

Wisdom is Found in Knowing and Holding your treasure!

1 Kings 3:5-12

We probably know this story as well as any story taught to us when we were kids in Sunday School. Solomon, king of Israel, given a blank check from God himself. “Ask for whatever you want me to give you...” God said.

What would you have asked for? That seems to be the question of the day right? But how you answer that question this morning is very important, because it shows how truly wise you are. If anything in this world could be yours, what would be your request?

Can you imagine facing Solomon’s dilemma here? “What should I ask for? I could do wonders for this kingdom with more gold. I could build a temple to the sky, I could feed all the hungry, build new homes for my people, not to mention a magnificent palace for myself. Oh but if I asked for a larger, more powerful army, I could conquer the world, I could eliminate all our enemies, bringing glory to our nation, not to mention my name would go down in history forever!”

Those surely would have been normal thoughts to go through a king’s mind when given a blank check from God himself. But instead, notice how Israel’s wisest king shows wisdom, even before God gave it to him. He responds to God’s offer in complete humility as he acknowledges his own inadequacies before the Lord when he prays, ***“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. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 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?”***

I’m sure Solomon, like every one of us, lacked something in his life. I’m sure Solomon’s life, like every one of ours, could have been better if only he would have asked God for it. And yet Solomon’s prayer didn’t include anything for himself.

Notice he doesn’t pray that the Lord will make him the wisest man in the land. He prays for a ***“discerning heart,”*** literally, ***“A heart to hear and to govern your people.”*** Solomon’s prayer was essentially this, ***“Lord God I am nothing without you. Give me the strength and wisdom to lead your people for THEIR good, so that through me, their king, they might see you, whom I humbly represent.”***

Yes, Solomon prayed for wisdom from God, but the truth is, Solomon was already a very wise man. Could things have been better in Solomon’s life? Probably. Could he have solved a whole lot of problems for his people by asking for something else? Most certainly. But Solomon, even at a young age, prioritized the Godly wisdom to hold his Lord and his eternal treasure as first and foremost in his life. And friends, this shows us a very important truth this morning: knowing your treasure is one thing, but holding onto it is another which is just as important.

And that’s why Jesus told the parable we heard in this morning’s Gospel, to emphasize that very truth. If you look at the parable in Matthew 13, you’ll see two men who found treasure. Now for one it was a complete surprise, as unexpected as it was valuable. For the other it came from doing a whole lot of research and expert digging. But once each man found the treasure, look at how little they valued all else they had. Jesus tells us that they both went away ***“and sold everything they had!”*** to make this treasure theirs.” And did you notice what doing such a thing brought to these men? Joy.

When you read through the bible, you see that joy is a dominant characteristic of every Christian. And if you have joy, it means you have found something worth treasuring. The word “joy” comes up more than 50 times just in the book of Psalms. ***“You have filled my heart with joy.” “The laws of the Lord give***

joy to the heart.” “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.” “Come, let us sing with joy to the Lord.” “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.” When you find the true treasure that is right here in the Gospel, in the fact that you’re forgiven, in the fact that nothing, no other treasures, or worries, or disasters can separate you from your God, you will at the same time, find true joy. And if you are having trouble finding joy, then maybe you have asked yourself if you’ve really found true treasure – which is just another way of saying to God, “things could be better.”

Could things have been better for Solomon? I’m sure they could have. Could things be better for you or me? I’m sure we can think of a few ways they could. Would you be happier if your family life weren’t so dysfunctional? If your job were easier? If you didn’t feel so tired all the time? If your chronic pain would just go away? If the doctor would have given you some better news? If money weren’t so tight? Or if you could just find a place where you knew fellow Christians who weren’t so loveless? Could things be better? Of course, we live in a sinful world, they always could be better. But do you think that it is wise if our greatest treasure is found in the comforts of THIS life... and the thing we request most from our God is for a life free from suffering?

One of my seminary professors told me about a couple he once visited in Hong Kong. They were both in their 60’s, but they were newliweds. He learned that they had been engaged 37 years before they were finally married. “Why did you wait so long?” he asked them. They said that they were set to get married, 37 years ago, while the husband-to-be was finishing his studies at the seminary to become a Christian pastor. But on the day of their wedding rehearsal, Chinese communists seized the seminary. They took the students to a hard-labor prison.

