

Politics as Usual
1 KINGS 2:10-12, 3:3-14

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“Politics as usual” is usually intended in a derogatory way, and is used by people of every political stripe to say their opponent is doing a really lousy job.

It’s a phrase that applies not only to politics, but to every area of life, I suppose. Those who want to put down the church might say, “It’s politics as usual in the church.” It could mean a range of things: The church is only interested in my money; The church is only interested in pushing its ultra conservative/hyper liberal agenda; The church exists to generate pay for the preacher, because the church isn’t interested in doing real justice in the world.

You get the idea: In the church, in government, in public education and public health, in the world of business, the media, the PGA, the music industry, college sports . . . *whatever*. “It’s politics as usual.” Ain’t it awful.

The world’s going to hell in a hand basket.

Lord have mercy.

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King Solomon, David’s son, is guilty of politics as usual.

In a few chapters before our passage today, Solomon has his brother Adonijah hunted down and killed for scheming for his throne. This “unscrupulous elimination of his adversaries” might have been an accepted and, even, acceptable feature of Near Eastern politics of the day, but it is morally reprehensible and does not ‘fit’ God’s law which a godly king is expected to follow.^[1]

Just prior to our passage, Solomon marries the daughter of an Egyptian king—in direct violation of the law outlined in Deuteronomy that prohibited inter marriage outside of the Hebrew fold. Solomon did this, ostensibly, to widen the influence and power of the Kingdom of Israel, not in an effort to be holy and just before the Lord.

One commentator says that Solomon is full of “human cunning, vindictiveness, pettiness, insecurity, and sheer dishonesty.”^[2] Politics as usual? For Solomon, obviously so.

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But our passage today finds Solomon in a moment of clarity and light. God asks Solomon, ‘What do you want from me? What can I do for you?’

Solomon could ask for smooth sailing. He could ask God to help him make his reign as king successful. Isn't that what many of us want: success? We want our children to be successful, our businesses to be successful, our churches to be successful. Solomon could ask for a healthy family. Solomon could ask for his enemies to surrender. Solomon could ask for lots of things.

Of all the things Solomon *could* ask for, he asks for wisdom. And he asks to be wise in order that he can govern the people; he wants to do his best for the whole people of God.

God is pleased with Solomon's answer. He didn't ask for a Lamborghini or a swimming pool. So, it pleased God to do as Solomon asked. But not only wisdom, God will give other success, too.

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Solomon is guilty of shortcomings. He directly disobeys the laws of God that he vows to uphold. And yet, in a moment of clarity, he asks for the right thing. And he thinks beyond himself and his career to the nation of Israel, to the people he is called to serve with fairness and equity. At this moment, Solomon is focusing well and rightly on the right thing.

Gayle Sayers' memoir is called *I Am Third*. For Gayle, God is first, family is second, and he is third. Maybe at this moment in our text Solomon was thinking like that, also. God is first: Trust in the LORD and lean not on your own understanding. The proverb is attributed to Solomon.

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What about you? Is it politics as usual? Our mothers and fathers in the faith want us to walk in the light of God's love. Follow the law. Seek justice, love mercy, walk humbly.

Think of how richer our lives are when we ask for and let God's wisdom seep into our thoughts, our reading, our work, our play, our relationships. Think of how truer our lives are when we think, "Not my way, but your way, O God. Not my wisdom, O God, but your wisdom. Not my plan, but yours, O God.

At the heart of Solomon's exchange with God in this passage is a humble soul who gets off his high throne long enough to recognize that God is mighty and we are small. *I can't do it alone, and I don't have to. You, O God, are worthy of praise. My wisdom is no wisdom at all; my strength is no strength at all. But you, O God—you are perfect, just, and holy.*

Even a fool is wise enough to know that.

AMEN.

Prayer: O God, may Solomon's request become our prayer: "O God, give your servant an understanding mind . . . able to discern between good and evil." AMEN.

Scripture: **1 KINGS 2:10-12, 3:3-14**

¹⁰Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹²So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

3:3 Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.

⁴The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted.

⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" ¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

^[1] (p. 35 New Interpreter's Bible).

^[2] (p. 34, New Interpreter's Bible.)

