

Sermon Presented by Rev. Shawn R. Thornton, Senior Pastor
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Where Freedom Reigns, Wisdom Must Rule

1 Kings 3: 16-28

People who live in freedom need to be led by wisdom from God.

Yesterday, we had the privilege of hosting a wedding here. Generally, the groomsmen and I enter when Bach's *Canon in D* is played. As I took my place at the center of the front steps, the groom and groomsmen joined me on one side as the bride and bridesmaids joined me on the other.

Then it was time for the ring bearer to make his way down the aisle; you have to understand that this little three- or four-year-old boy had not wanted to even show his face at the rehearsal the night before. As the door opened and the ring bearer stood there to make his entrance, I knew we were in deep trouble.

But he took right off down the aisle—all by himself. That little boy who was so reticent the night before came down the aisle, just sort of skipping along, looking in all directions, having a good time—nothing disrespectful in his actions, mind you, just confidently performing his part of the ceremony. He came down that aisle as if there were no one else in the room—twirling the pillow, having a great time, the perfect model of complete freedom—until he got to the front pew near where I was standing on the steps. Finally, after all his exuberant freedom, he realized he had to make a choice to go right or left. He stopped, looked up at me and asked in a rather gruff and demanding voice loud enough for all to hear, “Which way?” He had shown complete freedom all the way down the aisle, but then he found himself in a situation in which he had to make a choice.

We live in a great land. Today we celebrate the 228th birthday of the United States of America, and we enjoy an unparalleled freedom—a wonderful independence. This morning we are going to talk about the freedom we have and the relationship between freedom and wisdom.

At certain points in our lives, we need some wisdom. Like that ring-bearer in the wedding, we often run into situations in which we have to make important choices. The title of this morning's sermon is, “*Where Freedom Reigns, Wisdom Must Rule*,” and our Biblical text comes from 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Freedom is a great gift, but pure freedom can be dangerous. With no moral foundation and no values as guidelines, pure freedom can lead to social anarchy and personal debauchery. Each of us needs wisdom—whether the problem is a situation in our marriage or home, finances, work—whatever it may be—each of

us needs wisdom. Some of you have spheres of leadership in the workplace, in the community, at home, or in governmental positions that require the ability to make wise decisions. Certainly, we must pray that God will give our national leaders the wisdom they need to lead this free land. Pure freedom can be dangerous, but when there are moral underpinnings to that freedom, there can be assurance, peace, joy, and contentment.

Here at Bible Center Church, we believe that wisdom comes from God, and we encourage each other to walk according to the principles found in God's Word. Someone has said, "*Knowledge is horizontal, and wisdom is vertical.*"

Last week, we discovered how one acquires wisdom—by asking God to grant us this amazing gift. This morning, we are going to concentrate on how one applies wisdom to practical, everyday situations. We noted last week that Solomon was only twenty to twenty-two years old, and it was early in his reign. The nation of Israel at this time was still united. As a matter of fact, at this point in Scripture, Israel was very prosperous, living in freedom and enjoying peace with its neighbors. They were experiencing the boon of freedom, and this was their greatest time in all of history. Along with freedom comes the need for wisdom. We see a grand example of wisdom in the midst of freedom in this passage. Follow along as I read 1 Kings 3: 16-28:

Now two women who were harlots came to the king, and stood before him. And one woman said, "O my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then it happened, the third day after I had given birth, that this woman also gave birth. And we were together; no one was with us in the house, except the two of us in the house. And this woman's son died in the night because she lay on him. So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side, while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead. But when I had examined him in the morning, indeed, he was not my son whom I had borne."

Then the other woman said, "No! But the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son."

And the first woman said, "No! But the dead one is your son and the living one is my son." Thus they spoke before the king.

And the king said, "The one says, 'This is my son, who lives, and your son is the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! But your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.' Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to one and half to the other."

Then the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!" But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him."

So the king answered and said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother." And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.

I would like to make three observations about wisdom leading our lives in a free society and how we should exercise wisdom as we have opportunities to lead and have influence in the community, in our homes, in our church and in our nation.

