



The title of our message series really could have been the heading for the first 20 years of my life. When I was 18 years old I moved up to Truckee with all of my best friends. A few days before the move I was working on my 1987 Toyota truck and lost a nut that held on the head gasket. I didn't have enough time to order it so I just figured I would get on the road and buy it later. I left Big Bear early one morning towing a U-Haul trailer with all my stuff in it and my best friend Conrad following me in his truck. Somewhere off the 395 north of Bishop and south of Nevada my engine light when on; I didn't have many options in the middle of the desert for fixing my truck. I had a squirt soda bottle and knife in the front seat so I took off the bottle top, stabbed an X into it and screwed it on my engine. The light went off and we were able to make it safely to our new house in Truckee.

Now I'm not exactly sure if this is an example of wisdom, a crazy decision in my life, or I just got lucky, but for some reason it worked. Looking back on your life I bet that you can think of times where you just got lucky. Maybe you found yourself in a situation that was beyond your capacity and God helped you figure out a solution. There are probably other times that you made a crazy choice and when you look back on your life you can only point to the grace of God for getting you out of the situation. I would venture to guess that you've also had great moments of wisdom in life; those times that you wish could keep happening because you love the results so much.

The title of the message this morning is "Solomon's Simple Solution," when in reality the decision that Solomon has to make this week is anything but simple. Last week Mark taught on the encounter that Solomon had with God in a dream and the one request that Solomon made of God. That one request was for a discerning heart, or a listening heart; something that we tend to translate as a request for wisdom. This week we have the opportunity to see if God honors this request or if Solomon just had too much pizza and it upset his stomach causing him to have crazy dreams.

Open your Bible to 1 Kings 3:16–28. This may be a story that you are familiar with but I trust that this morning God wants to teach us all something new.

Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a 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" (verses 16–18).

We're not sure how long after Solomon's encounter with God this story takes place but it seem fairly close in time. To make the story easier to understand I chose to name these women. The first woman who comes to the king with the request I have named Tabitha and the second woman in the story Zoe. I love the respect that this woman shows to the king, but the fact is that this story reveals the spiritual state of Israel. In the law of Moses it was clear that prostitution was not an acceptable career choice for the women in Israel and here we have not one but two prostitutes standing in front of the king.

The story reveals to us that these two ladies are probably acquaintances or at least have known each other for a little while because we see that they were both in the same house when the other gave birth. An incriminating fact is tucked away in the story though; Tabitha clearly shares that no one else was in the house with them at the time of the incident that is about to be presented. This is a big fact for this case because in Hebrew culture there is a requirement that for a matter to be settled it had to be established the testimony of two or three witnesses. *"One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses"* (Deuteronomy 19:15).

"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 (verses 19–22).

Since Solomon was the king of Israel he would also have the power to judge over cases. Generally only the most difficult cases would appear before the king and usually would have been too difficult for other leaders in the community to handle. I want to bring to your attention that since this case came before the king it is probably safe to say that there are other people around

waiting to see how Solomon will handle this dispute; maybe even the leaders who had difficulty handling the case.

At this point in the story will you remove the stereotypes that you have already placed on these women? Once we read that they are prostitutes many of us have put a stigma on these women, but let's look beyond that to see them how God sees them. This may be difficult for some of us to do but to help see the story in a different light will you do your best to remove any preconceived notions? Right now we have two distraught mothers standing in front of the king. There is definitely a living baby involved and who knows where the dead son is at; he could be there in the courtroom with them intensifying the situation. One mother will never see her son again and one mother is desperately looking for hope.

Looking at this case from a purely judiciary standpoint we would see that there are two major offenses that have been broken. If indeed Zoe stole the baby from Tabitha then Zoe potentially could face death for kidnapping. If Zoe didn't steal the baby from Tabitha we now have a case where Tabitha is lying about the character of Zoe, but we already know that there is no other person to verify who the biological mother of the infant is.

