

Wisdom to Govern – Trinity 5 2011

I Kings 3 vv 5-12 p338, Romans 8 vv 26-39 p1135, Matthew 13 vv 31-52 p980

We've all heard of the Wisdom of Solomon. Today's Old Testament lesson is about how Solomon wisely attained wisdom. Solomon had just become King of Israel, after a brief tussle for the throne with his brother Adonijah and the death of his father King David, and he went to Gibeon, a place of worship, to honour God and to establish the kingdom. At Gibeon God spoke to Solomon, the new king, in a dream and asked him what he would like God to give him. Solomon asked for wisdom. What people in positions of authority and responsibility need above all things is wisdom. So God was pleased with Solomon and told him that he would indeed receive the gift of a wise and understanding heart. God pointed out to Solomon that he could have asked for a long life or for riches or for the life of his enemies. If God asked you what you wanted, what would you ask for? Health and wealth might be high on your list of priorities. I don't suppose you'd ask for the life of your enemies, but you might ask for success in your chosen field. You might want to be top dog at work or in the sports club or in the voluntary organisation to which you devote your time. God doesn't say it's wrong to want to live a long and healthy life or to be rich or to succeed in life. What God says to Solomon is more subtle than that. More important than health, wealth and success is wisdom. Solomon needs wisdom to be a good king. Actually you need wisdom to be a good anything, to be good parents, a good priest, a good prime minister or a good road sweeper. You need wisdom to be good. In the story God promised Solomon a long life, riches and victory in battle because he first asked for wisdom. Health and success in life very often do go together with living wisely, but not necessarily. Health and wealth, power and status are not the point of life. It is better to live wisely and to be poor, or to live wisely with an illness or disability, or to be a wise failure, than it is to be a rich, fit and successful fool. Health, wealth and success are not the point of life. The point of life is life. Life in all its fulness is eternal life and eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ Whom God has sent, Jesus the power and wisdom of God.

So what is this wisdom which Solomon is commended by God for asking for? According to the Bible, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*, whereas, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*. To live wisely is to live your life as a walk with God. To live wisely is to love God and, if you love God, it follows that you love other people too. Jesus says, *If ye love me, keep my commandments*. St Paul says, *he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*. A wise person is one who lives in accordance with the Law of God, the Law which is summed up in the twin commandments to love God and to love one another. Just think what a difference it would have made in the recent scandals if our politicians, policemen and newspapers had behaved wisely, if they had feared the LORD and kept His commandments. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour*.

The wise man built his house on the rock. The foolish man built his house on the sand. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*. The fool doesn't believe in God or doesn't

believe that God is of any real significance. So he doesn't fear God and keep His commandments. He may well behave unlovingly. The fool may well commit adultery, kill, steal, lie or covet. He may well do all these things because he is not wise, because he does not know God. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.* But it's more subtle than that. The fool doesn't only disobey God's perfect Law of Love in order to achieve his life's goals. The fool disobeys God's perfect Law of Life because he has the wrong goals. He thinks that life is about health, wealth and success, whereas in fact life is about life. Life is about knowing God. To know God is to have life in all its fulness and life in all its fulness is eternal life. Only if we are wise enough to understand what really matters can we be wise enough to see that it matters how we attain our life's goal. The better we know God, the better we understand that love is both life's end and the only way to live. St Catharine of Sienna wrote: *All the way to heaven is heaven itself, because Jesus said, I am the Way.* Boethius said: *Thou art the journey and the journey's end.*

Solomon was promised a long life, wealth, and the life of his enemies because he asked for wisdom to be a good king. More importantly, he was wise enough to ask God for the gift of wisdom and God gave him that gift. Solomon is still remembered as a wise man nearly three thousand years after his death. I don't suppose any of us will be Solomons, but the same principle applies. The foolish man built his house on the sand. When the floods came, the house on the sand fell flat. Eventually, the phone hacking, the lies, the relationships of dubious propriety came to light and the house on the sand fell flat. The wise man built his house on the rock and when the floods came his house stood firm. It was built on the Rock, the Wisdom of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The wise man knows God and Jesus Christ Whom God has sent. The wise man fears God and keeps His Commandments. Love is the fulfilling of the Law and Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

So let me leave you with one more thing to think about. What did Jesus really mean when He said, *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you?*