

1 Kings 3:4-14

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And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." ⁶ And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, 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 this day. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" ¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. ¹⁴ And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

If you could travel back in time to give your younger-self some advice, what would you tell yourself? There might be a few warnings sprinkled in here and there, certain things to avoid in their future. You might implore your old self to take out some extra time for a few particular loved ones whom you now miss. Maybe there'd be some investment advice which could bring some financial stability. And all that advice *could* maybe help you in the life you've already lived, but what about the coming days and years? I'm sure we all have things that we'd be happy to change about the past, but what about the days coming that we don't know anything about yet? What could we do to help with those?

King Solomon was feeling a similar sort of dilemma in our text this morning. He was young, the newly crowned King of God's people Israel, and he realized he was in a bit over his head. His dad—King David?—one of the greatest kings ever. He'd grown up as shepherd, he became a valiant warrior, commanded men in battle, went toe to toe with the mighty Goliath and struck him down while everyone else cowered in their tents. He was also a man of the arts, a gifted musician, one who wrote the most beautiful of Psalms to the Lord, Psalms which the people were *still* singing. And he was wise, in every situation he knew what to do, *because* he walked and talked with God. Yeah, that was all King David—Solomon's dad—and then here's young Solomon trying to fill in his dad's shoes. **"I am but a little child,"** Solomon pleads before God. **"I do not know how to go out or come in."**

So, God responds to Solomon with a very special offer. He cuts him a blank check of sorts, "Ask for anything you want, Solomon, and I will give it to you." Wouldn't that be nice to be presented with a similar sort of offer? "Anything you might need for the coming years, ask, and I'll give it to you." Well, He has given us that promise, hasn't He? You know, when we ask the question, "How does God answer our prayers," the Sunday School answer is, "Sometimes 'Yes,' sometimes 'no,' sometimes 'wait.'" But the *real* answer is that God always answers "Yes," when we pray according to His will. That's what Jesus meant when He said, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you."** (John 16:23) May the Lord help us to recognize today what we *truly*

need for the days ahead, and may we ask for it in Jesus' name and according to God's will. Because just like to Solomon in our text, God has a special offer for us today, which we'll ponder as we consider the theme: **God Offers Us a Blank Check**.

Solomon started out with so much promise. Here he was a young man probably about twenty-years-old, suddenly in a position of power and prestige and wealth, the king of an entire nation. You have to imagine that most people put into a similar position would let the power get to their heads, that they'd be arrogant, brazen, a general handful to be around. That wasn't Solomon though! In our text this morning we get a fairly good picture of what he was like: very humble, fully understanding his own weaknesses, and also a true child of God that trusted in the Lord for help.

We're told right off the bat that Solomon was in the city of Gibeon offering sacrifices to the Lord. It was a rather large city and only about 5 miles northwest of the capital Jerusalem. This location was a special place of worship for the people of Israel because that was where the tabernacle of Moses was located. At this point the plans for the great temple to be built in Jerusalem are well underway, but until that temple was built, the people worshipped here in Gibeon. So that's where we find Solomon, worshipping and making sacrifices to the Lord.

And what a sacrifice it was! We're told he offered 1,000 burnt offerings on that altar. And that isn't just an exaggeration to say that he offered a *lot* of burnt offerings, it was an intentional number. You see, the sacrifices in the Old Testament were tied to repentance over sin. You would repent of your sins, make a blood sacrifice to the Lord with a lamb or an ox, and the Lord would assure you of forgiveness. Ten was considered to be a complete number, and so ten times ten times ten (or one thousand sacrifices)—these were done by Solomon as a sure sign of sincere devotion to the Lord.

And God approved. He appears to Him by night in a dream (but truly making an appearance) and He hands Him this blank check. "Fill out the amount Solomon, whatever you want will be yours." Imagine you had the same deal. What would you ask for? A million dollars might come in handy! A trustworthy new car, perhaps. Maybe you'd set your sites lower and simply ask for a stable job.

Solomon had his eyes set on something else. He responded, ***"Your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"*** Colloquially, we say that Solomon asked for *wisdom* and that God made him the wisest person to ever live—which is true. But what he really asked for was ***"an understanding mind,"*** or literally in Hebrew ***"a listening heart,"*** one that ***"discerns between good and evil."***

This isn't worldly wisdom that he's after. He's asking for the wisdom from God that would bring King Solomon's heart in line with the will of God. A heart that would first recognize its own evil, a heart that would turn to the Lord in repentance and trust in His forgiveness, and then in turn would be prepared to listen to the problems of others and know how to respond. A heart that relied on God's Word for guidance, that would know God's will. So, he's acknowledging that the *only* thing that would make him strong enough to reign as King is the guidance and strength of God Himself.

This was a God-pleasing request, to which God responded with even more than Solomon had asked for. ***"Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor,***

so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.” And Solomon became world-renowned for his fame and his wealth—but most of all—for his wisdom. Think, for instance, shortly after this when two women came to him both claiming to have given birth to the same baby. He suggested that the baby be cut in half so that each woman would get part, knowing the real mother would never agree and would rather give the child away than see him die. And it worked; he figured out who the real mother was from her response. Think also of the Book of Proverbs which he wrote, chock full of tangible, rational wisdom that is still used and quoted around the world today. And the people came—kings and queens and the wisest scholars—all so that they could sit and listen to his wisdom.

And of course, we know, his story didn't end so well, or at least it took a bad turn. Before long, this prince of wisdom became the king of fools. Along the way, it seems that perhaps the money and power went to his head. In the pursuit of diplomacy, Solomon began taking many wives for himself from other nations, all who believed in many false gods. And this great King, who once offered 1,000 sacrifices to the LORD his Savior, was now turning to other gods in prayer. He who built the glorious Temple in Jerusalem for the One *true* God also built temples to Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and to Milcom the god of the Ammonites. That means that the very same man who once saved a baby and delivered him to his rightful mother was now building temples where similar babies were being burned alive as sacrifices to man-made statues. What a fall for the one started out so well!

