

# Written Copy: The LORD Prepares His Church Vocations – 1 Kings 3:9-14

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas

Sunday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## The Text: 1 Kings 3:9-14

<sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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."

## Exegetical Statement

Solomon had secured his position as David's successor and the sole king of Israel. He travels to Gibeon which is "The High Place" of worship to the LORD to offer sacrifices seeking forgiveness of sins and grace so that he might discharge his duties in keeping with the LORD's will. The LORD appears to him in a dream and asks Solomon what gift should be bestowed upon him as ruler/shepherd of God's chosen. It's a test of Solomon's faith which he passes with flying colors. He confesses in humility his lack of experience and what is needed for the vocation the LORD has given him. He presents himself not as a king but as the LORD's humble servant, and in doing so speaks his hope that the LORD will bless him in the same manner. Then instead of asking for selfish gain he asks to be given a heart of obedience and discernment in order to judge and rule God's people, being able to see with clarity the real issues at hand and discern what is good (in obedience with God's will) and what is evil (standing opposed to God's will). This request, being in keeping with God's will is pleasing to God and is granted Solomon as a gift of grace. The LORD also gives Solomon some of what he could've asked for but did not: riches and honor among men. Solomon awakes and realizes it was a dream, but still believes that the LORD came to him and spoke to him. He responds in faith by returning to the other Great High Place of sacrifice in Jerusalem before the Ark of the Covenant and offers Whole Burnt Offerings confessing both his sinfulness and the LORD's mercy and forgiveness and Peace offerings that confess the fellowship he has with the LORD by His gracious gifts.

## Focus Statement:

Just as the LORD granted to Solomon what he asked for to fulfill the LORD's vocation and then gave Him more than what he asked for, the LORD does the same in our lives through Christ Jesus who became the embodiment of true Godly wisdom in the flesh. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection as communicated in the Gospel He provides for us true understanding of who God is to us and for us, how we are to live in this broken world, and the means to carry on even when we fail. Through Christ our failures are made into His victory.

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

The vocation God has given each of us as the Church is beyond what we can handle by ourselves. If we try to live out our lives without His presence and His gifts of true wisdom we will most certainly fail, as we do even with these gifts since we have hearts and minds always ready to disobey

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Remain connected to the source of Godly wisdom in our lives. See our lives as a vocation given by God where we demonstrate how God would have people live and the grace, forgiveness, and salvation He gives in the Gospel when we fail.

## Subject Sentence: God Prepares His Church for its Vocation

I can relate to what Solomon was feeling in our Old Testament Lesson today. He was looking at the qualifications needed for the Vocation the LORD had raised him up to fulfill, to be King of the LORD's chosen people, and confessed that he fell far short. Yes sir, I can relate. Not that my vocation has anything to do with being a king, but I have been called and installed to be the Shepherd of the Flock here at Lamb of God. To be a servant leader. And there have already been plenty of times I've thought to myself: "You really don't have what it takes." Now I'll admit I'm not always swimming in self-confidence. But when I look realistically at the Vocation of Pastor in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod who has been called to preach the Word: rightly dividing and preaching the Law and the Gospel truthfully and equally, and administer the Sacraments, I find that as a poor miserable sinner who needs what the Word and Sacraments offer just as much as any of you I fall far short. I am to stand in the place of Christ and announce the Absolution of you. I am to lead you and guide you as a Congregation and as individual Christians to live out your salvation in fear and trembling, but at the same time with the hope and joy faith provides. Yet as a human being I am just as much in need of those things too.

This is not something I've just realized. I, along with my classmates during our 4<sup>th</sup> year at the Seminary confessed the same thing. It was in the Pastoral Leadership Class that I took just before graduation. This class was not just dealing with abstract issues. It was a practical course and our Professor Rev. Bob Weise provided for us numerous cases of problems encountered in the Parish. Some of them he dealt with personally during his Vocation as a Parish Pastor. Others were drawn from the experiences of other professors, and some came from former students of his who were now called and serving in the field. The names had been changed to protect identities, but the problems and situations were