The case has been presented and people are now looking to the king for a wise ruling. Learning about Solomon we can guess that he shared with some people about the dream he had; if God were to answer that prayer right now would be the ideal time. Up until now we haven't heard Solomon utter one word, but since the facts have been laid out it's Solomon's turn to speak.

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.'" 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" (verses 23–25).

What we have here is a typical "she said, she said" scenario. This is something that we would expect to see on the playground of a local elementary school where a teacher intercedes and gives both the kids a timeout for being childish. The whole thing changes pretty quickly though when Solomon asks for a sword to be brought to him. You have to imagine that people are wondering what the king has in mind. Does he have a stray thread on his clothes that he has to cut off? Does he want to cut his sandwich in half? What is going on here? The order is presented to cut the baby in half. You have to imagine the entire audience being in absolute shock. The king did not get wisdom but folly!

From a personal standpoint I couldn't take the order from king Solomon; it makes me sick to my stomach to think about a child being cut in two. Just to be clear I am not a mother but I am father. I have two beautiful little girls that I want to have the best chance in life. I want my little girls to see things that I have

never been able to see. I want them to have things in life that I never had. I want them to be safe and I want them to know God in a personal way. When Sophie was born she actually went straight over to NICU and as much as I wanted God to right what I thought had been done wrong to me I learned how much I needed the mercy of God in my life.

We want justice, but need mercy. Up to this point in the story your heart has probably gone out to Tabitha. There is a natural human compassion—in most of us—that expresses sympathy for her loss. At first glance we may have a wall up to her because of her occupation but once we realize that she lost her baby there is something internal that changes to compassion for the woman. We want justice to prevail and we want her to get her baby back but once Solomon makes the order to kill the baby something inside of you hopefully changed from justice to mercy. If your heart hasn't changed to the plight of these women yet keep listening because the story isn't over.

Once the order is given Tabitha cries out immediately and begins to beg Solomon not to kill the baby. You have to imagine that as soon as the order left the lips of the king Tabitha was crying out for mercy but just as quickly Zoe encourages the order of the king to kill the baby. The compassion of a mother is oozing out of Tabitha and her concern for her son; even if she can't have him she would never want him to perish. Tabitha would rather her son have the gift of life, even if it isn't with her, than to have to taste death.

This is a similar thing that happens to women all over the world. There are women who feel unfit to keep their children and wanting the best life for their child they put their babies up for adoption. These women consciously do this knowing they just can't provide for their child or feel unfit as a parent to provide the best home life; instead of their child having to suffer the compassion of human nature is revealed. On the other side we also see the dismal, broken-hearted, distraught pain of a woman who has lost her child. This isn't something I have personally experienced but there are probably some in the room who have.

In the order that Solomon gives we are able to see the depth of the hurt in the heart of Zoe. Hearing that neither woman will have the blessing of motherhood Zoe is excited; she wants someone else to feel the deep set pain that she has felt. The years of prostitution have left her an empty vessel in need of the mercy of God and even when it's offered she is so hurt that she is unable to respond with any compassion.

If you have been anxiously anticipating to see if God answered the request that Solomon made back in verse 9 of this chapter, the wait is over. Solomon has observed the response of both women; he feels that he has sufficient information to make a simple solution to a complex problem. Solomon calmly instructs his servants to give the baby to the first mother because he was

able to get to the bottom of the matter when the heart of both women were revealed.

Solomon used a difficult order to help him make his final ruling in the case. I feel like I can breathe now knowing that the baby is going to be ok! The tension in the courtroom that was so thick you could cut it with a knife has just dissipated. The nation of Israel can rest confidently in the young leader. People probably started talking about Solomon and word spread quickly on the streets of Israel about the wisdom on the young king.

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 (v. 28).

We could stop here this morning and most of us would probably be content knowing that Solomon made the right decision but it's almost as if the story is missing one last touch.

