



Good morning. My name is King Solomon, but you can call me, King Solomon, my Lord! Please, don't get out of your seat to bow down to me. I know your culture is not used to being in the presence of divine royalty. I'm here today because you have been studying my life. Don't worry, I am not offended by the sermon series title, *The Wisest Fool*, because it's true. I was the wisest, richest, most famous and powerful king that Israel had ever seen. But, I was also a fool. The temptations of money, power and sex led to my ruin. Sure, I have plenty of regrets and things I'd like to change about my life. But I am thankful that I was able to leave the people of God with hundreds of proverbs, a book of wisdom called *Ecclesiastes*, and a book about romance, the *Song of Solomon*. There is also my life, which I hope would be a warning to you and a sign post that points to someone much greater than I.

Last Sunday, you heard about my divine dream. In that dream God came to me and gave me one wish, "Ask for whatever you want and I will give it to you." Can you imagine God asking you that question? He probably never will, but God in his grace asked me that very question. Do you know what I asked for? I said Lord, give your servant a discerning heart, a listening heart, so that I could govern your people well and distinguish between right and wrong. And you know what? God was pleased with my request and he even gave me what I did not ask for—wealth, honor and a long life. After my dream, I celebrated by returning to Jerusalem. There, in the City of David, the city of my father, I stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed even more burnt offerings to the Lord. I then held a bountiful feast for all my court. It was a glorious day! God was with the people of Israel and with me, their leader.

Well, unfortunately, the celebration would not last long. God did give me great wisdom and it was immediately tested in the form of a legal dispute over the custody of a child. In Israel, at this time in history, my primary duties were to be the military leader and judge for all Israel. I was both the commander-in-chief and the supreme court. As the king of God's people, I often speak as the mouthpiece of God, for I am the highest court of appeal and the foundation of all administration and justice in all Israel.

I am sure you have heard this story before. It has withstood the test of time. Ancient kings kept good records of exceptional legal decisions so that future generations could learn from us. My kingdom was no different. But, the reason I am here today is because many of you have failed to see the rest of the story. This is not just about my wisdom. This is a story about the character of God.

What did my throne hall look, feel, and smell like? Have you ever been to a royal Hall of Justice? My Hall of Justice was magnificent; I spared no expense. The outside of the structure was made from blocks of high-grade stone cut to size and smoothed on their inner and outer faces. The inside was simply amazing. Cedar, from the Forest of Lebanon, covered it from floor to ceiling. I love the smell of freshly cut cedar wood. I commissioned an expert craftsman in bronze and his army of artisans to skillfully create the furnishings for the Hall of Justice. He made beautiful bronze pillars, a network of interwoven chains on top of the pillars, and row after row of ornate pomegranates filled the court house. He also made stands, tables and chairs.

And my throne, well, it was the most glorious, beautiful, and ornate throne to have ever been created. The throne was covered in plated gold and inlaid with precious stones. It wasn't the most comfortable, but it was beautiful! My craftsman was so amazing that I set him to work on the Temple and the rest of my palace as well. I don't mean to brag, but I want to give you a sense of the beauty and excellence in craftsmanship of the Hall of Justice. Here's what happened in the Hall of Justice that day.

Two women of the night—harlots—two prostitutes came to my court and stood before me trembling with fear. Now you should know that even though prostitution was prohibited by Mosaic Law (Lev. 19:29, Deut. 23:18), we Israelites tolerated the practice, much to my shame. Remember, I inherited a broken kingdom that needed reform. But, as you know, the Lord can use anybody to get his work done! Take Rahab for example. She was a prostitute who hid two Hebrew spies, helping them to escape in the night. When the Israelites captured Jericho, her life and the life of her family were spared. Did you know that Rahab is an ancestor of my father David? Sorry for that aside; let's get back to the story.

One of the prostitutes, with her face to the ground 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. 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 shouted out, "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 they argued before me! This was like an episode of, oh what's that show I hear about—Judge Judy!

How could I possibly resolve this case? The mothers had no witnesses to corroborate either's testimony. They had no evidence either. If they had either of those, the normal due process would have taken place and this would have never come to my attention. But because it was the word of one woman against the other, the matter was brought to me. Who can trust a prostitute?

In order to appreciate what was at stake here, you need to understand that my decision would be accepted as the very word of God. I took this matter very seriously, because the lives of two women hung in the balance. Both women needed a son to take care of them once they got old. Childless women, especially prostitutes, had no hope of survival in my day. There was no Social Security or retirement accounts. Family was everything; you needed family to survive. Widows and orphans were hurting people. Desperation and hopelessness can drive people to do awful things. What would you have done?

