

Promise Kept
1 Kings 3:4-9, 16-28
Matthew 6:9-10

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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1 Kings 3:4-9, 16-28

The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, 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 today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. The one woman said, “Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. Then this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.” But the other woman said, “No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.” So they argued before the king. Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead’; while the other says, ‘Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” So the king said, “Bring me a sword,” and they brought a sword before the king. The king said, “Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.” But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—“Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!” The other said, “It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.” Then the king responded: “Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.” All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.

Matthew 6:9-10

‘Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

This is a familiar story, and the moral is obvious. Love the Lord your God, and pray for wisdom, to follow in the way God wants you to go. It's a good story, and a good moral. A true moral.

But there's more to the story of Solomon.

This story takes place very shortly after King David died, and David's most junior wife Bathsheba played kingmaker. She persuaded King David on his deathbed to declare her son Solomon his heir, rather than his older half-brother.

Solomon is the youngest of the king's eight sons. He probably never expected to become king. He knows that he's not exactly a perfect model of what a king should be. So he makes large sacrifices to God, thanking God for this amazing gift that he has been given. God then asks Solomon what God should give him.

Solomon asks for wisdom to judge God's people, to discern between good and evil. And he gets it. With regard to everyone's lives and actions but his own.

It would take another hour for Carolyn to read all the Scriptures about Solomon, so I'll give you some highlights. Solomon rules a land from the Sinai Peninsula in the southwest to modern-day Iraq and Syria in the northeast.¹ He has an enormous royal court, so big that it takes wagons of flour, thirty cattle, and a hundred sheep to feed them for a day.² He keeps stalls for thousands of chariot horses, and his rule is known for peace.

Other rulers come from thousands of miles away to see the grandeur of the court and hear the wisdom of Solomon. Many of the Psalms that David did not write, Solomon does. The Biblical book of Proverbs is attributed to him, and the book of Ecclesiastes. Everyone comes to

¹ 1 Kings 4:21.

² 1 Kings 4:22-24.

Solomon for judgment, because his discerning eye can see what is right and what is wrong, in anyone's life but his own.

Solomon builds the Great Temple of God, the Temple by which the people of God defined themselves for generations. He builds the greatest temple ever built to the God who brought the Hebrew people out of slavery. And he uses forced labor gangs to build it. Yes, he enslaves the foreigners who live in his kingdom and makes them build the Temple.³ If you're not facepalming yet, I'll ask the question. How is this better than what Pharaoh did? How is it even different?

We have no record of Solomon ever killing a woman's husband to have her, like his father did, but Solomon was not exactly staying on what we'd call the straight and narrow. In a time when Israelites are forbidden to marry outside the Hebrew people, he marries the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh. In addition, he "loved many foreign women, including Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites." Scripture records that Solomon has one thousand wives and concubines.⁴

The stated reason that Israelites were forbidden to marry foreigners was that these foreign spouses would turn their hearts away from the worship of God and to foreign idols.⁵ In Solomon's case, boy, do they ever. He worships Astarte, the Sidonian fertility goddess, and the Ammonite deity Milcom. He builds shrines to Chemosh, the Moab destroyer god, and to the Ammonite Molech, whose followers practice child sacrifice.⁶ Whatever pagan idol one of his wives wants to worship, well, okay, Solomon will worship with her.

³ 1 Kings 5:13-18, 9:15-21.

⁴ 1 Kings 11:1-3.

⁵ Exodus 34:11-16, Deuteronomy 7:1-5.

⁶ 1 Kings 11:3-10.

Solomon still loves God, but he's a part-time lover. He worships all these pagan idols, too. He certainly worships at the idols of power and worldly success.

Solomon goes so far astray that God has finally had enough. God lets him keep his kingdom for his lifetime, because of God's love for his father David, but, after Solomon's death, the kingdom is ripped in two.⁷ God keeps God's promises, but Solomon's son ends up ruling over just two of the twelve tribes, and his great kingdom falls apart, never to be reunited. God still loves Solomon, and he is one of the earthly ancestors of Christ, but Solomon's empire and all that he lives for other than God collapses.