Care More and Condemn Less

The first observation is that wise people care more and condemn less than those who lack wisdom. It is very easy to condemn people; it is very easy to jump to conclusions. These two women were prostitutes. Certainly, their activities were not condoned by Solomon; but, in reality, he cared about them and was sensitive to their needs. Jesus Himself said, "*I did not come into the world to condemn the world*" because the world is already condemned. Jesus said He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Like Jesus Himself, Solomon was a wise man, in that he cared more and condemned less. Those who exhibit this kind of wisdom see themselves through the **lens of humility**.

The Lens of Humility

To fully appreciate this point, we must think back to last Sunday morning's message from the first 15 verses of this chapter. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked what He would like from him. Solomon could have asked for anything, but he said, "I would like wisdom, Lord." Pleased with this request, God told Solomon that no one who lived before or after him would be as wise. What a great thing to ask for! Verse 15 of Chapter 3 says that Solomon responded by returning and worshiping God. His opinion of himself had not been so elevated that he could not humble himself and bow before God.

You know, each of us needs a fresh glimpse of the Creator—in His holiness, righteousness, love, mercy and grace; we need a fresh glimpse of our Creator and the Lover of our souls, the One who so loved us that He sent His Son to die on the cross.

With this fresh glimpse of God, you will understand who you are compared to Him, and you will be brought to your knees. You will view yourself through the lens of humility and that will help you care for people more and condemn them less.

The Lens of Equality

Secondly, those who care more and condemn less **see others through the lens of equality**. Verse 16: "Now the two women who were harlots came to the king, and stood before him". These women were prostitutes. Leviticus 19:29 and Deuteronomy 23:18 said this was a sin and was not to be a part of the life of the nation of Israel. When Solomon looked at these women, he did not see their profession; he saw the people. In Israel's governmental system at that time, Solomon was the Supreme Court. These two women made their appeal to him; and as they stood before him, he saw and heard them equally and did not condemn them.

There is an old saying, "*the ground is level at the foot of the Cross.*" The Scriptures tell us that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Philippians 2: 9-11 says, "*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" This will surely happen; but for those who wait until the other side of eternity comes, every knee will bow in judgment rather than in honor and love. The Scriptures also give us the wonderful news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again that all who put their faith and trust in Him can have that judgment removed. If, on this side of eternity, the knee bows unto the Lord as our personal Savior, God forgives us and makes us right with Himself. Franklin Graham in his book, *The Name*, says this:

As Paul wrote in that letter to his friends at Philippi, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, including:

*Abraham, the pharaohs, Moses, Mary and Joseph, the disciples
John the Baptist, the Pharisees, Herod, Pilate, the Apostle Paul
Roman emperors, Alexander the Great, Constantine
Winners and losers
Columbus, Cortes, Perry, Lindberg, Armstrong
Popes, Muhammad, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa
Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Reagan
Kings, queens, princes, and princesses
George Wishart, Cassie Bernall, and all martyrs wearing their white robes
Babe Ruth, Tiger Woods, Joe Montana, America's Cup Winners
Mark McGwire, Muhammad Ali
Abortionists and anti-abortionists
Stalin, Hitler, Lenin, Mao, Pol Pot, Bin Ladin
Members of the nearly ten thousand religions
Construction workers and doctors
Frank Sinatra, Cher, Michael Jackson, Madonna
Marilyn Monroe, Jimmy Stewart, Mel Gibson, Julia Roberts
Martin Luther and Martin Luther King
Millionaires and misfits
Carnegie, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Walton, Gates*

*Moonshiners, mafia, drug lords, pushers, and addicts
Bunyan, Shakespeare, Hemingway, Lewis, Grisham
Pornographers, prostitutes, philanthropists, and pedophiles
Larry King, Barbara Walters, David Letterman, Tom Brokaw
Patriots and terrorists
Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Picasso, Rockwell
Saddam Hussein, Yasir Arafat, Golda Meir, David Ben Gurion, Ariel Sharon
Rachel the Israeli victim and Ayat the suicide bomber
Lawyers and longshoremen
Mozart, Beethoven, Gershwin, Lennon
Skeptics and mockers
Voltaire, Freud, Darwin, Madeline Murray O'Hare
Billy and Ruth Graham
Franklin Graham
Your boss and your neighbor
Your spouse and your child
You.*

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord."

