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## Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, April 25, 2010

### Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

#### *Wise Guy*

1 Kings 2:1-4; 3:1-15

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Heritage is all about being a “Wise Guy”. Former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm said: “Future historians will see best the multiple factors that led to the decline of America. But I suggest one of the major factors will be the failure to replace ourselves with enough stable children born to families with the ability to raise successful children.”<sup>1</sup> Governor Lamm is a “Wise Guy!” What Governor Lamm is talking about is heritage and our failure to receive it, embrace it, enrich it and transmit it.

You remember the covenant made with David. God promised that David’s house and his kingdom would endure forever; his throne would be established forever.<sup>2</sup> When God promises to do something forever, all of eternity is being shaped. And not only did God promise to establish David’s kingdom forever, but he would be the one that would fulfill the conditions. An established kingdom was David’s heritage. The kingdom could never be secure in the hands of a sinner. Israel learned over the centuries that disobedience in her king always brought the nation to ruin. But the godly among them knew one thing for sure: God had promised that the throne of David would be established forever. Only God can do what God can do. Jesus would fulfill the covenant made to David.

What is a heritage? In 1 Kings 2:10, the Hebrew word for “firmly established” means “something occupied, a possession or inheritance.” A heritage is something that is firmly established.

Basically, a heritage is something that remains after you; something you pass down to future generations. 1Kings 2:1-4 and 2:10-12 explain how King David passed on a heritage to Solomon and ruled forty years in Israel. David’s charge to Solomon was to be strong and walk in the ways of the LORD your God. His son Solomon inherited a rule from his father that was “firmly established.” When the sun sets, it does not suddenly grow dark. There is an afterglow. And when we die, we do not suddenly cease to exist on earth. There is an afterglow of influence. And that influence is our heritage. A heritage can be spiritual, taking the form of God-fearing habits we’ve passed along to

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Lamm, taken from a speech he delivered in Washington DC titled “How to Destroy a Nation.”

others. It can be cognitive in the form of education. It can be emotional in the form of good self esteem. It can be physical in the form of good health. And it can be material in the form of possessions and financial well-being. King David left a good heritage. We, too, are creating a heritage that will affect the lives of others. Heritage is all about being a “Wise Guy”.

Let’s look at an example of a bad heritage. There is the heritage of Eli described in 1 Samuel 1-4. Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phineas. Eli as high priest wanted his sons to follow in his steps. He had enjoyed the privilege of tending the Ark of the Covenant at Shiloh, ministering to Hannah in the temple and even assisting in training Samuel, the first prophet. Yet all the while Eli’s sons were blaspheming God and he did nothing to restrain them. Eli was so busy getting Israel ready for his sons that he forgot to get his sons ready for Israel.

Certainly King David was not a perfect man. His coveting, adultery, murdering and lying show us that no heritage is untainted by sin. But David was “a man after God’s own heart.” That’s because he could repent. And such pleases God. To David God promised a heritage, that there would not fail to be a descendant of his to sit on Israel’s throne forever. And so it was that Jesus Christ was born to us through David’s line.

Let me cite two examples of non-biblical characters, each who left a heritage. Take J. S. Bach. A Christian, Bach lived in Germany in the late 1600s and early 1700s and worked for the church as a musician and composer. He fathered twenty children and his descendants dominated western music for 200 years. And even today his heritage enriches our lives as we listen to his works. Then there is the Edwards family. A Christian man and woman wed in the late 1600s. Three generations later Jonathan Edwards was born. He became a revival preacher and president of Princeton University. There are 1,344 descendants in the Edwards heritage. Of them, 186 were ministers. Dozens were college professors. Eighty-six were state senators. And there have been three congressmen, thirty judges and one vice-president of the United States.

Heritage is all about being a “Wise Guy”. Wisdom stands at the forefront of having a good heritage. We see this in 1 Kings 3:1-15. “At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’” And Solomon answered, ‘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. Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a child and do not know how to carry out my duties.

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<sup>2</sup>2 Samuel 7:16

Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.”<sup>3</sup> God was pleased that Solomon had asked this. He gave Solomon a discerning heart; that is wisdom.

Imagine it's your birthday. With your family and friends, you have finished dinner and a birthday cake with candles is brought in. After singing “Happy Birthday,” the time comes to blow out the candles. But before you take a deep breath to blow out all the candles in one blow, someone says to you, “First, make a wish!” You had not thought about a wish. But the candles are burning low and friends are waiting in silence. You have but a second to make up your mind. What request shall you make?

If you were given only one request by God, you would not want to answer on the basis of an immediate or impulsive desire or need. To answer wisely, you would want to think about it, determine your scale of values and ask for something that would be a permanent blessing.

