

I imagine that some of you have been watching the Presidential debates over the last few months. All the candidates are being asked what their solutions will be to our current economic, social and foreign policy crises. Regardless of who has been or who becomes President, wise decisions seem to be very difficult to come by. **A decision to solve one problem always leads to a whole host of others.** When leaders fix one thing, there are all of these unintended consequences that may actually be worse than the original problem. Add to that the notion that many today think our government is corrupt or self-seeking or unrestrained. And so people are desperate for leaders who are decisive and trustworthy and above all wise.

Now both the Old and New Testament readings today are about wisdom. 1 Kings 3 tells the story of Solomon, who is described as the wisest king Israel ever had up to that time. Luke 2 tells the story of Jesus and how even at 12 years old, He had wisdom that far surpassed His years. Now Wisdom is obviously important for being a good ruler. A lack of wisdom can bring great damage to your Kingdom or to your nation. But there's a lot more to wisdom than just managing current affairs.

Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." As believers, we conceive of wisdom as proceeding from faith. Faith begets wisdom. **Faith gives birth to wisdom.** In our Old Testament reading from 1 Kings, God declares to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon responds in humility and in faith as he asks for an understanding mind to govern God's people.

And the next chapter says, "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore." So Solomon now has this wisdom

and he goes on to speak unforgettable Proverbs and to compose unforgettable songs. And the scriptures say that people came from everywhere just to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

Solomon then goes on to build a Temple for God that would stand for some 400 years. The people offer sacrifices at this Temple and it becomes the religious center of the Holy City. All of Israel's worship and religious activity would take place at this Temple. **And at its dedication, Solomon gave great vows to the Lord and blessed Him and had a feast in His honor.** So everything in the history of Israel reached a high point as Solomon's wisdom benefitted Him and the nation greatly.

But wisdom in and of itself is not complete. Remember, wisdom proceeds from faith. So what happens if that faith grows cold? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but what happens if your wisdom and honor and riches and nature take you in another direction?

Solomon was initially called not to intermarry with those who did not share his belief in the One True God, but chapter 11 says that's exactly what he did. He pursued and married those forbidden to him. And 1st Kings predictably tells us, "And his wives turned away his heart after other gods."

For all the wisdom Solomon had and the honor and the security and the accolades, it did not guarantee that He would remain faithful. Solomon's nature, was after all, sinful. **God had given Him all that he needed, but he still wanted more.** His story very much reminds us of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden who knew God face to face and lacked no single thing. And yet, along came the Tempter, who was able to seduce them towards something they perceived as greater. And just as they were evicted from the Garden, so would Solomon also lose his kingdom.

In our Gospel lesson, we find Jesus at 12 years old. He is standing in a rebuilt Temple at the same location that Solomon had built the original some 900 years earlier. Luke tells us that the boy Jesus was also filled with wisdom and that he even stays behind to do His Father's business after the Passover. Solomon had built the Temple, but he could not put the God to whom it testified above all else. **He was wise, but at the same time, fallible. In the end, he could not maintain the nation God had given him, but lost it in pieces.** So you see, the integrity of the kingdom was not just dependent upon the King's wisdom, but also on His fidelity.

So with Jesus, we do again, see someone who is wise even from His youth. Long after the age of 12, he will also draw crowds for His wisdom. He will speak in many wise proverbs and parables. He will amaze all who hear Him and put to rest the words of all His detractors. But unlike Solomon or any other earthly King, the honor and wisdom and praise of Jesus will not lead Him astray.

You know, exile was the ultimate destiny for people when the King led them to false gods and faithless worship. The people would be marched off from their homeland and into exile in a foreign land. We see this same result after the Fall in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve turn away from God, they are exiled from the Garden and God's presence. If we turn away from God and seek after other gods, we will also be exiled. **The ultimate exile from God is hell. It is to live apart from Him and His grace forever.** It is the place for scoffers and deniers and all those who reject the One true God. Its population is larger than that of heaven because infidelity towards God tempts and seduces many.

But it is Jesus Christ who seeks to save us from this eternal exile. In fact, Jesus embraces exile Himself. He's marched outside the city and put out of the sight of God to be hanged on a

tree. He is treated as God's enemy and crucified because the people believe He has brought shame on the Holy City. But the deeper reality reveals that Jesus is remaining faithful to God above all else – even His own life. He gives His life in sacrifice to God that His blood would both cleanse and cover all of us. This is the blood that placates the wrath of God and removes His judgements from us.

The Temple Solomon had built saw constant sacrifices which staved off God's wrath, but only through the blood of the perfect Christ could that wrath ultimately be paid for and turned away. **Solomon, in all his wisdom, would not be the kind of King who could deliver Israel.** But Christ in all of His faithfulness was that King. Where Solomon fails and where you and I fail, Christ succeeds. He saves us from sin and death and from an eternal exile to hell.

Being a king with a sinful nature in this life means that you will be tempted to pursue your own path. It means using your God given gifts to serve yourself. But Jesus' nature was not sinful and His desire in this life was not towards Himself. His desire was to forsake the world's wisdom and to go to the cross where He would give His life.

In His time here, Jesus used His wisdom to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Those given ears to hear receive His testimony and are saved by His mercy and grace. **The wisdom of His parables and teachings enlighten us by warning us against unbelief, imposters, false teachings and hypocrisy.** His preaching explains to us that we cannot earn our way into His presence or count on our own wisdom to get there.

Regardless of who wins the next presidential election, there will be mistakes and unwise decisions that are made. The world may become better or safer in some ways but worse off in others. Kings and leaders do not offer us the same assurance that we find in Christ. Only in the fear and knowledge of God do we become wise as Proverbs says. If we know Jesus Christ and

we know His work for us, then we know the way of eternal life. And we also know that we cannot ultimately count on the wisdom of any sinner, including a president, to save us or our nation. If the wisest King who ever lived can fail and even lose his nation, then all others after him can easily make the same mistake.

But in Christ, we have a wise King who will not forsake us to pursue his own vices. When He appeared among us, **Jesus did not use His wisdom to serve Himself**, but He used it in service to God for the good of those whom God loves. You and I are the ones who benefit from this wisdom and we can rest secure today knowing that we have been saved from eternal exile. Whereas the Old Testament Kingdom of Israel was lost, in Christ, the New Israel promises to stand forever and ever. Thanks be to God and the Son in whom He reveals His wisdom, mercy and grace. Amen.