

1 Kings 2:10-12 & 3:3-14 - 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

Today I am going to talk about Solomon becoming king over Israel, replacing his father David who we are told had died.

Before Solomon became king, he was in a similar situation to our present queen in that had our queen's uncle not abdicated, and had he had children, the whole royal family would be totally different today.

In the case of Solomon, Adjonijah, David's eldest son, had declared himself king before David had even died, and it was only at the intervention of Solomon's mother Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan that David had Adjonijah removed and Solomon, David's chosen heir to the throne, declared to be the next king.

Out of all his brothers and sisters David had chosen Solomon to be king, and the process of him becoming king hadn't been a smooth one and his problems didn't end after his coronation.

His brother Adjonijah, still very resentful of losing the right to the throne still opposed him and Solomon had to fight a fierce battle to keep his throne and the right to reign over Israel.

However, by the time of the start of our reading we are told in chapter 2 verse 12 that Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his kingdom was firmly established.

So by the the time of our reading Solomon was accepted in his role as king, and stability and normality now reigned over Israel.

In verse 3 of chapter 3 of our reading we are told that Solomon showed love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, and he also offered sacrifices in the high places.

As yet the temple in Jerusalem hadn't been built and Gibeon was the most sacred high place in Israel at that time, and was relatively easy to get to, being about 5 miles north of Jerusalem; so it was there that Solomon worshipped God.

We are told that Solomon sacrificed there, and in verse 4 we are told that he used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar.

It is possible that some of the animals were donated by other families who would also stay for the fellowship meal.

I want to pause there for just a moment, because I want to try and describe what it would have been like to sacrifice a thousand animals, and its significance to the Israelites and to us.

By burnt offering the Jews probably meant roasting or cooking the animal to be used in a fellowship meal, but a portion of every animal would be completely transformed by being totally burnt.

The altar wouldn't be like our altar, first of all it would be very much larger, it would be made of a large number of stones, and in this case would be outside, because a huge fire would be burning on top of it, just like a very large barbecue.

The animal offerings would probably have been oxen or sheep and in this case there would be a thousand of them, that's a large number of animals, in the cooking and burning process.

A thousand animals would have taken a large number of people, all of whom would be priests, descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother, and it would possibly have taken several days to cook and burn the whole lot.

We are told in Leviticus 1:13 that the smoke from the burning animals would be pleasing to God and it was the portion of the burnt meat that was God's portion.

It was in the burning of God's portion that was believed to transform the meat from the ordinary into the sacred or holy.

Which is what we do at our Eucharist service when a priest consecrates bread and wine to the Lord and which for us then becomes sacred or holy, which is why the more common name for our service is Holy Communion.

Also in our Book of Common Prayer the post communion prayer reads, "Mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving", and in this service we say, "Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice."

In both the Israelite and the Christian ceremony of Holy Communion the meal becomes a sacrificial fellowship meal with God.

Moving on to verse 5, it was while he was at Gibeon that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. Dreams aren't unusual, God spoke to Joseph in a dream and told him to go to Egypt to escape from Herod.

Quite often, if we have a problem, it is nearly always better to sleep on it, and then by morning miraculously the problem has been solved, or at least the solution has become apparent; for a Christian this is, I believe, the work of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 5 we have the start of Solomon's prayer initiated by God with the words, "Ask for what ever you want me to give you."

What an opportunity Solomon had, this was stuff of fairy godmothers, you know, *'you may have a wish.'*

But rather than thinking of himself and what he would like, whether he needed it or not, he only thought of other people and of their needs in relation to the way he would rule God's people and God's great nation.

It was here, right at the beginning of his rule, that he demonstrated his exceptional wisdom which was probably his greatest strength throughout his life as the king of Israel.

From verse 6 to 14 we get Solomon's beautiful prayer where Solomon not only talks to God but also listens to God.

At this point I have to confess that I find it very much easier to talk to God than to listen to him.

But having said that, when I do listen, the rewards for listening have been far better than I could possibly have wished for.

I am also confident that you've also experienced blessings from God as well, because our God is a great God who only wants to do the best for us, if we would only speak to him and listen to him.

But instead of asking for personal things Solomon says, "Give your servant 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?"

We often hear of Solomon's wisdom but seldom do we hear of his humility, but here is true humility in acknowledging that he doesn't know it all, but needs help if he is to succeed in the task that God has set him.

When we get into a tough situation and pray for help we too need humility', it's no good saying to God this is the problem, this is how I'm going to solve it, now Lord God, please make it work.

That's not how it's done, we have to surrender all our own ideas and obey God in everything, and that may mean that instead of resorting to a grandiose schemes or a set of lies to get us out of trouble, we may merely be told to repent and ask for forgiveness.

Now Solomon asked for an understanding mind to govern God's people, and Solomon's action should be a model for every one of us who wants to do God's will in their lives.

We have all been given a job to do whether it is a menial job, or a job with great responsibility for the welfare of others, but what ever our jobs, let all of us pray to God in humility, for wisdom to do the job as best we can.

And because Solomon asked for wisdom to look after the people that God had placed into his care, God said to Solomon,

'Because you have asked for this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but asked for wisdom, I am very pleased with you.'

'And because I'm pleased with you I'm going to give you those things that you have not asked for, both riches and honour, and if you keep my statutes as your father did, I will also give you a long life.'

That last message from God, that those who do God's work will be blessed. is as true today as it has ever been.

So many people today think, and probably always have done, that a happy fulfilled life is to do with being some sort of celebrity, or how much money you have, or how many holidays you can go on.

But actually the pursuit of those things rather than bring happiness or fulfillment can so often bring misery and disappointment.

Solomon's pursuits did not revolve around himself and his personal needs or wants, but around other people and their needs and welfare, and it is so often in pursuit of those things that so often lead to a happy fulfilled life, and where we find that all our other needs are also miraculously met.

It was because he obeyed and trusted God that God made his reign a peaceful and prosperous one, and he became a monarch with world wide fame for his wisdom to maintain justice and peace.

And God also gave him a prosperous city which attracted the wealth and power of all the surrounding nations, and Solomon built a magnificent temple to the God whom he loved and who loved him.

What God did for Solomon he will also do for us, and indeed for many of us we have already been, and continue to be blessed by God's kindness and generosity in our lives, but be assured that there is no end to what God will do for those who love him.

Amen