

## THAT FINE LINE

### I Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

#### Intro

This morning's passage details a transition of kingly power from David, to his son, Solomon.

Now while David certainly had his extended moments of wandering away from the path of God, he was still chosen by God and it was through his leadership that the people were able to experience a period of time when Israel was looked to as a powerful country.

However, in that power comes great risk and responsibility for while power has the ability to lift people up by using it appropriately and as God would have us do, it can also tear people down, because it becomes an intoxicating elixir that drives individuals to think only of themselves.

Solomon's reign begins with this recognition.

Solomon had stood beside his father, as co-regent (think of this as king-in-training), and watched as power has corrupted even those who were supposed to be the most loyal. Solomon knows that the position that he is entering into is one that will challenge him, tempt him, and cause him to walk that fine line between following his personal wants and God's communal needs.

David has died. Solomon is the new king.

Put yourself in Solomon's place, taking into consideration that which we have mentioned already, and ask yourself, what would you ask God for?

The scripture reads this way.

### **I Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14**

<sup>10</sup>Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. <sup>11</sup>The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. <sup>12</sup>So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

<sup>3</sup>Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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?"

<sup>10</sup>It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup>God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup>I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup>I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. <sup>14</sup>If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

### **Ephesians 5:15-20**

#### **Intro**

Our second passage takes the query that God placed before Solomon and makes it a whole lot more personal. Now, all the trappings of kingship are removed so that the wisdom that is discussed fits perfectly into life as we know it. There is a reality that is spoken of quite clearly though: these days are evil. Many of us hear that and try and turn it into some variation of religious speak. But there are too many things, from the Pennsylvania grand jury report that was released this past week about the hundreds and hundreds of sexual predators and abusers over the past 70 years within the Roman Catholic church (as well as the cover-up that followed), to the over 70 people who were sent to the hospital from one New Haven, Connecticut park after taking a toxic laced synthetic marijuana, to a general culture of affixing blame on someone else, all the time, no matter what, there are too many things that remind us that this quote is anything but superficial church talk.

Which makes the declaration of, 'be careful how you live' all the more poignant. So, as was asked a moment ago, if God gave you the chance, what would you ask Him for? The scripture reads this way.

### **Ephesians 5:15-20**

<sup>15</sup>Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **"That Fine Line"**

As was mentioned prior to our second reading, when we look at Solomon what we see is someone that we cannot relate to.

Solomon was the King of his country: we are but one of some 300+ million citizens.

Solomon was incredibly rich, so rich that the cost of anything was of no concern. We, while rich by the world's standards, complain when the cost of a gallon of gasoline goes up a few cents from one day to the next (or maybe that's just me?).

Solomon was powerful and other nations respected the strength that was under his command. Our power is rather limited in its scope and as for respect, forget other countries because if we can get our kids to respect us, then we end up feeling pretty good about where things stand.

Simply put, we are not in the same league as Solomon.

But why do we think that? The descriptions that I used to differentiate us relate to title, wealth, and power: all standards of the world. What we often forget, is that just because someone has all the accolades of the world does not mean that they are going to struggle any less than we do on a day to day basis.

And then, on the flip, just because we do not have the worldly honors does not mean that we are any less a person than Solomon.

After all, look at what the passage describes to us this morning.

What we hear is yes, a person who has been crowned king, but also a person who is rather nervous and maybe even more than a little scared about stepping into the shoes of his predecessor, of his father. We hear Solomon saying to God, "you have made your servant [a] 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."

Now by all accounts, Solomon was of a good age, but the metaphor does work: in terms of using the power and authority that he has received, he is like a little child: he doesn't know how to use it.

So what does he do? Does he abuse the newfound influence to help build him up?

No. What he does is recognize that he needs help, but more importantly that he needs God's help. He asks, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil." Solomon is in a position of authority but instead of walking that fine line and falling toward the side of personal wants, he recognizes that the collective needs that can be satisfied through the wisdom of God as being so much more important.

Here's the thing, and this is what is reiterated in the passage to the Ephesians, all of us have the opportunity to make this distinction because all of us are in a position of authority. Even if the only authority that we have is in relation to our own person, we are still in charge; we are in a position of power.

With that in mind, what are we going to do with that power?

Are we going long for all those things that the world declares that we should want?

Or are we instead going to strive for the things that are of God; those things that we innately know that we need? Are we going to build up or tear down? As we walk that fine line between right and wrong, wisdom and foolishness, the world and God, in our position of authority (at least as it appears to us), what are we going to choose?

Every day that goes by contains more than a small sample of examples of people using the authority that they have to make decisions that impact those who are around them. Yes, there are certainly times when the impact that is made builds up...but in the social media world that we live in where insult has become the accepted norm, we know that such affirmations feel like they are in short supply.

So with that in mind, I have a different sort of illustration. For the last several weeks there has been a pair of finches that have taken up residence (with the intent of having a family) in the middle hanging basket on the front porch of the parsonage. This is something that we actually enjoy and have had it happen on and off over the course of several years.

In any case, the chicks had hatched and we could tell that they were getting bigger and stronger because their chirping when they got hungry could not be denied.

Well, on Thursday it was time for two of them to fledge, to leave the nest. Jen just happened to be there and was able to watch it (and get photos!) as it took place. One of the chicks had started to flap these things attached to the side of his body and realized, 'whoa: I can fly!' At which point the mother showed up with some food and stood on the chain just above the basket encouraging as only a mother bird could (by hopping up the chain little bit by little bit) for the baby bird to put those wings to use...which it did. As it set sail on its first flight the mother bird flew right along beside it, all the way over to pine tree across the street.

I know that it may feel like apples and oranges, but that mama bird worked at building up her chicks and when it was time, 'encouraging' them to fly the way they were created to.

The simple fact of the matter is that each of us can add to or take away from another's life by praise or criticism, attention or neglect, caring or contempt.

Today, will you add to each life you meet, or will you take something away? Will you be a friend - or a foe? How will the lives you pass look when you are gone? You're in charge. Now what will you create?

I know that you may be thinking to yourself, "oh, it can't be that easy. Life is hard and there are all sorts of variables that go into all of the decisions that we make everyday."

If you're thinking that, then my retort is this: why does it have to be so hard? Why can't it be as simple as making the decision as we traverse that thin line between the positive and the negative and decide to do the things that are positive, that are affirming, that are wise, that are loving, that are of God?

We have been given in our opening passage this morning, which is absolutely amplified by the New Testament text, is the example of a king who walked the fine line between the things of this world and the things of God. What he ended up reaching for was the wisdom of God, for the ability to build others up. In doing so, he was ultimately blessed with in ways that he could have never imagined.

What we need to understand is that our life is very similar. We too walk that fine line and have the opportunity to make a decision that will either reflect the way and ethic of the world, or the way and ethic of God.

So what's it going to be? Are we going to walk by the people of our life and tear them down (the way of the world)?

Or are going to walk by them and build them up?

Let us go to God and choose wisely.

**After Sermon Prayer**

God, it's so easy to look at the world and think that we can have no affect; that we are just being beat around in circumstances that fill us with negativity. And yet, we do have control, we do have a choice as to how we relate to each other: we can either tear down, or we can build up. God, we pray that You might work in and through us so that we are able to walk that fine line of life choosing wisely, choosing the thoughts, words, and deeds that are of You; choosing to build up all those whom we meet. God, fill us with Your Spirit, grant us the gift of Your wisdom, and let us build our friends, family, and neighbors up. Amen.