

Fifth Sermon: Solomon's Excellent Wisdom, 1 Kings 4

- I. Solomon's Administration (vv. 1-19)
 - A. His Cabinet (vv. 2-6)
 - B. His Regional Governors (vv. 7-19)
- II. Solomon's Prosperity (vv. 20-28)
 - A. The People (v. 20)
 - B. The King (vv. 21-24)
 - 1. His Territory (v. 21)
 - 2. His Provisions (vv. 22-23)
 - 3. His Territory (v. 24)
 - C. The People (v. 25)
 - D. The King (vv. 26-28)
- III. Solomon's Wisdom (vv. 29-34)
 - I. The Order of Wisdom (vv. 1-19)
 - II. The Promise of Wisdom (vv. 20-28)
 - A. The Proliferation of the King's Subjects, v. 20
 - B. The Extent of the King's Dominions, v. 21
 - C. The Bounty of the King's Table, vv. 22-23
 - D. The Peace of the King's Realm, v. 24
 - E. The Strength of the King's Forces, vv. 25-28
 - III. The Excellence of Wisdom (vv. 29-34)
 - A. Its Source (v. 29)
 - B. Its Extent (vv. 30-31)
 - C. Its Humility (vv. 32-33)
 - D. Its Fame (v. 34)

Proposition: The kingdom of Solomon demonstrates the order produced by wisdom, the promises fulfilled through wisdom, and the reputation wisdom gains for its possessor.

I. The Order of Wisdom (vv. 1-19)

Solomon was king over all Israel, and he didn't do it on his own. Far from it! He had officials right and left, cabinet ministers and regional governors. These men served the king faithfully--one of them even was later stoned to death, after the accession of Rehoboam--and provided for him. The point of all these names, almost none of whom are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and who have not been identified in secular records, is that service to God's kingdom does not have to be flashy. True wisdom is content to work for Christ, seeking first His kingdom

and righteousness simply because they are His, and not because it will lead to name recognition. This passage also shows us, as do all genealogies and name lists in the Bible, that God cares about individuals. These people are, to the Biblical writer and to God, not just cogs in some bureaucratic machine, but real individuals with immortal souls. The narrative treats them accordingly--not by giving us complete biographies, but by showing respect and valuing their service. If your name was in the Bible, wouldn't you be pretty proud of that fact? For example, Isaiah 49 says that people will come to serve Christ from the land of "Sinim." Now, as far as we know, the name "Sino" was not used for China until almost 400 years after Isaiah's day. But that didn't stop the translators; in Chinese Bibles, that obscure Hebrew word is translated by the word for "China." According to my brother-in-law, who lives in Beijing, the Chinese are very proud of this. They showed him that they were mentioned in the Word of God! Well, brothers and sisters, if the Chinese are proud of the name "China," how much more ought we to rejoice that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life? The history of the kingdom of God is indeed virtually summed up in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, but He nonetheless deigns to use us and commemorate our names as those who have served Him. What a massive privilege! Finally, we see from this passage how God-honoring gifts of administration and organization can be. Deciding who will shovel the sidewalks and set up the coffee fellowship here at the church, or who will buy the groceries and who will call the plumber at home, is not some afterthought. Being organized in your service of God is not only an acceptable thing; the example of Solomon shows us that it is good and right to take thought for organization. Biblical wisdom is not high-and-mighty; Biblical wisdom is practical for this life and the life to come. Biblical wisdom plans ahead and sets up clear lines of responsibility so that enterprises can be brought to fruition.

A. Solomon's Cabinet (vv. 2-6)

B. Solomon's Regional Governors (vv. 7-19)

II. The Promise of Wisdom (vv. 20-28)

If you read these next verses with Bible eyes, fresh off a tour through the Pentateuch, it almost sounds like Moses was a prophet. He foresaw all of these things!

A. The Proliferation of the King's Subjects, v. 20

First of all, look at how many people there are. *There is no kingdom without subjects!* A king with nothing to rule is hardly a king. But God has fulfilled His promise of a numerous seed to Abraham. In fact, the people of Israel are described here in the exact same words God used to Abraham: "As many as the sand by the seashore." That's how many Israelites there were! And not only were there a lot of them; they had plenty to eat, and they were happy. What a blessing from God! What a way to live under the rule of the Man of Peace!

