

January 5, 2025. Christmas 2. Luke 2. Pastor Scott Brayall

Stand in awe, everyone, he's done it. He's figured out the formula to get God to answer prayers.

That's what it feels like to me when I read the account of Solomon asking for wisdom. It seems like there is a man who finally figured out the right formula—he asked the right question in the right way at the right time—and God just opens up the heavens with an affirmative answer plus more blessings besides.

It seems pretty impressive and exciting after years of pestering God for the same thing—and not even always selfishly! Sometimes it's for the sake of others! And yet these requests seem to be met with silence and I'm left to do theological gymnastics to explain why not this prayer, at least not at this time?

But Solomon gets wisdom and more.

Now, while Solomon does seem to receive his answer quite rapidly and dramatically, there is a wonder in this reading because it is not uniquely for him. The reason God blesses him so rapidly and abundantly is because he asks for precisely what he needs, and that in accordance to God's will, and because for God's own reasons He answers miraculously, but what he needs is also precisely what each and every child of God needs. And thus the prayer is answered to you as well, although I will concede, not in such an obvious manner.

Solomon, amongst all the myriad of things a person could ask for from God, especially when God invites you to ask for whatever you want, he humbly asks for wisdom. He knows the task of ruling ahead of him is too great for his mind to wrap around and faithfully accomplish, and thus wisdom is what he needs to get it done. But what is given to him is more than what most of us think of when we rightfully ask for wisdom in our own vocations.

As a father, when I ask for wisdom, I'm seeking knowledge of how to deal with Herschel's fairly frequent though not lengthy night time wake-ups, or how to get him to let me change his diaper when he knows that Becky is sitting right in the other room. Or as a pastor, I'm looking for a way to curb conflict or answer strange theological questions or I'm looking for the know-how to stop procrastinating so I can get to everything that needs doing and the to-do list can stop looming quite so ominously and my conscience can rest a little better.

If I were an engineer, a prayer for wisdom might be looking for a solution to a physics problem so that a building will be steady or a pipe won't risk bursting. If I were a farmer, a prayer for wisdom might be seeking out direction for which crops will do best in the

coming season's weather. For Solomon, his wisdom allowed him to govern people with justice, and his smarts impressed the other nations so that they feared and honoured the Israelites and it allowed them to prosper.

The Bible is very insistent that wisdom is vital to life. The bible is hard on fools, and it paints the wise in a very good light, and from Solomon's life, to have wisdom is good, and to be blessed with wisdom is a blessing from God.

But there is a depth to wisdom that goes beyond what the eye can see, beyond what our own reason would anticipate and look out for.

Christ, in today's Gospel, is shown to be wise at the age of twelve. He's with His family in the temple as they fulfill Jewish custom and law, coming to the temple for the proper feasts. After everyone else has left to go home, after they've fulfilled what God has assigned His people to do, Jesus sticks around to chat with the wise-guys. He's listening (which, as a side note, is characteristic of the wise), but then He's asking the good questions and His responses are astounding those who others looked up to for their wisdom.

It is clear that, just as God blessed Solomon with wisdom, so is Christ blessed with this heavenly brain power. Solomon demonstrates his wisdom by saving the life of a baby fought over by two moms, and in a like-wise manner, Jesus will teach in parables throughout His ministry, parables that will both astound and confound those who hear Him. This wisdom that He'll demonstrate throughout His years is already more than budding, evidenced by His conversations with these grown men, and even by His cryptic comment to His parents—I must be in my Father's house, or I must be about my Father's business.

But here is the twist—for Jesus to be in the temple, even for Him to be about His Father's business, this is a distinctly unwise thing for Him to do. This is not wisdom that leads to a solution of ease or practicality, like an engineer figuring out the mechanics of a bridge or a farmer realizing she needs to harvest a week early to get the best crop or even a parent figuring out how to deal with a child's temper tantrums or Solomon understanding how to lead the people.

All of these things are wise, and they are good, and that the brain can comprehend such matters is honestly a gift from God, and yet they are almost opposite of what Jesus' wisdom ultimately is. Jesus' understanding of Scripture, and His visiting the temple, each time He shows up, and His going about His Father's business, all of this ultimately ends up in nothing more than His suffering and death, which is what most earthly wisdom seeks passionately to avoid.

Yet this is the wisdom of faith, wisdom that trusts in what God says more than what eyes can see and the brain can rationalize. Our Introit compares God's great power and His rightful worship with His care for those who fear Him and hope in Him. Our reason says God should care for those who can serve Him and benefit Him, those who won't need His constant attention but can make it a few days in between pestering prayers, yet His wisdom and understanding is to care for those who put their hope in Him.

Thus Christian wisdom is not simply being really great with Bible facts. Don't get me wrong, memorizing Scripture is a good thing—to have Bible passages in your back pocket to pull out whenever you need them, either for yourself or for your kids or parents or friends, that is a good thing. But knowing all of Jeremiah or Jude doesn't get you more of God's favour.

In fact, reading your Bible is only half of the answer for our prayer for wisdom. If God is to make you wise, you must hear His Word, but then you must also live it out in faith—that is, it must be thrown into the wringer of life and then after your sin, the world's evil, and the devil himself have done their best, and God's Word has remained, then you begin to truly believe that it is true and right and good, this wisdom of God. This is how Luther said a true theologian is formed.

First they pray that the Holy Spirit would teach them God's Word, then you read or hear His Word, and then satan and the world tries you and God and His Word does His work on you in the midst of this broken creation.

It's how we learn God's faithfulness—that it is true even in spite of all the decay that happens. It's how we learn of His righteousness—as bad happens to us, it reveals our sinful reactions and it sends us in repentance and asking for His righteousness to live in us instead of anything we would have tried before. It's where we learn of His goodness—the only reasonable thing for us to do when God allows bad to happen, to us or to others, and yet He sustains our faith in Him, our trust that He will make all things right in the end, and keeping us in the faith is the truest good He has ever done for any of us.

This is precisely how Christ learned His wisdom, how He grew in grace. It's not that He was missing any of that from the beginning, and yet as He lived in faith and suffered right alongside His people, it was revealed to Him again and again, and it was confirmed to Him again and again, and those around Him could witness what He taught and how He lived in spite of being hunted around 2, and the Pharisees questioning Him, and everyone pestering Him until even the toughest of us would break.

But as He lived through all He lived through, His trial and torment, the mocking, the crucifixion and the abandonment all included, Psalm 119, that we read part of today, this Psalm that only He can honestly pray, it remained His true prayer. "Oh How I love your law!

It is my meditation day and night... I have more understanding that all my teachers for your testimonies are my mediation... I hold back my feet from every evil way in order to keep Your Word.”

Though it was written by the Psalmist, it was prophetic and only true of Christ, the child who was wise among the learned in the temple, and knew God’s wisdom was to return to there one day, God returning there to reign, not with jewels on His head but thorns, and all eyes to be on Him not in adoration but in disgust. God’s wisdom is to serve, and it is to serve you. To give you the fruits of His cross and empty tomb, the wisdom of Christ, and to care for you all your days.

This is truly why Solomon was wise—because he could care for the people placed beneath him. It’s why we pray for wisdom—not just to have the answers as parent or business owner or whatever role you find yourself in day by day, but to serve those God has placed around you to serve.

It’s why we gather here, for God’s wisdom has deemed it right that we receive once again of His gifts, that He may tend to those who hope in Him, that He may fill you with this cross-shaped wisdom to live your life, and that you may know that He has blessed you in Christ with every spiritual blessing. As much as Solomon received, in Christ you have more, for in Christ, you have Him.

In His Name,
Amen.