



**Liturgical Day:** The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
**Date:** October 11, 2009  
**Sermon Title:** The Wisdom of Solomon

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As you know, a number of us are working on reading through the entire Bible in 90 days this Fall. This past week we read the books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings.

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel tells us about the beginning years of Israel's United Kingdom. God's people are no longer scattered groups of nomadic families, but they are united as a powerful nation, under the rules of Saul, David and Solomon. These three kings rule for about a century's worth of Israel's history. At the heart of this section of the Bible is the promise God makes to King David. Because of David's faithfulness, God declares that his descendants will continue to rule over the land – and as long as they are faithful to God, the kingdom will thrive.

1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings continues the story where Samuel leaves off. This section of the Bible begins in a strong way, with the rule of Solomon, David's son. But towards the end of his life, Solomon turns away from God, and because of that, the nation falls apart. The United Kingdom splits after Solomon's death, and the kings who rule the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom are occasionally faithful, but more often unfaithful – and when the king loses his way, the kingdom suffers. By the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, Jerusalem has been sacked by the Babylonians. God's people have been carried off and are living in captivity. They are long removed from their homeland, and from the physical signs of God's promise to their ancestor Abraham.

Our reading this past week has been dramatic – quite a change from the week before, when we spent most of our time reading rules and regulations. This week we have witnessed the rise and the fall of the United Kingdom, and it has been quite a story.

Today's text takes place about half-way through that story. In this passage, the wisdom of Solomon is extolled. Solomon is often described as the wisest king in Israel's history. As a matter of fact, the phrase "the wisdom of Solomon" is a phrase that makes sense even to some non-believers. But his wisdom doesn't guide him for his entire life.

After a few years on the throne, he will make the

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** unwise decision to yoke himself to 700 wives and God's work. Our hands.

FIRST LESSON  
**AMOS 5:6-7, 10-15**

PSALM  
**PSALM 90:12-17**

SECOND LESSON  
**HEBREWS 4:12-16**

GOSPEL LESSON  
**ST. MARK 10:17-31**

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES:  
**JOB 23:1-9, 16-17**  
**PSALM 22:1-15 (1)**

"90 DAYS" READING  
**I KINGS 3:5-12**

PRAYER OF THE DAY  
**ALMIGHTY AND EVER-LIVING  
GOD, INCREASE IN US YOUR  
GIFT OF FAITH, THAT,  
FORSAKING WHAT LIES  
BEHIND AND REACHING OUT  
TO WHAT LIES AHEAD, WE  
MAY FOLLOW THE WAY OF  
YOUR COMMANDMENTS  
AND RECEIVE THE CROWN OF  
EVERLASTING JOY,  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST,  
OUR SAVIOR AND LORD.  
AMEN.**

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300 concubines, many of whom worship other Gods, and who eventually entice him away from loving God with his whole heart and soul and mind.

*[Let me offer a personal aside here – something that has nothing at all to do with today’s sermon. There are those who advocate a return to the concept of a “Biblical Marriage” in our country these days. Actually a careful reading of Samuel and Kings reveals an understanding of marriage that nobody I know would ever advocate for today. But the realities of many “Biblical Marriages” – especially those found in the Old Testament – may well be the best reason ever to support monogamy. Even someone as wise as Solomon found that having more than one spouse made it almost impossible for him to stay faithful to God.]*

At any rate, the focus this morning is not on Solomon’s weaknesses, or on his marital life, but on his wisdom. Soon after the death of his father, the great King David, Solomon finds himself on the throne of Israel, and in a dream God offers to give Solomon whatever he wants. All he has to do is say the word. Solomon responds in a way that is surprising to anyone who has studied the history of kings in Israel. He doesn’t ask for power. He doesn’t ask for wealth. He doesn’t ask God to keep at bay any who might be planning to overthrow him and become Israel’s king. Instead, Solomon admits that he is only a child, and not nearly capable of ruling God’s people wisely and faithfully. And so he asks God to give him an understanding mind. Now granted, it takes a good bit of wisdom to make this kind of a request in the first place. So God may simply be strengthening what is already one of Solomon’s strongest gifts. That said, God grants him his request, and Solomon becomes known as the wisest King ever to serve Israel.

Solomon was wise, and in the first story following today’s text, we read of what is perhaps the most well-known attestation of this wisdom. Two women approach him, who have two children: one is alive, and one has died. They are arguing about which of them is the mother of surviving child. One claims the child is hers. The other claims that the children have been switched, and she is the mother of the living child. You remember what Solomon does, don’t you? He calls for a sword, and declares that the child is to be cut in two and split between the women. The first mother agrees with him, but the second one says, “No. Don’t harm the child. Give him to her.” It isn’t hard, after that, to tell who the real mother is, is it?

Solomon was wise in a worldly way. His wisdom helped Israel make sense of its existence. But not all the wisdom of our Bible makes sense to the world. In his letter to the Christians in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human

wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.<sup>i</sup>

Paul understood that on another level, the kind of wisdom that comes from God doesn't always agree with what the world considers to be wisdom. The wisdom of God sometimes looks like foolishness to the world. For Paul, the most obvious example was the cross of Jesus Christ. The wisdom of the world looks on that, and sees loss, pain, humiliation and defeat. But sacred wisdom looks on the cross and sees the power in suffering, and the redemptive love of God for the world. Our faith often presents to us what we might refer to as an unconventional wisdom.