In our text, Solomon is put in this predicament by God, who comes to him shortly after he ascended to the throne of Israel and says, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon might have asked for wealth, a long life or to be free from opposition. Solomon asked for wisdom. Because he asked for wisdom, “Give your servant a discerning heart”, God was pleased and granted his request. If you were given but one request by God, would you ask for a discerning heart, that is wisdom? Or would it be something else, like money, health, success or love?

Is wisdom what we want? God says to us as he once said to Solomon, “Ask what I shall give you.” Our answer should be based on our greatest need rather than on our most intense desire, for many times what we desire is not necessarily what we need. Our greatest need informs our heritage.

What is our deepest need? Do we agree with Solomon that wisdom is what we need most? Not everyone would agree on wisdom. Karl Marx claimed that humanity's deepest need is the possession of things, goods and economic equality. Sigmund Freud claimed that our deepest need is pleasure in terms of sexual fulfillment. Alfred Adler took the position that humanity's most basic need is power.

Solomon asked for a discerning heart. He asked for wisdom.

What is wisdom? Perhaps we can begin to answer the question by seeing what wisdom is not. Wisdom is not native intelligence. Each of us is born with a certain amount of grey matter. We call it our intelligence quotient or IQ. It may be high or low. There is nothing we can do about it. It is the way we were made. Our IQ is a natural

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<sup>3</sup>1 Kings 3:5-9

endowment. Winston Churchill once told his son that to a large extent, we in the civilized world erased the lion and tiger from the human heart, but we did not succeed in removing the donkey.

If wisdom is not IQ or knowledge, what is it? Wisdom is the ability to make good judgments and the right decisions. Some of us are reluctant to make decisions, because we fear that the decision will not be the right one.

Reinhold Niebuhr asked for wisdom in a little prayer that has become a classic and is used by Alcoholics

Anonymous: "God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." Shortly after Solomon's request, the gift of wisdom was needed when he was asked to settle a dispute between two prostitutes<sup>4</sup> claiming the same child. You recall that each had a baby and one mother in her sleep rolled on her baby and smothered it. Then she took the other woman's baby and claimed it as her own. The case came before Solomon. He resolved the matter by ordering the child to be cut in two and a half given to each mother. But the real mother, out of love, cried out, "Please don't kill the child. Let the other woman have it." Solomon awarded the child to the woman who pled for the child's life; for he had the wisdom to know that she was the real mother.

Heritage is all about being a "Wise Guy". Wisdom is the ability to lead and distinguish between right and wrong. Solomon asked of God only one thing which was most important to him; a discerning heart that is, wisdom.

Without a dependence on Jesus Christ we lack wisdom; we are ignorant. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." A good heritage begins when one acknowledges God by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Ignorance passes away and wisdom comes.

How do we get wisdom? Wisdom is a gift of God. In fact, wisdom is God. Just as God is love or truth, God is wisdom. Thus, only he can give wisdom as he gives himself to us. If we would have wisdom, then, like Solomon, we must ask for it: "Give your servant a discerning heart."

As a nation, we have become increasingly awash in information; much of it misinformation. Viewpoints that challenge and even mock time-honored truths, values and righteousness are given open forums by misled columnists and a media that seems bent on pushing a skewed intellectual and politically correct agenda upon us. For example, opinion columns mock the traditional understanding of marriage

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<sup>4</sup>1 Kings 3:16-28

being understood as that between a man and a woman. Most modern-day “intellectuals” have turned their backs on wisdom and the laws of God. They beat the progressive drum of a socially just and tolerant Utopian society, embracing practically everything but biblical truth. Ironically, as this very truth has been systematically scoured from American society, we can see a directly proportionate increase of hopelessness and a desperate yearning to fill the emptiness it creates. The ideological clash of this modern intellectualism and mankind’s arrogant insistence of self-determination in defiance of the very one who set the stars in motion is not only incredible folly, but will result in a social breakdown of calamitous proportions.

What is the main roadblock to wisdom? The arrogant insistence of self-determination. What is the key stepping stone to wisdom? Believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Why is being a “Wise Guy” important? It is all about a good heritage.

Wisdom leads like the good shepherd described in Psalm 23. Wisdom leads us to know the difference between right and wrong as we imitate God, living a life as Jesus lived, giving ourselves up for the sake of others as Ephesians 5:1-2 indicates. Wisdom leads us to conclude like John 6:35-40 that only those who believe in Jesus Christ will have eternal life and will be raised up on the last day.

Being obedient in order to pass on a good heritage requires humility, passion, persistence, resilience and affirming that service is better than selfishness. Heritage is all about being a “Wise Guy”. Let us pray!

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