It is unfortunate for Solomon that he did not have a prophet, like David had Nathan. When David got seriously out of line, Nathan showed up and told him "No." Nathan told David that he was not allowed to build the Temple. Nathan called David out when he had murdered Uriah and raped Bathsheba.

Nathan held David accountable.

Nobody holds Solomon accountable. He was very wise and discerning in judging what was happening in the lives of other people, but utterly blind about what was happening in his own life and his own actions.

We have some folks who are getting ready to formally join this congregation, and we sat down and talked. They asked me, "What are core Presbyterian beliefs? What do Presbyterians believe?"

⁷ 1 Kings 11:11-13.

That forced me to think about that. As a pastor's son, I grew up in the Presbyterian church, and Presbyterianism soaked into me by osmosis, like water into a plant's roots. So I had to think about it to articulate these things.

Let's start at the beginning. God is sovereign. God is the king. God made everything that there is, and God is the rightful owner of everything that there is. When the Hebrew people wanted to have a king, God was angry. God told them that their having a human king would not end well, because a human king would not be worthy.⁸ That was for one simple reason.

We are all sinners. I am a sinner. You are a sinner. Any human being you can think of is a sinner. No religious leader, no king, no politician is above sin, or above criticism.

We have one savior. There was one human being who was not a sinner. His name was Jesus Christ. No religious leader, no king, and no politician can save us from what we really need to be saved from. If you hear anyone claiming that they can, it's a sign to watch out.

Because we are all sinners, we are all in need of God's amazing grace. And God's grace is enough. There is not a single human being on this planet who is so good that they don't need God's grace, and there is not a single human being on this planet who is so bad that God's grace is not enough for them. When Jesus came to earth, it was because "God so loved the *cosmos*,"⁹ the whole world and all that is in it.

Because we are all sinners, we all need to be held accountable. Not just to God, — we are all accountable to God — but, if we're going to live together as a culture, as a society, as a congregation, as a nation, we each have to be accountable to other human beings.

⁸ 1 Samuel 8.

⁹ John 3:16. "*Cosmos*" is the Greek word usually translated "world."

I am accountable to my wife, and she to me. We made promises to each other at our wedding.

As people who live in the United States, we are accountable to the courts, which are ultimately standing in for the people. I can't drive a hundred and twenty miles per hour the wrong way on Two-Seventy¹⁰ and refuse to pull over for the police. Neither can you. Neither can anyone else. That's a good thing.

As the pastor of this congregation, we are accountable to each other, y'all and I. We made promises to each other when I was installed. That's a good thing.

As a pastor in the Presbyterian Church, I am also accountable to the Presbytery of Scioto Valley, of which I am a member. That's part of the deal when I became your pastor. If I were to do something terrible, whether or not it was a crime (I haven't, by the way), they have the power to try me, and the power to suspend me or even defrock me, make me permanently not a minister. And they are accountable to the Synod of the Covenant, who are accountable to the General Assembly. That's a good thing.

As a member of a Presbyterian congregation, you are accountable to the Session. If other methods of reconciliation had failed and the Session were to find it "necessary to preserve the purity and purposes of the church,"¹¹ they could try a member of the congregation and exclude him or her from holding office in the Church. This happens rarely, thank God, but it can happen. That's a good thing.

We are all accountable. The rapper Tupac Shakur may have claimed that, "Only God can judge me,"¹² but he was not Presbyterian, and he was wrong.

¹⁰ The Interstate beltway around Columbus, Ohio.

¹¹ Presbyterian Church (USA), *The Book of Order*, D-1.0103.

¹² Tupac Shakur, *All Eyez on Me*, 1996. Shakur never claimed to follow a particular religion, and most analysts describe as a deist.

Accountability, or, rather, the lack thereof, is a large part of what is wrong with America today. Too many people feel that they are not accountable to anyone for what they say, or what they do. Too many people do or say whatever feels good, without regard for the consequences, to themselves or others.

Accountability is a good thing. I am glad that I am accountable. And you should be, too.

If Solomon, who was, according to all accounts, the wisest person who ever lived, after Jesus, went so far astray when no one held him accountable, how far astray will we go, if no one holds us accountable?

I pray that none of us ever find out.

AMEN.