

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

I Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 August 16, 2009

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“Be careful what you wish for, you might get it.” You know that saying? If you could be granted a wish, what would you wish for? The better question might be “how long would it take you to figure out what you would wish for?” That might be the better question. On the surface, a lot of money might be a good wish. But I have been reading stories of what happens to people after they win the lottery – millions of dollars. The stories are not all “happy ever after” stories.

Let us consider the wish of King Solomon in our text for today. It comes to us from the First Book of Kings. This First Book of Kings is about the past – history!! That word to us is almost synonymous with the word “irrelevant.” Face it, we live in a world of email, twitter, instant communication. We move on to the next innovation so quickly that recent ways of communicating is – well, history, something in the past. Carl Sandburg wrote, “History is a bucket of ashes.” 1st and 2nd Kings at first seem to be nothing but history - the record of rulers long dead and battles long forgotten. Kings does provide some useful information about Israel and Judah during the period of the monarch rulers. That hardly seems important to contemporary Christians. We are not Jews of the 6th century B.C.

But Kings is not just history – it is preached history - oral history. It is written to transform the belief of its first readers and to get them to re-evaluate their identity before God. This narrative finds its relevance in God – the very God that the church (we) come to worship today. What is that relationship between God and humanity? That is what the books of Kings are about – and that is much of what we are about as we come to worship each Sunday.

Solomon will be the last ruler of the United Kingdom. After him the Kingdom will split – Judah and Israel, with different kings. And soon both kingdoms would fall to the Babylonians.

This book of 1st Kings opens with a dramatic power struggle for the throne of David. It is a contest between Solomon and Adonijah. Solomon wins and he is the one who follows his father as King. Solomon would rule for 40 years. There was no major power to bother him. It turns out that his greatest flaw was that he tolerated the gods of his foreign wives. He built temples for them and when foreign slaves were not enough to build the temples, he conscripted his own Hebrew citizens to work as slaves. Books in the Old Testament attributed to Solomon are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

The verses of our text for today are concerned with what will be the pattern of Kingship for Solomon. Interesting it is not about the usual riches and royalties of kingship. Solomon is the first king not selected because of skill at war or leadership. Nor is he elected by representatives of the tribes. His kingship is the first genuinely dynastic accession. He is King because his father, David, was king.

The story begins with a word from God that could be taken as a test. The passage is framed as the account of a liturgical event. We would think that Solomon would go to Jerusalem to sacrifice to God and ask for God’s blessing. The text gets by with Solomon going to Gibeon because the temple has not yet been built in Jerusalem.

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Solomon goes to Gibeon to offer sacrifice and to ask for God's blessing. God appears to Solomon in a dream and "Ask what I shall give you." Solomon gives the right answer. First, he acknowledges that God has shown both him and his father "great and steadfast love." Then he acknowledges the difficulty of the office and his own limitations. Solomon asks for one thing. "Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, to be able to discern between good and evil. "An understanding mind" – the literal Hebrew says "a hearing heart" – a heart with skill to listen – so he can discern between good and evil. In the Old Testament, the heart is the organ of thought and will. "So I can judge between good and evil" – literally means "to hear judgement." Solomon asks for a wise and discerning heart.

Is that a good wish? If you want to be a fair and honest King, I think that would be a great wish. God grants his wish. The story that follows our text is used to prove that God gives Solomon what he has asked for.

There are two women living in this house together – they are the only people there. One has a baby. Three days later the second one has a baby. One of the mothers rolls over on her baby while she is sleeping and kills the baby. She takes her baby and exchanges it for the other baby. When the mother wakes up and discovers the dead baby, she examines it and realizes it is not her baby. The case comes before Solomon. After the case is presented, Solomon realizes he cannot determine which mother is telling the truth. So he orders the guard to cut the living baby in half and give each mother half of the baby. One mother responds by asking Solomon to give the baby to the other mother. "Don't kill the baby." But the other mother responds, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" Solomon gives the baby to the mother who was willing to give him up rather than have him killed because he was wise enough to know the real mother would not want her child killed. "When all Israel heard the verdict King Solomon had given, they held the King in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice." The passage for today can cause us to think of how the leaders of countries administer the work of nations. It calls on us to consider our vote on the kind of leaders we want in office.

So, what do you wish for today? In our Prayers of the People each Sunday, there is usually a prayer for world peace, for the end of poverty, for leaders of the world to work together for the good of humankind. That is a prayer, but it is also a wish.

Do you remember wishes you have made in the past? Most of the time, the situation determined the wish.

I wish I could pass this test!!

I wish I could get that ball for Christmas!

I wish I could go to the Naval Academy!

I wish we could win the game Friday night!

I think of wishes I have made that involved others. You can do the same. I wish my friend Elias in South Africa could buy a stove so he could bake and sell bread in our village of Moteti. I wish Wesley had not died from an overdose of drugs. I wish we as a church could accept and celebrate black people as a part of our congregation! I wish Mike was not in the detention center for six months! I wish my friend, Kim, had not died in a car wreck at the age of 16. Those were not just wishes, they were also prayers.

I firmly believe that we have a lot to do with our wishes coming true. The names may not be the same, but when we ask for God's help that we be more faithful and more like Jesus who we intend to follow, I believe that God will hear and bless our wishes. That is what happened to Solomon. He didn't live up to his request, but he did make a good wish as he began his reign as King. We are God's children and God wants the best for us – all of us. Let us make wishes that include others. Let them be good wishes. And let us work to make them come true.