You can bow your knee today, acknowledging your need of God, and you can be right with Him. Jesus made the way possible for you. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus said, "No one comes to the father, except through Me."

What does this do to shape our perspective on life and how we live life in a free society?

When you realize that every knee is going to bow, when you look through the lens of humility and realize who you are, when you look through the lens of equality and realize who others are, you know in your heart that God does not differentiate between gender, age, and skin color—and neither should we. God has created every human being to be equal. Equal! When you understand those things about God, then you begin to care more and condemn less.

Listen More and Lecture Less

Secondly, I would like us to see that wise people listen more and lecture less. Verses 17 through 22 describe a courtroom scene in which each woman told her own side of the story. King Solomon listened to the first woman's interpretation of the events, and then to the other woman's description of what had happened. He did not interrupt; he did not interject; he did not lecture. Most of us would rush in and start lecturing them about their profession or the silliness of the story—instead, Solomon listens.

Let People Say What Needs to Be Said

We need to listen to various voices and various perspectives. **We need to let people say what needs to be said** in the proper settings. We need to listen more—especially when it is not our turn to speak, and we need to talk less.

Let me admit to you that I am more of a **talker** than a **listener**. I pray every day that God will temper my youth, and help me listen better today than I did yesterday. It is a part of my every-morning prayer. I speak in places where I should say nothing, and at times when I ought to be quiet. As a matter of fact, I will tell you a little secret about myself that even my staff does not know. Before I go into any meeting, I write on the top of my agenda four little letters followed by an explanation mark; and I underline them twice.

When people come in for a counseling session, I pull out a post-it note and write these same four letters on the note; and when the meetings are over, I destroy all copies. Four little letters—KYMS!—underline, underline. Shawn, you had better get this. What it means simply is, “**Keep Your Mouth Shut.**” During the last meeting I attended, I knew it was probably best that I not talk much; I needed to listen to various perspectives. I came out of that meeting, looked at those letters, and said, “Boy, I am glad I wrote that down I just wish I had paid attention to it!”

We must let people say what needs to be said, and we need to listen more and keep our mouths closed when appropriate. For many of us, this is a difficult task. When used properly, wisdom will compel us to listen more and lecture less. Not only do we need to let people say what needs to be said, **we also need to let pressure reveal what needs to be revealed.**

Let Pressure Reveal What Needs to Be Revealed

Can you imagine the gasp in the room when Solomon ordered his servants in verse 24, to bring in a sword and to divide the child in two and give half to each mother? Solomon intentionally created a pressure situation.

Now, I would not advise you to create such a pressure situation, especially one as extreme as this; but King Solomon knew without a doubt what was going on and what was about to happen. When you let pressure reveal what needs to be revealed, you will hear a person’s heart. Verse 26 says the woman whose son was living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son and she said, “*O my lord, give her the living child and by no means kill him!*” But the other woman said, “*Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him.*” Solomon said, “Right there...that’s the mother—the one who cares enough about this baby to give it up to save its life.” Watch people in pressure situations, and you will see who they really are.

Unfortunately, the bulb in the projector above me blew out right before this service began, and that explains why we have no projection of hymn texts or sermon outline points this morning. Most of you know the emphasis I place on the use of both visual and auditory communication tools. Needless to say, I was—at first—rather disturbed by that bulb’s inconsiderate timing—right as our service began! Then, I calmed down—somewhat; reasoning that since the Socratic method of

teaching has survived for thousands of years, surely we will successfully communicate without PowerPoint slides for at least this one-hour service!

How we respond to these kinds of things--I am talking to myself now—is very important. Pressure reveals what is truly in our hearts. Listen fully to the words of others. Watch people at work, at home, in your neighborhood. When you are observing people, listen to their hearts by watching them under pressure. Wise people listen more and lecture less.