That is no more obvious than in the words of Jesus. In the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, he address the crowd in what some have come to call The Sermon on the Mount. His words in this passage are a classic example of the unconventional wisdom found in the Bible. Who is blessed in this world?

- Those who are poor in spirit, and dependent on God.
- Those who mourn, and receive comfort from God.
- Those who are meek.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Those who are merciful, or pure in heart.
- Those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

You could easily make the case that if the world was to compile a list of what it means to be blessed, it would not include any of these examples. But that is how it is with the unconventional wisdom of our Bible – the unconventional wisdom of our God. The truth is: God's wisdom may indeed draw us away from the wisdom that most people in our world embrace.

So the question is this: "How will you and I appropriate this unconventional wisdom in our own lives?"

- When the world insists that wrongdoers be punished, will we as people of faith believe that, or remember that Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek?
- When the world says you get what you deserve, will we as people of faith believe that, or remember that God's grace is both unearned and undeserved?
- When the world says that the point is to get everything you can out of this life, will we as people of faith believe that, or remember that the Bible says it is only in giving our life that we find out what true life is all about?
- When the world says that international borders need to be sealed off, will we as people of faith believe that, or remember that God's people have often been sojourners in a foreign land, and as a nation were commanded to care for the foreigner?

Today we celebrate King Solomon as one of the wisest rulers ever to lead God's people. Perhaps the

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<sup>i</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:20-25. New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

wisest thing he ever did was to ask God for wisdom instead of wealth; for understanding instead of power. There is wisdom in our Bible that often runs counter to the common wisdom of our day – and it comes only as a gift from God. Perhaps these days we would be wise to ask God that this might be the kind of wisdom that informs our living.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (October 11, 2009)

### **Gospel Lesson; English Text:** <sup>ii</sup>

<sup>10:17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.' " <sup>20</sup> He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. <sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." <sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions — and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." <sup>iii</sup>

### **Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:**

<sup>10:17</sup> Καὶ ἐκπορευομένου αὐτοῦ εἰς ὁδὸν προσδραμῶν εἰς καὶ γονυπετήσας αὐτὸν ἐπηρώτα αὐτὸν· διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ, τί ποιήσω να ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω; <sup>18</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἰς ὁ θεός. <sup>19</sup> τὰς ἐντολάς οἶδας· μὴ φονεύσης, μὴ μοιχεύσης, μὴ κλέψης, μὴ ψευδομαρτυρήσης, μὴ ἀποστερήσης, τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα. <sup>20</sup> ὁ δὲ φη αὐτῷ· διδάσκαλε, ταῦτα πάντα ἐφυλαξάμην ἐκ νεότητος μου. <sup>21</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἐν σε ὑπερέι· ὕπαγε, ὅσα χεῖς πώλησον καὶ δὸς [τοῖς] πτωχοῖς, καὶ ξεῖς θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολουθεῖ μοι. <sup>22</sup> ὁ δὲ στυγνάσας ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ ἀπήλθεν λυπούμενος· ἦν γὰρ χων κτήματα πολλά. <sup>23</sup> Καὶ περιβλεψάμενος ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· πῶς δυσκόλως οἱ τὰ χρήματα χοντες εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελεύσονται. <sup>24</sup> οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἐθαμβοῦντο ἐπὶ τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν ἀποκριθεὶς λέγει αὐτοῖς· τέκνα, πῶς δύσκολον ἐστὶν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ

<sup>ii</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>  
<sup>iii</sup> St. Mark 10:17-31, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

είσελθῆναι· <sup>25</sup> εὐκοπώτερον ἐστὶν κάμηλον διὰ [τῆς] τρυμαλιᾶς [τῆς] ῥαφίδος διελθεῖν πλουσίον εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθεῖν. <sup>26</sup> οἱ δὲ περισσῶς ἐξεπλήθησαν λέγοντες πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς· καὶ τίς δύναται σωθῆναι; <sup>27</sup> ἐμβλέψας αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει· παρὰ ἀνθρώποις ἀδύνατον, ἀλλ' οὐ παρὰ θεῷ· πάντα γὰρ δυνατὰ παρὰ τῷ θεῷ. <sup>28</sup> ἤρξατο λέγειν ὁ Πέτρος αὐτῷ· ἰδοὺ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήκαμεν σοι. <sup>29</sup> ἔφη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὃς ἀφήκεν οἰκίαν ἀδελφοὺς ἀδελφὰς μητέρα πατέρα τέκνα ἀγροὺς νεκρὸν ἐμοῦ καὶ νεκρὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, <sup>30</sup> ἐὰν μὴ λάβῃ ἑκατονταπλασίονα νῦν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ οἰκίας καὶ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ἀδελφὰς καὶ μητέρας καὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀγροὺς μετὰ διωγμῶν, καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζωὴν αἰώνιον. <sup>31</sup> πολλοὶ δὲ σπονταὶ πρῶτοι σχατοὶ καὶ [οἱ] ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι. <sup>iv</sup>

### “The Bible in 90 Days” Lesson:

<sup>3:5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” <sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup> And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?” <sup>10</sup> It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup> I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. <sup>v</sup>

### Scheduled Readings for “The Bible in 90 Days” 9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009

Date	Begin Reading At	Sermon Based On
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5

<sup>iv</sup> St. Mark 10:17-31, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

<sup>v</sup> 1 Kings 3:5-12, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11