real. Stories of conflict surrounding such things as the relocation of a picnic area on Church Grounds, to cases of infidelity concerning an officer of the Church, to tension between an elder and his pastor that made the congregation take sides and threaten to split it in part. There was even the case of a church whose budget needed tightening and therefore it was decided to stop providing donuts after worship. Families threatened to leave over that. We read an account of the problems, and then talked about ways to handle them in according to God's Word. Then we would hear how the Pastor of that congregation handled it and discuss the pros and cons of his response. When the class was through you might think we were empowered with ideas of how to handle difficult things. But instead we had been given a glimpse of all that can go wrong with the Church as she lives and serves in this broken world. We had only scratched the surface of what can happen. I remember one of my classmates posing the question we all wanted to ask but were afraid to: "We've never done this before. How are we going to handle all that can possibly go wrong? How are we supposed to minister to all the things that can happen in broken people's lives? How are we going to find meaningful and needful things to preach on week after week?"

I would suspect that those individuals that we are going to install as Church Council Members may have the same kind of questions and concerns about the Vocations they have before them. And they should, just as I should, just as you should. As baptized believing Christians the LORD has called you into His Church and given you your Vocations as: spouse, parent, child, neighbor and friend, citizen of this country, and as one charged with building one another up and sharing the Gospel with those whose lives you touch. Those are formidable tasks, and like Solomon they should give us pause, reflection, and reason to cry out to the LORD in prayer. Now some might say, "Running and leading the Church is

easy, you've got all you need written down in the Scriptures. You just have to do what it says." And true enough. But those commandments and instructions have to be carefully and faithfully applied to everyday life where things are not so black and white, not so cut and dry. It's not as easy as it sounds. Those of you who were a part of the Bible Class we had on Wednesday Evenings in the Fall: "The Intersection of Church and State" will remember how hard it is to be loving and gracious in a culture that demands we acquiesce to its standard of truth which stands counter to Scripture. When those who live lifestyle sins are members of our own family. These things affect all members of the Church, not just the leaders.

So, each one of us would be in good company with Solomon. He had come before the LORD at one of the two Great High Places of Worship, one of which was there at Gibeon where the Tabernacle that Israel worshiped in throughout their wilderness wanderings was set up. The Sacrificial Altar they used in the wilderness was there. Solomon had come as the new King to offer Whole Burnt Offerings for forgiveness of his sins and the sins of the people. To seek the grace, mercy, and forgiveness the LORD offered through that Sacrificial System. It was there that he took a good hard look at what it meant to be the Ruler and arbitrator over God's chosen people and didn't like what he saw. He looked at the gifts that God had given his father, King David and saw that he was not gifted in the same way. He saw that the responsibility of leading God's chosen people in this broken sinful world was too great a task for him alone.

And it was here that the LORD came to Solomon in a dream. Before Solomon even asked anything, the LORD made him a wondrous offer: **(1 Kings 3:5b) "Ask what I shall give you."** Now, pause and think about what is being offered. God is laying before King Solomon

a blank check. You fill it in Solomon: what is the gift that you desire above all other things? Think about how you or I might answer that request. How much would you be tempted to drop your façade of piety and holiness and answer according to the desires of your heart? The LORD gave some examples of how sinful people would be tempted to respond in **1 Kings 3:11a** “... and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies” We would be tempted to ask for that which would be most beneficial to us and to our family. We would seek to grow our personal temporal kingdom even at the expense of our relationship with God and the Vocation he has given us to be His Church.

But Solomon was brought up by his father King David to be a man of faith. A man of humility. A man who takes the Vocation of ruling God’s chosen seriously. He doesn’t ask for personal wealth, or power, or fame. Instead he responds in **1 Kings 3:9** “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?” That is a great prayer. That is an unselfish request to the LORD in keeping with His plan for Solomon and Solomon’s role in God’s kingdom. That’s why the LORD is pleased with it and that’s why He grants it. **1 Kings 3:11-13** <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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” Solomon didn’t deserve these blessings or earn them. Yet he received what he asked for and more. He asked unselfishly because the LORD had

already granted him faith, and through that faith comes the unselfish love that is from the LORD. The LORD had planted this love in Solomon's heart. These gifts the LORD gave were a demonstration of the grace, the mercy, and the love the LORD has for Solomon, and has for you and for me.