B. The Extent of the King's Dominions, v. 21

But we see further that the king's dominions were wide, stretching from Iraq to Egypt. The Bible refers to the Euphrates as simply "the River." It's such a big, important river that it is, in effect, "the river who needs no introduction." There were other kingdoms in these lands, but they paid

tribute and were under his absolute sway. Just as the USA dominates North and South America, for good or ill, so Solomon's Israel dominated the ancient near East.

C. The Bounty of the King's Table, vv. 22-23

These numbers are supposed to impress us. I am certainly impressed. This is something like enough to feed 32,000 people every day.

Now, obviously Israel even in its expanded state was still very little in size. Modern Israel is 8500 square miles. Campbell County, Wyoming, is 4807 square miles. New Hampshire, which seems to me like a very small state, is 9300 square miles. The county in which I was born, Weld County, CO, is 4000 square miles. So to me, this state is roughly the size of two counties. So when you hear that 9 billion chickens are alive at any given time in the United States, and that we slaughter and package 37 billion pounds of chicken meat each year in this country, you can be impressed. When you recognize how many of us there are, and how few were in Solomon's empire by comparison, you can see even better how bountifully the king fed his people.

It is with all this in mind that you ought to come to the Lord's Table each Sunday. Think of the bounty, the generosity of God! The meal He serves could have been bread and water, but it is bread and wine--bread, the standard staple food that has kept most of the world's people alive throughout history, and wine, also a staple but a high-end luxury food at the same time. God delights to feed His people! He delights to feed you, and feed you well. Who do you think allows us to grow those 9 billion chickens every year such that the poorest American family can afford to eat meat? Who do you think provides the food that you thank Him for before each meal? Who do you think provides the spiritual food we enjoy in this church from our pastor, and the other spiritual food that we get from reading God's word, from encouraging one another, from holding family worship, from listening to great teachers whom the Lord has given His church? All of these things come from his hand.

Fathers, you've all heard your children say, "I'm hungry." Now, when you feed them all the time, that phrase is a little annoying. But really, don't you love to feed them? If you know that they are truly hungry, does that not break your heart? God keeps a king's table. He owns enough cattle that He can serve more than 30 every day.

D. The Peace of the King's Realm, v. 24

Again, the size of Solomon's realm is introduced--and also its peace. David was constantly killing people and winning great victories. Rehoboam fought all the time. But God gave Solomon peace, because he was the man of peace and served as a type of the great Prince of Peace. We are the church militant, brothers and sisters. But we labor in hope of the triumph of the Kingdom and outbreak of peace all over the world. We don't mean just the cessation of conflict, although that's great as far as it goes. We mean the world united in intentionally glorifying God, manifesting the fruits of the Spirit, and serving the Lord Jesus. That's the kind of peace we want, and that's the kind of peace we will have. Notice, too, the economic elements of this peace: every man under his vine and under his fig tree. This is what Messiah will bring, according to Micah 4. This is what the state promises, according to the Assyrian officer in 2

Kings 18. But it's what only God can give. Do you want a pastoral idyll like this? Do you want to dwell in safety, eating the fruits of your own labor, like all your neighbors around you? In some respects, of course--even in many respects--it is this idyll which has been realized in our country for four centuries now through the preaching of the Gospel and the maintenance of a Biblical ethic. The day may soon come when this kind of peace is taken away, and we can be shot for eating the fruits of our own vines and fig trees. Beware, family of God! This peace cannot be found through any political party or candidate, or through any efforts to change the culture and make it righteous. Peace like this is strictly the result of the coming of God's kingdom, incipiently in the preaching of the gospel and the transformation of the heart, and ultimately in the eternal kingdom of glory in which God will be all in all. Therefore do not look for this peace anywhere but in Christ's kingdom.

E. The Strength of the King's Forces, vv. 25-28

Returning again to the excellence of wisdom for administration, we see that Solomon, the man of peace, had a huge army and was in excellent shape for war. The food distribution system worked so well that 40,000 horses, stationed apparently all around the country, didn't starve to death. Oh no. There was no lack in the supply. In this kingdom, people showed up to work. They did their jobs. They were responsible!

Is this not like the great Prince of Peace, who treads down our foes, who restrains and conquers all His and our enemies?

III. The Excellence of Wisdom (vv. 29-34)

Finally, we see that wisdom is great not only practical purposes of everyday administration, and not only for its relationship to all the promises of God to protect and bless His people; it is great in its attractiveness, in its ability to draw in outsiders and make itself known throughout all lands. Wisdom excels!

