

1 Kings 3:5-12

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Pick out whatever you want.” That’s what my grandmother once told me when she took me to a huge toy store. Wow! What does a second grader choose when someone says, “pick whatever you want?” I chose an eighteen wheeler dump truck. In fact, it’s still around, among the other toys in my mother’s basement.

It was a wonderful thing for my grandmother to say, “Pick out whatever you want.” But I’m sure she would have had her limits. It’s even more wonderful when the ruler of heaven and earth, the only being who has no limits, says “Ask whatever you want.” That’s what God said to Solomon, but do you realize that he says the same thing to us? At least three times in John’s gospel Jesus says to his disciples (and we are his disciples) **ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.** We might wonder how God could say to Solomon; how Jesus could say to his disciples, to us, “ask whatever you want.” Let’s see what we can learn about God’s offer from the conversation he had with Solomon.

Solomon had been named by David as his successor. But, not everyone was happy with David’s choice. Solomon was not David’s oldest son. As soon as Solomon took the throne he had to deal with a conspiracy led by his older brother Adonijah that also involved Atiathar the priest and Joab the general. After Solomon put an end to the conspiracy he was able to take a deep breath and think about being King over Israel, God’s chosen people, at the tender age of about twenty. That’s when it must have really hit home. He was in charge. The buck stopped with him. Ambassadors from other nations, powerful neighboring kingdoms, were eager to meet with him and test him out to see if he would be weak or strong, an ally or an enemy. He was only the third king of Israel and the nation was not all that united behind the monarchy. Any kind of trouble, foreign or domestic, could cause a breakup of the kingdom or even civil war. And his father David had made him promise to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, the temple God wouldn’t let him build but that he had been saving and planning for all his life. It must have been overwhelming to try to comprehend it all—what if he made a wrong decision?

What did Solomon do? He went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices. Gibeon was the place where the Tabernacle was set up. It was the place where the great bronze altar that Moses and the people had built while they were at Mt. Sinai had ended up. David had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, but the Tabernacle was still at Gibeon. So Solomon went to Gibeon and offered **a thousand burnt offerings on the altar.**

His purpose in offering these sacrifices seems to have been twofold. First, he was expressing his thankfulness to the Lord for allowing him to overcome the threats to his kingship and firmly establishing him on his throne. Solomon said to the Lord, "**You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.**" “God, you have graciously kept your promise. David didn’t deserve to have you do this. I don’t deserve to have you do this, but you have done this in spite of our sins and shortcomings.” And, by establishing Solomon on the throne, God was showing his intention to keep his most important promise, to send the even greater Son of David, the Messiah, the Savior.

Solomon recognized that God was being gracious and he responded by giving him thanks, not just in words, but in actions, in worship. What an example for us who recognize that God has been gracious to us, showering us with undeserved physical blessings, and most importantly, giving us the forgiveness and eternal life we don't deserve. We too want to thank God, not just in words, but in actions, in worship.

But there was another purpose for going to Gibeon and offering sacrifices. Solomon realized that he needed help. He says, "**Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.**"

This was the situation, the mindset of Solomon, when God came to him and said, **Ask for whatever you want me to give you.**

When God says to us, "Ask for whatever you want," he is speaking to people who know his grace and their need. He is speaking to believers who, like Solomon, acknowledge that they don't deserve anything from God; that all that they are and have is an undeserved gift. They have looked at themselves in the mirror of God's law and seen that they are sinners deserving only God's wrath and eternal punishment.

He is speaking to believers who, like Solomon, acknowledge that they need help. They are overwhelmed with the responsibilities God has given them, whether it be raising children, or planning their retirement or balancing all the responsibilities of work and family and church.

He is speaking to people who like Solomon, acknowledge, "Lord, I can't do anything on my own. I know if I try to do anything without you I will make a mess of it. I need your help."

Solomon didn't just ask for help in general. He was specific in his prayer. He asked, **give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"** He asked for a discerning, or literally, a hearing heart. He asked for the ability to listen carefully to what people were saying and then that he would be given the ability to discern who was right and who was wrong, who was telling the truth and who was lying. And God answered his prayer and said, **I will do what you have asked.**

Immediately following these verses the holy writer gives us an example of the wisdom God gave Solomon. It's the incident of the two women claiming the same child. Both seemed to have equal claim to the child. There were no DNA tests to determine who the rightful mother was. So Solomon gave the command to cut the child in two and give half to each. When one woman said, "fine, go ahead," but the other said, "no, give the child to the other woman, just let it live," it was obvious who the real mother was.

But note why Solomon asked for a discerning heart. He didn't say "so that I may become rich and famous and be considered the greatest king of all time." No. He asked for this gift because he wanted to serve God and his people. He said, "these are **your people**, Lord. I might be king, but the people are your chosen people. They belong to you, not to me. By ruling them wisely and justly I will be serving you."

Ask whatever you want is what God says to those who want to serve him. It's what he says to parents who realize that their children are not really theirs, but God's. It's what he says to parents who realize that by doing their best to raise the children God placed in their care and in

the training and instruction of the Lord they are not just serving their children, or serving society, but they are first and foremost serving God.

It's what God says to those who realize that everything belongs to God, nothing is theirs to keep. They realize that doing the job God has given them to the best of their ability and managing the money God has loaned them to the best of their ability is a way of serving God.

When we hear that God says the same thing to us that he said to Solomon, "Ask whatever you want," our sinful nature gets excited. We start thinking, "really? You mean I could ask for millions of dollars, or a bigger house, or a long healthy life of ease in retirement?" Some have even taken this promise of God to mean that they could ask for a loved one to be raised from the dead. But God's answer to Solomon points out our sinful selfishness and puts us to shame.

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

The other Scripture lessons for this week/morning warn us about putting our trust in wealth and earthly wisdom. They remind us that the most important thing, the treasure that's worth all we have, the pearl of great price, is the gift of eternal life. That's a treasure that is worth more than all the money in the world. It's a treasure that we could never afford to purchase, but it has been purchased for us because God kept his promise to David and Solomon and sent his Son, a descendant of David, to purchase that treasure for us with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He has won forgiveness for all the times that we have decided that we could do something on our own without his help. He has won forgiveness for all the times that we have heard him offer to give us whatever we ask and have asked selfishly.

Like Solomon, God has placed us where we are. Like Solomon, if we think about all that God has asked us to do, we are overwhelmed. We realize that we can't do what he asks of us by our own power. We know how merciful he has been to us in Jesus and we want to serve him in all we do. And so, like Solomon, God comes to you and to me and he says, "Ask whatever you want."