There is a reason that we are calling this series The Wisest Fool and today Solomon made a good choice. But like Mark said last week we have already seen evidence of a divided heart in the actions of Solomon. Today we affirm that in his leadership by the spiritual state that Israel finds itself in; although Solomon is a great leader with wisdom to spare, there is still something more to be said. The story can't end with it being all about him.

Solomon really is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ; Jesus was able to accomplish what Solomon wasn't able to accomplish in his leadership. In the Gospel a group of religious leaders approached Jesus in an attempt to trap him with a question but their attempt failed. Reading the Gospels you will find that Jesus is the leader that Israel was hoping to find but didn't have in the time of Solomon. For many of us, Jesus is the answer to life that we have been looking for.

At this point you may wonder what this has to do with your life. That is a great question because I think there are many things that we can learn from the simple solution that Solomon provides but I have narrowed it down to three application points for us to take away this morning. It seemed good to relate these application points to the movie *Vantage Point* that was released in May of 2008. The movie tells the story of the assassination of the President but shows it from the viewpoint of eight different characters. That is probably the same thing that happened to those who saw the original case ruled by Solomon and the same thing for our lives today.

Even though we want justice but need mercy the first thing we can do is defend the case of the innocent. Solomon could have kicked these women out of his courtroom and sent them over to *The Jerry Springer Show* but he choose to listen to their plea. The young people who watched the king listen closely to the plea of a

broken-hearted mother learned a valuable lesson that morning about defending the case of the innocent.

This week I was meeting with Sandy Hughes, our Jr. High Pastor, and we were talking about Operation Christmas Child. This is a very practical, kind of first step that we can all participate in to defend the case of the innocent. A bonus on this is an opportunity for those of you with children to teach your children about caring for the needy in our world. This is a very practical step that most of you can take today and start applying this message.

Since we want justice but need mercy will you be an agent of mercy this week? This can be a little more difficult to apply in our lives and will probably take some more effort; it will take wisdom to apply this one. In the story Solomon could have thrown these women out of his presence and disregarded their case but he didn't. Solomon looked past the stereotypes in their lives and saw the deep set pain in these women. To make this practical it could be looking past the outer appearance of someone you work with to share the Gospel with them. The next time they approach you just take the time to listen to their situation. This could mean that you listen to your neighbor who is in a difficult situation while the rest of the block is too busy gossiping about them. This may look like answering a phone call from a relative who is constantly making unwise choices in their life, instead of just sending the call to voicemail you actually listen to them and wait for your chance to speak truth into the situation.

Love those who are difficult to love. That day some people walked away from the courtroom with a different perspective on life. About two months ago our Elders shared Vision 2020 with our church. One of the things that we talked about was making 5,000 disciples for Christ on the Peninsula. That is not going to happen on its own; we need to start working on that today. There are some of you in this room that are mature Christians and I want to ask you to start praying about who you are discipling. The question may have to go a step further and start with who are you praying for them to give their life to Christ so you can disciple them. We have people that are waiting to get involved in community groups and we need people to step up and lead these groups. I'm not saying that all of these people are difficult to love but we need you to love on them and disciple them.

The way that Solomon handled this case is almost mind boggling but the Bible is clear in the book of James that wisdom from Heaven is full of mercy. ***"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"*** (James 3:17). Early in the book James gives us instruction about obtaining wisdom; he lets us know that all we have to do is ask God.

Could you imagine what the Peninsula would look like if we all stepped out of our comfort zone and asked God for more wisdom in our lives? One of the things that drew my family to CPC was the heart of this church; this is an amazing church if you didn't know it already! If only a couple of us apply the message to our life today we can impact the world, but the impact increases with every one of us that applies the message. The impact grows exponentially as our families, friends and neighbors

see the wisdom we have that is full of mercy. We want to work together to reach the Peninsula for Christ but we can't keep what we are doing hidden. It's going to take this unique mixture of wisdom and mercy to impact this place for Christ, but I think we can do it.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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