

“What Shall I Give You?”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

First in a series on King Solomon

1st Kings 2:1-4,10-12; 3:5-15

April 28, 2019

Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

What shall I give you?

You have things to do. You have tasks to perform. You have responsibilities. People are counting on you. They have expectations. You have expectations of yourself.

What do you need so you can succeed?

You know you are in over your head. You are so full of doubts. Are you cut out for this? Can you pull it off? Or, will you fall flat?

“What shall I give you?” That’s the question Solomon hears from God. “What shall I give you?”

II

Looking back, it seems inevitable. Of course Solomon became Israel’s king. In the midst of things, however, there was nothing sure about it.

For starters, this idea of God’s People having a king never sat well with God. It wasn’t God’s idea. The people insisted, though. God said “Okay.” . . . but with a warning! God knows what we’re like when we get power. God knew what these kings, even kings of God’s People, would be like. Kings came with a cost.

The first king, Saul, proved a disaster. Next God picked David. David was successful — enemies defeated, the nation secured, Jerusalem made the capital. Most important, David proved faithful. He led God’s People well. Flawed? Yes he certainly was. Still, he was devoted to the Lord. So God promised to stay committed to David’s family after David had gone.

Now, David is gone. His last years were rough. His powers failed. His family split into factions. He was too spent to do anything about it.

Things are ripe for renewal. We are ready for Solomon. He is one of David’s sons.

That’s the problem. He is just “one of.” David has at least 21 sons! By many wives and

sort-of-wives. Some have already died or been killed, sometimes by each other. There are no rules for succession. David had done little to prepare.¹ Solomon is one of the middle ones. Nothing really sets him apart, except he survives. His mother Bathsheba (yes, *that* Bathsheba!) and their allies are sharp and calculating. After a bloody mess, Solomon became king.

III

Where has God to do with all this? It's hard to say. People talk about God. They assume to know what God wants — which is usually what they want. (Funny how that works.)

But as these events have unfolded, we haven't heard from God.² Solomon gets to the throne through conflict and bloodshed, with scheming, shifting alliances and payback. Is God working through this? Sure. God is always working through human messiness. God works with people, and we are messy. Sometimes God works with what we are doing. Sometimes God works against what we are doing. Most of the time it's hard to know.

All we can know is God is always working. In this messy world today, God is working. In our messy communities today, God is working. In our messy church today, God is working. In my messy life, and in your messy life today, God is working. God is weaving God's pattern of redemption, and justice, and peace, and hope and life. God is weaving God's pattern using our tangled, frayed, knotted and tattered threads. That's what matters.

Into this new generation of David's family, God weaves God's pattern. Solomon becomes king.

IV

As I said, in the story of Solomon's rise we don't hear from God. Now we do. God comes to Solomon in a dream, with that question: "*What shall I give you?*"

You've got your new job. The other candidate had a lot going for them too. It was a tough struggle, but you made it.

Now, you have to do it! Now, the doubts are hitting, hard. The responsibilities are nothing like anything you've had before. Everyone is looking at you. The costs if you fail will be

¹ "David, too, had taken no action in connection with who should succeed him. It is an aspect of the way he had become more and more irresponsible and feeble as years have gone by." John Goldingay, 1 & 2 Kings for Everyone (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 8.

² ". . . the narrator and God stay silent. Yhwh does not appear at all in the account of this ascension." John Goldingay, Old Testament Theology Volume 1: Israel's Gospel (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 560.

very high, and everyone will see. Are you up for it? Your public face is confident. Inside you are churning.

God asks, “*What shall I give you?*”

What do you ask for?

What does Solomon know he needs?

V

Wisdom.

That’s what God gives to Solomon. Wisdom, and more. Solomon becomes known for many things, especially wisdom.

The next couple of months, we are going to be digging into stories of Solomon. We’ll see different ways he acts wisely. He becomes wise in his knowledge of many, many things. He becomes wise in good government, in growing prosperity, in administering a nation. He becomes wise in international relations. He becomes wise in understanding human nature, so he can give sound judgements in solving disputes. He becomes wise in leading God’s People in the ways of God. He fundamentally changes how they worship God by changing where they worship God; he builds the Temple.

I was intrigued to see, however, that as much as Solomon is rightly known for wisdom, when God asks, ““*What shall I give you?*,” Solomon does not ask for wisdom. At least, he does not use the word. Solomon asks for a “listening mind.”

Wisdom is listening.

Solomon knows he will only do his job well if he listens. He needs to listen to people. He needs to listen to the world around him.

A wise mind is curious. Curiosity asks questions, then listens.

Wisdom is knowing how things work, and how to make them work well. A wise manufacturer knows how things are made, and knows how to make them well. A wise team leader knows how people tick, and knows how to make the group work well. A wise programmer knows how lines of code work, and knows how to make the software run well. A wise gardener knows how seed, soil, sun, fertilizer, and water work together, and knows what to do (and not to do) so the plants grow well.

We learn all that by listening: watching, observing, asking questions, and then using well what we've discovered.

VI

Above all of this, or maybe under all of this, a truly wise person listens to God.

You can know all sorts of things about all kinds of stuff. You can be proficient in your field. You can master management skills. You can have exemplary leadership skills. You can be a guru at tending relationships. You might know a lot about God.

But if wisdom is understanding how things work, how people work, how life works . . . you can only have wisdom if you are listening to the One who upholds all things, who creates all people, who gives all life.

Solomon knows that if he is going to have any chance at getting things right, he must learn to listen to God. He cannot rely on himself — on what he knows, on what he understands. He must listen to God. He knows enough to know that even to listen to God, he needs help. We are not inclined to listen to God. We need to be taught how to be taught. We need to listen to learn to listen.

It starts with that desire. So I'll finish with that question. God asks, "What shall I give you?"

Is your desire to listen? Then tell that to God. I think that would be wise.