Respond More and React Less

Thirdly, wise people respond more and react less. We have the freedom in our society to do many wonderful things; but, we also have the freedom to be impulsive and **overreact** and do inappropriate acts that hurt others and defeat what we are trying to accomplish. We can be fiery and decisive and think that our passions are right and our judgment is clear. After Solomon had heard these two women, he could have said to one woman, “You take the child,” and to the other, “You get out of here;” but he does not do that—he does not overreact with impulsiveness.

Also, we can “under-react” with timidity and uncertainty. We can be indecisive—saying: “I don’t know; I can’t make a decision; I’m not sure.” With such fear of failure, we can get to the point that we don’t know how to make a decision; and, consequently, we can do and say silly things. Solomon could have simply resolved the controversy by using the child’s method for decision-making: “One potato, two potato, three potato, four...” But, he did not do that, either. He **responded** in this scenario. Wise people respond more and react less. How is that accomplished?

Step Back and Identify the Problem

First of all, wise people step back and identify the problem. Solomon stopped and identified the problem. “You claim this child, and you also claim this child.” He succinctly summarizes all they have said. Sometimes, we need to take a deep breath when we face a hard situation—when we have the same freedom that little boy had to come waltzing down the aisle. We enjoy our freedom as Americans; but sometimes we have to make hard decisions, and we arrive at those moments when we need wisdom. That little boy paused at the end of the aisle as if to say, “Okay, now I’ve got to assess this thing;” but, instead, he looked to me for direction and asked, “Which way do I go?”

We Americans enjoy our national and personal freedoms as citizens of this great country, and we also enjoy the freedom of living by God’s Word. When you face a problem in some sphere of leadership or in your personal or spiritual life, I would challenge you to step back and identify the problem. Then what? Then you count to ten and take a deep breath.

Step Forward and Glorify the Lord

After that, by relying on your relationship with God and the teachings of His infallible Word, you can step forward and move through the solution--you can step forward and glorify the Lord. Look at verse 28: *“And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.”* Listen again: *“And all Israel heard”* — word got out—*“and they feared him.”* That means they respected him—and they saw the wisdom of **Solomon**? NO! *“they saw the wisdom of **God**.”* This man who had asked God for wisdom now has wisdom; his caring, listening and responding has let all the people of Israel see—not Solomon—but God. Jesus said in Matthew 5 we are to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. We often encourage this attitude in our lives by singing a children’s chorus, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.”

After you have taken a step back to identify the problem, you can step forward for the Spirit of God to work in your heart and life. This spiritual approach to the hard decisions of life lets you respond, not react, to the situation. It gives God the opportunity to work in your life so that you become a reflection of—not a distraction to—Him.

It has been my heart and passion this morning—as it is every day—to do or say nothing that will distract us from the worship of our God, or from the person and work of Jesus Christ. I pray that everything in our hearts and lives will bring honor and glory to Him. Is that true in your life? Is that true in every sphere of influence you have? Is that true in how people view you? Do they see you glorifying Him?

Let me challenge you with this: Pray as you enjoy this Independence Day that the freedoms you have as an American will be tempered with the wisdom that comes from God. Pray that you will care more and condemn less, that you will listen more and lecture less, and that you will respond more and react less. Pray that God will give you the wisdom to care, to listen, and to respond appropriately in your area of leadership and influence in our society.

Then I would challenge you to pray for our governmental leaders as they contend daily with decisions that touch untold numbers of lives throughout our nation and the entire world. Pray that they may be granted the wisdom from God to care more and condemn less, listen more and lecture less, and respond more and react less.

Freedom is indeed a great thing; but with freedom there always comes a point where you must make a decision. Will that decision be wise or unwise? We have to be walking with God through His Word in order to have the freedom to make a tough decision with wisdom--wisdom like that of Solomon in the passage today.

Let me ask you this question: While you enjoy freedom, are you being led by God's wisdom? Are you allowing God's wisdom, as revealed to us in His Holy Word, to guide you in your life and in your sphere of leadership?

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for this great land of liberty and freedom, and we pray that each of us would be led by Your wisdom. We pray that You might be exalted, praised and lifted up today in every way. Our heart's passion is that nothing would distract from You and Your loving us through Your Son. May You be glorified in our church, in our lives, and in this nation. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, our Redeemer and King. Amen.