

September 13, 2015 - National Grandparents Day / Rosh Hashanah

"What do you want?"

1 Kings 3:5

Three friends were stranded on a desert island. After several weeks with no food and no drinking water, they were beginning to lose heart.

Suddenly, a bottle floated into the shore. A genie popped out and said, "I have three wishes to grant. Each of you gentleman can make one wish come true."

Friend number one got excited. He said, "I wish I was relaxing in Hawaii on a beautiful beach with a cold drink, surrounded by food and enjoying the beautiful scenery. Instantly he was gone, his wish granted.

Friend number two smiled and said, "I wish I was back home right now with my wonderful wife and our two small children, at our log cabin in the woods." Just like that, he disappeared.

The genie asked the remaining man, "And what do you wish for?"
He answered, "Gee, I wish I had my buddies back to help me decide..."

If God gave you a wish, what would it be?

This morning we look at the book of 1 Kings (like 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings was one long book in the Hebrew). As the book begins King David is an old man, and he makes his son, Solomon king. God blessed Israel during the days of Solomon, yet after the death of Solomon the nation split apart; it became a divided nation. Chapters 1 -11 describe the glory of Solomon's reign, but the remaining chapters describe the failures of the kings that followed Solomon in both the split North and South kingdoms.

And so, 1 Kings is also the story of Elijah and his fellow prophets who called their nation to repentance, yet, to no avail. Today God's people are still warning, nations to repent. Sometimes it seems useless, but there's never reason to be discouraged where God is concerned. 1 Kings teaches us that even the downward twists and turns of history serve the ultimate purposes of God. It also reminds us that God is still on the throne.

In the Old Testament, God rarely appeared to people. However, King Solomon had a number of direct encounters with God and this was one of them.

1 Kings 3:5

That night the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!"

I have often wondered how I would have responded if I had heard, like Solomon, the voice of God saying to me:

"What do you want" - "What can I give you? Ask.." (1 Ki 2:5)

What do you think you would have replied if God had asked you that question?

Maybe good health for you and your family; or sufficient finances to live comfortably; or to be successful in owning your own business; or to get to the top of your profession –all for the glory of God of course!

Solomon could have asked for riches, but rather he asked for the ability to fulfill his God given calling - to be a fair and just governor in Israel.

Solomon wanted the things of God ahead of any riches and honor for himself.

What was most important for him at that time was to be able to walk God's ways – in a corrupt world.

So he chose a discerning heart not only to be able to be a good governor of God's people, but to please God.

Jesus said : Luke 12:34

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

As I thought about this passage I wondered WHY Solomon made such a good and wise choice in response to God's question: "What do you want, what can I give you? Ask."

I can think of three reasons:

1. His Father's influence

The first reason was the good influence of David his father.

We read in 1 Kings 2: 1-3 of David giving Solomon a solemn charge

1 Kings 2:1-3

As the time of King David's death approached, he gave this charge to his son Solomon: "I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man. Observe the requirements of the LORD your God, and follow all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so that you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go.

This reminds me of one of our New Testament readings this past week:

Titus 2:11-15a

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with

hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds. You must teach these things and encourage the believers to do them.

It is interesting that today at sundown begins the Rosh Hashanah or the Jewish new year. Rosh Hashanah means, "head of the year." It is believed by the Jewish people that as the new year, God opens his book for judgment. This holiday coincides with the Old Testament Feast of trumpets. Which points to Christ who will come at the sound of the last trumpet to judge everyone. Paul told Titus, "We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed."

We not only want to be ready for this day but we want to influence others to be ready especially our children.

Not just parents but others can have a positive influence on our children as well. Including grandparents, by the way did you know that today is also National Grandparents Day. Let them know today how much you appreciate them. More and more grandparents these days are raising their grand children.

As parents (or grandparents) we can have a real influence on our children – for good and for evil. We can't underestimate how much of an effect we have on our children, even when they have grown up and left home.

My son has moved to North Carolina, but we talk on the phone and our conversations often reminded me of Mark Twain's famous quote about his own father:

"When I was a boy of 14," wrote Mark Twain, "my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around, but when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

It takes time for children to appreciate their parents' concern and advice. David was eager to encourage his son to follow the ways of God.

David's influence I believe was an important reason in Solomon making such a good choice in response to God's question: "What do you want? Ask." (I Ki 2:5).

However, godly parental influence is not enough to guarantee that your child will follow the ways of the Lord. The company we keep will have an IMPORTANT influence on our Christian commitment.

We read later in 1 Kings that sadly Solomon's commitment to the Lord didn't stay strong BECAUSE of his foreign wives who introduced their foreign gods into Israel. We read

1 Kings 11:4

In Solomon's old age, they (his wives) turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the LORD his God, as his father, David, had been.

If we want to keep our Christian faith going, we need to meet regularly and pray with and for one another. And we need to spend our time alone with God.

But godly Christian parents are a good start.

2. Solomon was committed to God's will for him.

The second reason why Solomon made this wise choice was because he actually decided for himself that he would follow the ways of God.

Someone once said: God only has children, not grandchildren.

We cannot make a commitment to God for anyone else but ourselves. We can pray for our children, we can advise them but it is still THEIR decision whether or not they will commit themselves to following God.

As the old adage says: "You can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink."

David wanted his son to follow God's ways, but Solomon still had to decide to do so for himself.

When we decide to walk in God's ways, our goals change. We are not out to please ourselves but rather to serve God. Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 5:17-18a

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.

And again in Galatians he writes:

Galatians 2:20

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Jesus said this: Matthew 6:31-33

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

As Christians we want to be committed to God.

Story: Luciano Pavarotti tells this story:

When I was a boy, my father, a baker, introduced me to the wonders of song. He urged me to work very hard to develop my voice. Arrigo Pola, a professional tenor in my hometown of Modena, Italy, took me as a pupil. I also enrolled in a teachers college. On graduating, I asked my father, 'Shall I be a teacher or a singer?'

"Luciano,' my father replied, 'if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them.. For life, you must choose one chair.'

"I chose one. It took seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance. It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera.

And now I think whether it's laying bricks, writing a book--whatever we choose--we should give ourselves to it. Commitment, that's the key. Choose one chair."

As Christians we can try to sit on two chairs. But in the end we will fail.

We can decide to be committed to God's cause or to be committed to some other cause. But we can't be committed to both.

Solomon chose to commit himself to God's cause.

3. Solomon knew what God's will was in his life

The third reason, that I believe caused Solomon to answer wisely when God asked him, "'What do you want? Ask.'"(1 Ki 2:5) was because he knew what God had called him to do. He knew the vision God had for his life. And he knew that it would be an impossible task without God giving him the wisdom to carry it out.

So he asked for the ability to do God's will in his life and that is why God was pleased with him. And God went on to say:

1 Kings 3:12-14

I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life."

Jim Eliot, a missionary who lost his life taken the Gospel to the Indians in Ecuador on 5th January 1955 once said:

"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"

As we give up our desires and focus on following what Jesus has called us do, we will be surprised to find what blessings God has in store for us.