The LORD has come to us and offered us even greater gifts of overflowing love, compassion, and mercy that are beyond what we would ever think to ask for before He had given them. That is what He has given us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that was promised to King Solomon. Jesus is the King of Kings and ruler of the whole universe, of all things and all people. And He is the embodiment of Godly wisdom. He is the Wisdom and Word of God made flesh. But when He came, He didn't look like this to those who were charged with shepherding God's people. To them He looked quite the opposite: they saw Him as weak, as foolish, as unwise, as a pretender to the throne of David. That's because He didn't come to fulfill the role that they, *in their wisdom*, thought the Messiah should. He came according to the will and wisdom of God the Father, the source of all wisdom. And He fulfilled the Father's will and plan perfectly.

He came to provide what you and I needed most. According to the wisdom and justice of The Father sin must be punished. You and I as creatures created to obey God refuse to obey daily. And that means we owe God death, eternal death. But God in His wisdom, in His love, in His mercy, chose from the beginning of time to send His Only Son to stand in our place, suffer our punishment, and give to us all that His perfect life has earned for us. His suffering and death paid the price for all the world's sin. His resurrection demonstrated that He is the victor over our worst enemies: sin, death, and the devil. He earned for us the

greatest gift God has to offer, to make us good enough to be God's special children. To be able to stand before Him with nothing that would deserve our punishment. Even though we continue to disobey, instead of eternal death we receive His gift of eternal life. The wisdom of God provided Jesus Christ: true man and true God to win these things for all men. And He was the only one who could do it.

We receive this gift not through a dream, but through the gift that is God's very own words concerning what Jesus has done for us. These gifts come through the faith we receive by hearing the Gospel Message. That faith is given and implanted in your heart and my heart through the Holy Spirit who is present in God's Word, Who is present when God's Word of promise is combined with the water of Baptism. He comes to you and to me and takes up residence. He makes what the world considers foolishness to be the truth, to make the eternal wisdom of God our reality that we hold fast to. **Ephesians 1:7-11** <sup>7</sup> **In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,** This is what you and I have received from Christ as His free gift. He gives it to all members of the Church. It's the gift of faith in Christ crucified and resurrected that unites us with each other and unites us with God Himself in the Sacrament of the

Lord's Supper. And it will find its complete fulfillment when the Wisdom and love of Christ reign supreme everywhere: on the Last Day.

Through the Word and the Sacraments, we receive all that is needed for us to fulfill our vocation as the Church in this broken and sinful world. It is how I am equipped to be your Pastor. It is how these members of the Church Council are equipped to fulfill their roles. Not by human wisdom. That comes from sinful selfish hearts and leads us to disobey God rather than follow His will. The LORD granted to Solomon the wisdom he needed to be king and gave him even more than he asked for. The LORD does the same for you and for me. He gives us His Spirit who through the Word and Sacraments leads us with true Godly wisdom. This was the assurance my class received from Professor Weise that day. He said to us: "You know, you don't have what it takes. But God does. He already knows the problems and situations that your going to deal with. And He has already begun the work to prepare you. His given you His Holy Spirit, 24-7. He has promised never to leave you or forsake you. He will not fail you but will use you in accordance with His purpose and plan. Call on each other. But make sure you call on Him and remain in a faith relationship with Him." Words of wisdom based on Scripture. And in that faith relationship with Him, when any one of us fails in our Vocational calling to be the voice, hands, and feet of Jesus, He promises His mercy and forgiveness. When we fail, we ask forgiveness of Him, and then of each other, and whoever else in the world we may have offended. And that is a great demonstration of the gift of grace Jesus has for all men. The grace He would have us proclaim as the Church. So, as each of us looks to the vocational responsibilities we have here at Lamb of God, be it Pastor, Church Council Member, spouse, parent, child, friend and neighbor, citizen, and

God's witness to the world, let's do what Solomon did. In all humility recognize our unworthiness for these callings. Ask the LORD to equip us with the wisdom and gifts we need to do His will, and then trust that He will answer, as He did with Solomon with more than we could ever hope for. May this promise, kept alive in our hearts by faith, keep you holding steadfast to Christ now and forever. Amen.