



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 KINGS 3

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LONGING FOR A LEADER

We are designed to live in connection to a leader. As created beings, we properly respond to our Creator as One who is worthy of worship and trust. It was only when we bought into the lie that we can be our own leaders without submission to anyone that we as the human race lost our way.

Scripture relates a time in Israel's history when the people were doing what was right in their own eyes and feeling frustrated. Discontented with Yahweh as their king, they longed for a human leader. They wanted someone to make the big decisions for them - someone to blame or to glorify. They were willing for him to conscript their sons for battle, their produce for taxes, and their land for his own purposes. They demanded a flesh and blood leader like the other nations had. He would rescue and protect them, and they would be free from having to hear directly from God to make good decisions. In reality, their demand

revealed their irresponsibility.

We live in a similar time with contemporary culture featuring the popular ethic of "everyone doing what is right in their own eyes." Yet we, too, long for a leader. We want protection, provision, and pleasure. Sadly, our culture is handicapped in developing effective leaders. The social institution designed to develop leaders (the church) has been co-opted by a consumeristic culture rewarding celebrity rather than character and skills rather than maturity. We find ourselves ruled by emotional, relational, and spiritual children fighting over their toys (idols)

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and throwing sand in each other's faces, while the world outside their sandbox slips into insanity. We have canceled truth and convinced ourselves that each of us can have a reality of our own making. We are stumbling in our search for someone with a compass that points true north, and our choices are not that pretty.

A SOLOMON WOULD BE GOOD.

When King David was dying, he installed his son, Solomon, to be king in his place. 1 Kings 3 records an experience Solomon had with God that defined him and the nation for years. God appeared to Solomon when he was in his teens and offered to give him whatever he asked. There were no boundaries or limits; no genie-in-a-bottle restrictions. The account is instructive. We see a graphic picture of God's heart. He was eager to be generous to Solomon. He appeared in a dream. Solomon didn't go out looking for Him. God initiated the offer. He was also faithful to His promises and His purpose. Solomon recounted how God had never failed to keep a promise. He might have been thinking about the promise to Adam and Eve about a seed that would prevail or the promise to Abraham that his seed would reverse the curse of Adam's sin. He could have

been remembering God's promise to Moses to have a people on earth to represent Him. It is surely certain that he had in mind the promise God made to his father, David. God had promised David that he would have a son that would sit on the throne. Solomon knew he was the first iteration of that promise. It would later be fulfilled in Jesus who sits now and eternally on the throne, ruling God's kingdom on earth.

God is generous and faithful to a narrative in which we play a role.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER

Solomon confessed that he was just a child. He did not possess the wisdom to make the needed decisions in front of him. Wise men always feel like children. They never get over it. If they start feeling wise, they become fools. Solomon demonstrated that one can feel like a child and think like an elder. Elders are concerned about the people under their care. Their purpose lies beyond their own security and significance. They want the best for their community. Solomon asked for a "hearing heart." He didn't want to rule alone. He wanted to carry out the decisions God would make. I'm glad he had not attended the leadership

seminars that focus on dreaming your own dreams and fulfilling them. He had not been instructed to dream big and make it happen. He had not visualized five cars in the garage, the 20,000 square foot house, the elaborate vacations, or the influence with the elite. God had given him an assignment bigger than any dream of his own making. Likewise, His visions for us are always bigger than our visions for ourselves.

Solomon's prayer pleased God. That is not a bad goal for praying. How can I pray so that God is pleased? Maybe that should be the metric for effective praying. It is not about how much we get or how quickly we receive what we requested. The question is: Does the prayer make God smile? It should be said that God not only gave Solomon what he requested, but much more. Solomon did get wealth, prestige, reputation, and influence, but that was not his original request. It could be argued that later in his life he began to focus on those blessings and forgot his childlikeness. Blessings can easily become idols. But in the chapters of 1 Kings following Solomon's prayer, we see his wisdom revealed. His fame grew because his hearing heart revealed a God bigger than the smartest of men.

WHAT ABOUT US?

So what does this generous God offer to us? After all, we are not called to rule the nation of Israel. Do we fit into the narrative like Solomon? The apostle Paul addressed that in his letter to the believers in Philippi. Paul was in prison, but was still demonstrating the fruit of a hearing heart. Listening to God, he wrote letters that ultimately defeated the godless empire of Rome and the joyless religion of the Jews. Focusing on Philippians 1:3-11, we see that God's grace offers us His commitment to finish the work He began. Paul could live in joy knowing that, though absent from his congregation, he could trust God to finish what He started. He goes on to acknowledge that he and the believers in Philippi were sharing the very life of the risen Christ. This was no mere self-improvement scheme. It wasn't about trying to live up to standards or suppressing their own inclinations. This "life of the age to come" was theirs now. Paul loved them with the very compassion of Christ. All that Christ's life entails belongs to the believer who trusts in Him. It is even better than God's gift to Solomon.

In Paul's prayer for the church of Philippi, we see the sequence of Christ's

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life in them. It starts with growing love. Since love is the energy and power of God's kingdom and the transforming agent in each believer, nothing eternal is done without growing love: "*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment...*" (*Philippians 3:9 ESV*). This kind of love is not just an idea, a feeling, or a choice. It is a dynamic relationship with God Himself whereby we continue to see our needs and His supply. We move from children asking for toys to elders asking for wisdom. We grow from anxiety about our performance to joy in giving him pleasure.

Love makes way for insight and true knowledge. Information gleaned without the interpretation of love can be cruel and destructive. It is not enough to know more facts than ever. We must relate to each other with the desire to build up and equip. God's love has eyes of its own. It sees the world the way God sees it. Such insight ensures that decisions are the very best possible. Codes of ethics will not suffice. Only those so captured by being loved by God that they can't wait to love will see things in a way that allows them to make decisions that reflect heaven's

perspective. These decisions will produce a good fruit of harvest and provide grounds for looking forward to the final accounting: "...so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (*Philippians 3:10-11 ESV*).

Growing love, insight, confidence, fruitful harvest.

You are a leader. Your role is important. Like Solomon, you are a recipient of the promise to David. You have a kingdom to rule and decisions to make. God offers everything he has to assure your success as His partner. Believe it! Feeling like a child, you can choose like an elder.



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