

1 KINGS 3:16-28

A. Introduction

1. In our elders' meetings, we're going to be tracing the story of King Solomon, from his coronation to his burial, as recorded in 1 Kings 1-11.

As well as seeing how he points us to the 'one greater than Solomon', we're going to focus in on what we can learn as elders from his life and particularly his downfall, as we seek to lead those whom God has made us overseers over.

2. In the opening half of 1 Kings 3, Solomon shows that he loved the Lord by asking for wisdom from the Lord.

Solomon recognised his need for God's help.

He knew that ruling over God's people was a huge responsibility.

So he asks for God to give him the wisdom he needed.

And God said he would give Solomon this wisdom that he needed to govern God's people.

The second half of 1 Kings 3 records an incident that shows that God had given Solomon the wisdom He promised.

3. Solomon is presented with a tricky court case.

"Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, "My lord, this woman and I live in the same house. I had baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no-one in the house but the two of us. During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son – and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne." The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours." But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king." (1 Kings 3:16-22)

The difficulty of this case is increased by the fact that there were no witnesses.

Which woman is telling the truth?

Solomon's ability to administer justice in this case will show whether God had given him the wisdom he needed to govern the people.

"The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'" (1 Kings 3:23)

Solomon begins by giving an accurate summary of the facts of the case.

Rather than jumping right in and making a decision about what to do, he ensures that he had got all the details correct.

He then delivers a verdict that appeared to be folly rather than wisdom.

"Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other." (1 Kings 3:24-25)

It was a test that was designed to expose the hearts of the two women.

It had the desired effect.

"The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" (1 Kings 3:26)

The first woman showed herself to be a true Israelite. Like Abraham she was willing to give up her son, and she did so in order to save him.

The second woman, however, was willing to allow the baby to be killed and take her half of the child.

Solomon now knew who the true mother was.

"Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." (1 Kings 3:27)

Justice had been administered.

God had kept His promise to Solomon.

Here was proof that Solomon was the right man to rule over Israel.

"When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice." (1 Kings 3:28)

4. Interestingly throughout this incident, Solomon is not mentioned by name.

He is always 'the king'.

And he certainly acts like 'the king' in how he deals with people here.

He is the king by showing mercy – prostitutes (!) had access to him.

He is the king by administering justice – as he delivers the right verdict.

And in these two ways he points us to the 'one who is greater than Solomon.'

Jesus welcomed sinners into his presence (Matthew 9:10-11), and can show mercy to sinners because He has dealt with the sins of all who trust in Him on the cross.

Jesus will ensure that justice will be done in the end (Romans 2:16).

Solomon is called the king because he acts here like the King.

5. How does this passage speak to us as leaders?

It tells us two things:

B. The local church we lead should be a community that shows mercy

1. We point to the king by showing mercy.

How do we do that?

2. One way we show mercy is by welcoming sinners.

Solomon showed this by allowing these two prostitutes into his presence.

This church should be a place where people of all backgrounds (including those that are morally questionable) find an offer of mercy in the gospel.

This church should be a place where people of all backgrounds (including those that are morally questionable) who trust in Jesus, are welcomed as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We need God to give us the wisdom we need to do this.

C. The local church we lead should be a community that is concerned about justice

1. We point to the king by being concerned about justice.

How do we do that?

2. One way we show that we are concerned about justice is by being serious about sin.

Solomon showed this by delivering the right verdict in the court case.

We are not 'kings' in the sense Solomon was.

But as leaders, we should have a concern about sin in the community.

We do this by pointing people to Christ as the place where their sins can be forgiven.

We do this by calling people to live holy lives by obeying Christ.

We do this by not allowing members to continue as members if they are unrepentant about their sin.

We do this by being clear that Jesus will punish people for their sin in hell for all eternity.

We need God to give us the wisdom we need to do this.