Which leads us to ask today, *“Why, Solomon? Why was what God gave you not enough? Solomon, so wise, so humble, did not God give you more than you asked for? Not just wisdom but wealth? And power? And fame? How is it that God’s gifts were not enough—that you needed to take more, that you just needed more? How could you let that happen, Solomon?”* Wait a minute, I'm not actually talking to Solomon anymore, am I? Well, I am, but as I consider what Solomon did, how he began to think so little of God's gifts, about how he squandered his spiritual wisdom in favor of worldly pursuits, I realize that I'm talking to someone else too. My *real* frustration is with Sam Rodebaugh. Why do I do the same as Solomon? And perhaps you're wondering the same about yourself, too.

Consider the wealth the Lord has given *us*! Certainly, there have been painful times, but think of all the blessings along the way! Family, loving friends, jobs, our fellowship here. Sure, some of us have gotten sick, but the Lord healed us. Throughout our lives, as we continually failed in our sin and brought our guilt to the Lord, God assured us again and again that His mercy is new every single morning. (Lam. 3:23) He's assured us constantly in His Word, ***“If we are faithless, He remains faithful!”*** (2 Tim. 2:13) This is *true* wealth. God's grace is a blank check with your name on it. And how frequently do I treat all this as just some pittance? *“You know what would make me really happy: _____.”* How many days of my life have I spent sulking rather than rejoicing in God my Savior?

That Savior stands as the ultimate contrast to both Solomon and us. When He was young, He was studying the Word and accumulating wisdom, increasing ***“in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”*** (Luke 2:52) But He did not do this just so He could become wise. Jesus spent His life growing in wisdom so that He could share His wisdom with you! That's what God was speaking about when Jesus spoke through the pen of Isaiah the prophet, saying, ***“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”*** (Isa. 50:4) His focus was on the wisdom of God so that he could share it with those who were weary.

And that includes us. We here are weary. Weary over our sin. Weary over our constant return to our own weaknesses. Weary of being totally unable to get out of our own way. We are weary, and Jesus is

here to sustain us. He invites us, ***“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”*** (Matt. 11:28) He is the one who picks us up from the mud of our sin and washes us and makes us clean in His own blood. He takes our hearts of stone and replaces them with clean hearts, with right spirits. (cf. Ezek. 11:19, Ps. 51:10) He clothes us in the robes of His righteousness so that the sins of our past no longer cling to us and can no longer condemn us. In this promise, we find rest.

We see the perfect example of all of this in our text. Did you hear how Solomon described his dad, King David? ***“He walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart,”*** Solomon said. But we also know about David’s sins. We know how he eventually became fat with his wealth and power and ceased being that mighty leader. We know how he took his friend’s wife into his own bed and then killed his close friend as a cover-up once she became pregnant. We know how David’s heart started to tune out God’s will and began to follow the way of this world. We also know what God did about it. We know that God sent a messenger to David who brought David to confront his own sins head-on, on the basis of which David announced, ***“I have sinned against the LORD.”*** God’s response? ***“[I have] put away your sin; you shall not die.”*** (cf. 2 Sam. 12) God covered David’s sins in the blood of His own Son, paid for them in full. For *that* reason, it was true what Solomon said, David was righteous and upright in heart before the Lord, because that’s what God had given him.

Solomon would have a turnaround in his life too. The day eventually came when Solomon realized that all the frivolities of his life were just vanity, meaningless grasping at the wind. But he also recognized that true joy comes only from God. (cf. Ecclesiastes 2) In his book of Ecclesiastes, we have reason to believe that Solomon returned to the Lord in humility, trusting in the Lord for forgiveness as he once had. It *appears* that the Lord once again gave Solomon a *listening* heart, one that listened to what God had to say most of all. And God wants the same for you. So, He offers you a blank check today, ***“Whatever you ask of the Father in [Jesus’] name, He will give it to you.”***

I’m sure very few of us have ever been offered a physical blank check before. But perhaps you’ve been charged for something, “Whatever *you* think is a fair price”? That’s a blank check of sorts and that’s always a tough payment to figure out. Any time that’s been said to me, I think I usually end up paying more than I normally would, just because I want to do the right thing for the person. I’d feel terrible if I responded to their generosity with anything less than generous. In the same vein, if anyone ever truly cut you a blank check and said, “Put any dollar amount you would like,” I’m sure many of us would try to figure out a rather conservative figure. How could you respond to generosity with greed? That just wouldn’t be right.

Well, God’s given us a blank check with our name on it, but there is no way we can be conservative with our request. For what we *need* is the most valuable wealth of all: we need wisdom from God. We need new hearts to replace our selfish hearts, hearts that listen to God before anyone else. We need hearts that that humbly will turn to the Lord and ask Him for forgiveness. And we need forgiveness, not just for a few sins here and there, but for our entire being.

What’s God’s answer to our request? It is: “Yes.” You have it! It was a costly price, yet one He paid, ***“And the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*** (1 Jn. 1:7) This is what we need most of all to get us through the coming years. Any trials that pop up, any changes in circumstance—it doesn’t matter! Like Solomon, like David, God has declared us righteous before Him. He’s declared that our sins have been put away, we will not die. And even if any of us were to die soon, God has declared that your heart now belongs to Him. You shall not perish but shall have everlasting life. That’s what we really *need*, so, thanks be to God for giving it freely to us in Jesus’ name. Amen.