A. Its Source (v. 29)

Wisdom excels in its source. It comes from God, as we saw last time. It involves a large heart, one that can embrace everything that's out there. A heart with a supernaturally enlarged capacity to do everything a heart can do. In Biblical thought, the heart thinks as well as feels, knows as well as emotes and desires. So Solomon's heart was huge to love, huge to know, huge to understand and desire. Honestly. Do you have the capacity to love one woman? Solomon loved a thousand. In our day and age, you don't have to be a great man to spend money. You don't have to be a great man to wield enormous power. That's one of the hazards of the nation-state. With a tax base of 315 million Americans, a non-entity in an ugly building in Washington D.C. may control more power than Solomon could have dreamed about. But Solomon was and remains the greater man. To know this man was to be awed, flabbergasted, stupefied not so much by his kingdom, great as it was, as by the man himself. Do you know anyone with a large heart like this, who has the ability to know and love and care about more things than you even have the ability to have heard of? This was a supernatural gift. God made Solomon great. You want to talk a rich, full life--Solomon lived it.

B. Its Extent (vv. 30-31)

How great was this wisdom of his, manifesting itself in a hearing heart that was interested in everything? It was greater than the wisdom of the East and the wisdom of the Egyptians. There have been some wise eastern sages; the text names four of them. These guys were known in that day for wisdom, but Solomon walked away with the cake. He was the wisest man, period. Indeed, only the King who is the wisdom of God is wiser than Solomon. The one who taught Solomon everything he knew now sends His Spirit to teach us everything we need to know, too. Solomon was known throughout the ANE; now, because of the wisdom of Christ, Solomon's wisdom is known throughout the whole world.

C. Its Activities (vv. 32-33)

So what does wisdom do? It organizes nations for success. It glorifies the kingdom of God by appropriating and realizing the promises of God. But it fundamentally manifests an interest in everything. Solomon was not content to accept the world as it was; he wanted to ransack it for everything it held. Solomon was interested in the world. That's the fundamental reality of wisdom. Wisdom wants to know, and it is humble enough to learn! With all his abilities, all his wealth, all his power, all his learning, Solomon had fundamentally a hearing heart. Humility speaks to the janitor, talks to the child, deliberately seeks out the homeless and destitute and powerless. The less someone can do for me, the more I want to befriend him: this is the true spirit of humility. These words of G.K. Chesterton are too good to ever overlook:

In a very entertaining work, over which we have roared in childhood, it is stated that a point has no parts and no magnitude. Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are--of immeasurable stature. That the trees are high and the grasses short is a mere accident of our own foot-rules and our own stature. But to the spirit which has stripped off for a moment its own idle temporal standards the grass is an everlasting forest, with dragons for denizens; the stones of the road are as incredible mountains piled one upon the other; the dandelions are like gigantic bonfires illuminating the lands around; and the heath-bells on their stalks are like planets hung in heaven each higher than the other. Between one stake of a paling and another there are new and terrible landscapes; here a desert, with nothing but one misshapen rock; here a miraculous forest, of which all the trees flower above the head with the hues of sunset; here, again, a sea full of monsters that Dante would not have dared to dream. These are the visions of him who, like the child in the fairy tales, is not afraid to become small. Meanwhile, the sage whose faith is in magnitude and ambition is, like a giant, becoming larger and larger, which only means that the stars are becoming smaller and smaller. World after world falls from him into insignificance; the whole passionate and intricate life of common things becomes as lost to him as is the life of the infusoria to a man without a microscope. He rises always through desolate eternities. He may find new

systems, and forget them; he may discover fresh universes, and learn to despise them. But the towering and tropical vision of things as they really are--the gigantic daisies, the heaven-consuming dandelions, the great Odyssey of strange-coloured oceans and strange-shaped trees, of dust like the wreck of temples, and thistledown like the ruin of stars--all this colossal vision shall perish with the last of the humble. (Chesterton, *The Defendant*, ch. 12)

Would you beg God with me for the humility to enjoy this world that God has given us? Truly it is a glorious place.

D. Its Fame (v. 34)

All the men of the nations came to hear Solomon. Who does that remind you of? Of course. Solomon may have attracted seekers after wisdom, but it is the Lord Jesus Christ who truly, through His supernatural wisdom, draws all men to Himself. By wisdom a kingdom is built. And just as the man of peace built his kingdom by wisdom, so it is by wisdom that the Prince of Peace is building His kingdom. Submit to His wisdom, especially the wisdom of His plan of salvation. Come under the sway of His kingdom, and by wisdom appropriate the promises He has made to you. Amen.