"Silence! Stop arguing in front of the king," I shouted. "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.'" What am I going to do with you two?

At this moment, I said a silent prayer to my God. There are times when it seems that the only person who really knows the truth is God himself. This was one of those times. My prayer was quite simple, "Yahweh, you are the one true God and you've made me king over your people. Continue to give me a listening heart so that I can govern your people well and discern between right and wrong. I need you now." God answered my prayer and gave me

insight into a mother's psyche. There is always something deeply satisfying about finding a simple solution to a difficult dilemma.

"Bring me a sword," I commanded. My servants were startled by this request, not to mention the two women and everyone in the courthouse that day. I had to ask again, "Bring me a sword, now!" The king should never have to ask for something twice! So my attendants brought me a sword. The entire court sat in utter silence wondering what I would do with the sword. Most kings use the sword in service of their ruthless self. Kingdoms have been conquered and lost by the sword. But, today, justice would prevail with the sword of wisdom. My plan was simply to expose the heart of each of these women. So, I stood there patiently sharpening my sword. With each stroke of the sharpening rock against the sword, the tension and fear in the room became thicker than my mother's gravy.

I gave this order next: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other." The court gasped in horror at my decree. The first woman responded with all the compassion of a mother's heart, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" Her maternal instincts took over. She had bonded deeply with her newborn son and would do anything, absolutely anything, to save him. She would even give him to her enemy, if that would save her son. The real mother would rather see another woman raise her child than see it split into two. This was a test of a mother's love.

I am constantly amazed at the intensity of the love that a mother has for her children. It is absolutely unconditional and sacrificial at its very core. Good mothers and fathers make similar sacrifices every day for their children. Instead of doing what they want for themselves, they do what is best for their children.

The other woman had quite a different reaction. Callously and heartlessly she said to me, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" Hateful envy had filled her dark heart. If she could not have her own son, then nobody would have a son at all. In rage, she told me to go ahead and cut him in two; she was willing to take her half of the child. Unbelievable, isn't it?

With the hearts of both women finally revealed, my decision was an easy one. I gave this ruling, "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." It was a simple solution to a difficult dilemma.

News like this, as you can imagine, travels quickly! Everyone in the courtroom that day was astounded at the wisdom God gave me. Soon all Jerusalem would hear my verdict and a deep sense of awe fell over God's people. They knew I had wisdom from God

to administer justice. They knew God was with me and with us as a nation. See, the mark of a truly great leader is the possession of a wise and listening heart. No title or degree can give it to you. Wisdom comes only from God and he loves to give it to people he can entrust it to. God gave me a listening heart for the benefit of his people. There would be many other courtroom rulings in my reign. In every single one, I relied on the wisdom of God to lead me.

You are probably wondering, "What does this story have to do you with me?" Are you surprised that two prostitutes got an audience with the king? You should be. As you are well aware, I wrote the Proverbs and in them I repeatedly told men to stay clear away from prostitutes. So, why did I, king over God's chosen people, take the time to hear an argument between two prostitutes over an illegitimate child? These women, and the sinful men who paid for their services, were living out of the will of God.

I was concerned about these two women because God was concerned about them. God didn't give me wisdom so folks would stand around the palace and say, "ooh" and "ahh." He gave me his wisdom for a purpose. God loved those two prostitute mothers and that baby. The Torah—sorry, the Old Testament in the Bible—tells us that children are a reward from the Lord (Psalm 127:3) regardless of how they are conceived. God gave me his wisdom to save the child too.

Many people back in my time and today would have said that prostitutes and their illegitimate children don't deserve justice or mercy, but I treated them as real people who mattered to God. I don't have to convince you that the church should stand for

moral purity. But, the church should also stand for forgiveness and restoration.

Every life matters to God, even a life that is enslaved to sin. If God has mercy for prostitutes, he has mercy for everyone who comes to faith in him. God knows you by name because he created you. He also knows everything you have done wrong. And he still invites you to trust him.

I am so flattered that you are studying my life, but my life should point you to someone greater—Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true king and he is infinitely wiser and greater than I am. In Jesus, God provided a solution to the most difficult dilemma of all, the problem of our sin. How could a just and holy God maintain a relationship with guilty sinners? God's solution was simple but very costly. He sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins and in our place and take the sword of divine justice. Because of the bloody death of Jesus Christ our guilt was paid and we could receive the mercy of God. The cross is the best solution for the worst of problems.

Please hear this—every life matters to God. You are not worthless. Come to Jesus Christ and let him take away the sin, shame, and regret that you are holding on to. He knows you by name. He hears you when you call. He answers your prayers and gives wisdom to all who ask for 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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