusion:

As we think about the judgment of Solomon, and as we close our lesson for this morning, I would simply remind all of us about a passage from the New Testament where Jesus was referring to the final judgment, and the Lord said in Matthew 12:42, referring to Himself, that, ***“...something greater than Solomon is here.”*** In other words, Jesus was saying that His judgment was even greater than Solomon’s judgment, that His wisdom was even greater than Solomon’s wisdom. And we are thankful for that, because we know from the Scriptures that Jesus will be our Judge when this life is over. Solomon, then, becomes a picture (a symbol) of a much more important judgment that is still coming at some point in the future, a time when the Lord, ***“...will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left”*** (Matthew 25:31-33).

And so as we think about Solomon’s judgment in light of what is still coming, perhaps the main idea this morning is that we really need to be ready. Because, as we read earlier in Hebrews 4:12-13, the Bible says that, ***“...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”*** There is a time coming when even the thoughts and intentions of our hearts will be opened up—all of our secrets will be spread out for God to see and for God to make a decision.

The Bible teaches that we respond to God’s coming judgment by turning away from sin. That is, we do whatever it takes to do what is right. Perhaps we express regret, and then we turn around, and we go in another direction. We turn our lives back to God. At that point, we accept God’s offer of salvation by allowing ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. According to the Scriptures, baptism is a picture (a reenactment) of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. If you have any questions and would like to meet to talk about it further, please let us know. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org