The guards allowed his fiancée to visit him once per year. After each visit, the young man would be led into the warden’s office. “You may go home with your bride,” the warden said, “if you will deny your Christian faith.” Year after year, he said the same thing. “No, I will not.” He gave that answer for 30 years. And after each time he did, he would be taken away and beaten badly. By the time he was finally released, his back was bent permanently at an almost 90 degree angle.

Could things have been better? I guess it depends on whether or not you believe you’re already holding your treasure. There *is* a difference between knowing what your treasure is and actually holding onto it.

CS Lewis once wrote about a famous Christian who told him that when he was a young man he prayed constantly for chastity; in other words, that his sinful lust wouldn’t get the best of him. But years later he realized that while his lips had been saying, “Oh, Lord, make me chaste,” his heart had been secretly adding, “But please don’t do it just yet.” He knew what the true treasure was, but he wasn’t yet willing to give up *everything* for it. It’s the line of thinking that says, “Because I know that the treasure exists, because I know what it is, because I know where to find it, I can always find my way back to it.”

Friends, that’s not a wise way of thinking. Wisdom isn’t found in knowing your treasure, but holding onto something else until you need it. You *can* do that. But you’ll be living in a different kingdom.

For 30 years - separated from his fiancée, his home, his friends and family – that young man in China kept saying “No” because he knew what treasure was. And he knew that just because you’ve found your treasure doesn’t mean that you’ll be free from trouble. In fact, sometimes the hardest part of finding treasure is holding onto it.

It’s hard when they take away your wedding. It’s hard when they beat you so badly your back won’t stop bending. It’s hard when Satan knows where you’re vulnerable to temptation, to doubt, to distraction, to fear, to peer pressure, to bullying. It’s hard when the people who used to love and respect you are the ones talking behind your back.

It’s hard to keep carrying crosses. ***“Lord I am only a child and I do not know how to carry out my duties.”*** we say with Solomon. Well, Christians it’s also hard to keep breathing when you’ve been hanging on a cross all day. It’s hard when you’re carrying the sins of the world on your back. It’s hard to keep going during every viscous, verbal, and evil attack; unless you believe there is a treasure worth finding. And Jesus did. And when he found you, he gave up all he had so that he could find joy in simply holding you.

True wisdom is found in knowing your treasure, and holding onto it. Today Jesus wants you to find strength, encouragement, and joy in simply holding onto him. When you are disappointed with the ways in which the treasures of this world have failed you and continue to do so, like Solomon, pray for a wise and discerning heart that knows where true treasure is found. When this world starts to suck the joy out of your Christian living, treasure his invitation to come and find rest in him. When you feel like you're going at this all alone, treasure his promise that he is with you always to the very end. When you're burdened with a sin, ask yourself, "Could *anything be better* than being forgiven?" at no cost to you, but at great cost to him.

I want you to look in the bulletin on the bottom of page _____. Under the sermon title, there's a squiggly mark with a diamond that kind of looks like a smiley face. You may have seen this on the internet or on tv. This is the Arabic symbol for the letter N. In Iraq, when the Islamic State takes control of another city, they spray paint this symbol on the homes that belong to Nazarenes, or Christians. And then, if the Christians in those homes don't run away or convert to Islam, they punish them. In fact, there is a park in the city of Mosul where the Christian children are taken and executed. In the eyes of those who paint this symbol, this is the mark of someone worth killing. But to those whose homes have it and who don't give it up for anything, it means something different. It means they know, in the middle of their greatest pain, when they have everything even their own child ripped from their arms and murdered in front of them, they know they have a treasure they wouldn't give up for anything. A treasure that no Islamic army can take away from them.

Maybe our homes aren't spray-painted with the Islamic letter N. But at your baptism, you were marked with a cross as a child of God. By faith, we all belong to him, which makes this family and every relationship in it the number one target of Satan, which is why sometimes there's friction. But we don't hold onto our Family of Faith because nothing bad ever happens here; or because we're perfect and never sin against one another. Yes things could be better, even in our church. But we hold onto our Family of Faith because it is the one place where, when we're imperfect or feel pain, we are never far from the only treasure that heals our wounds and brings us closer together.

Wisdom isn't found on holding on to the past, it's not found in holding on to the things of the present world. Wisdom is found in knowing where your true treasure lies, in the true treasure you all share. You are a forgiven child of God. You have heaven waiting for you. A treasure which unlike everything else in this world, will never disappoint. There's nothing that could be better than knowing *that*. There's nothing in this world that is worth holding onto, more than *that*.

