

Sunday February 12, 2023
Lesson 11: A Parent's Love
Scripture: 1 Kings 3:16-28; 1 John 4:7-12

Context:

Today we start our final unit of this season with the theme, “The Practice of Spiritual Friendships.” What a perfect way to end this study on “Power and Love,” as we think of the relationships to help us both grow and be held accountable in our spiritual journey. The two scriptures for today’s lesson come from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The New Testament passage, 1 John 4:7-12, will be repeated each week this unit and was part of the focus of last week’s lesson. The Old Testament passage is the focal passage today and comes from 1 Kings 3: 16-28. The purpose of today’s lesson is to discern what true sacrificial love looks like.

The text from 1 Kings comes from a larger unit of scripture chronicling the reign of King Solomon and his ascent to power. The genre of the story is a “traditional folktale,” a story which would have spread throughout land to support the reign of Solomon.¹ The focus is on how God’s wisdom dwells in Solomon, portraying the confirmation of God’s promised gift to the king.² The story very much falls in line with wisdom literature as there are events, characters, and a moral point established by the king.

There are two prostitutes who come to the king with a quarrel. Both had babies and yet one baby died in the night. The first woman asserts the other woman stole her child after she crushed hers in her sleep. The women were completely alone and no customer was present so the normal juridical practice of hearing witnesses is precluded.³ The next procedure would be to rely on God’s judgment through the casting of sacred lots, an oath of purgation (Exodus 22:9-10), or an ordeal (Numbers 5: 11-15).⁴ Yet the wisdom of the king is there and so the writer moves us to look at what he will do.

As King Solomon listens to the fighting of the two women, he asks for a sword to divide the child in two. One woman asks the child to be given to the other woman, with the Hebrew word being “yalud,” meaning “compassion of the born one,” being the moving force.⁵ The other woman is fine with a dead child. And thus, Solomon knows the true mother. The story is not only about Solomon as it is also about a hallmark of God’s justice which is fair to all, even a pair of disreputable prostitutes.⁶ God’s goodness will prevail, and all will receive wisdom.

¹ Nelson, Richard D. “First and Second Kings.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 37.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 38.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 39.

Application

Solomon's wisdom has always been a source of fascination for me. Knowledge is powerful and yet wisdom is transformative. In this case, we can appreciate how wisdom can be found in sacrificial love and what others will do to care for those who mean the most to them.

In our world today, we are often taught about the power of advocating for oneself. If we want to be happy, we must seek it. There are the jobs to pursue and places to be. Getting ahead is a prized future and finding the knowledge to get there is greatly valued.

The older I have become; I have come to appreciate wisdom more than just being "happy" or possessing knowledge on how to get ahead. Wisdom is a gift by which we can discern how to relate to others and discern where God is leading us. With wisdom, we can learn the true gift of love, even if it calls for a sacrifice on our part.

Today's scripture lesson focuses on the power of sacrificial love and what a parent will do to protect her child. Even as the first prostitute gives up her son to spare his life, she also gains her life. To see one's child live, even if under another mother, is better than to see the child split into two.

In addition to learning about wisdom as I have grown older, I have also come to understand more about sacrificial love through reflection. As one enters young adult years, you begin to think about your own upbringing and the home you lived in. I was privileged and fortunate enough to be raised in a home where there was much love present. While you may never know everything you come to pick up from your own experience all the ways your parents (or guardians) did things or made decisions to positively impact your life for the better.

There are times I am sure my parents could have made certain decisions to benefit themselves or their "careers," and yet they seemed more to focus on call and the family. They loved deeply, gave of time and money, and never forced us to carry burdens. Whatever mistakes they might have paid, they lathered us with love.

I come to find myself in my own journey seeking ways I might love others deeply. While there are some who cringe at the idea of sacrificial love, I find a beauty in giving up things for others so they might experience goodness or peace. As you give of yourself, you are transformed and God's wisdom dwells in one's heart and life.

For me, I have come to find as this unit suggests, some of the greatest spiritual friends are those who display sacrificial love in their relationships or callings. These are people who do the right thing or give of themselves so others might flourish or thrive. They see how loving people connects to loving God.

Hopefully, you have been able to see sacrificial love at work in your life. We often think of the hero/heroine stories where someone saves someone else. We of course should and do celebrate the countless men and women who serve in the military to protect the freedoms and rights of the country. Every Memorial Day, we have prayers to give thanks for those who show true sacrifice.

Yet I hope you also see the everyday people around you who make sacrifices so others might live and flourish. There is the teacher who spends a little of their own money to help with education. You have a policeman in your local community who seeks to help homeless people find a place to stay, sometimes cutting into time with other matters. There are single moms who give everything so their children might flourish.

Every day, I give thanks for the heroes and heroines around us who seek to sacrificially love others. And I hope I too find the ways to pour out for others and love just as Jesus has loved me. The greatest gifts we can give as spiritual friends is to find the ways God calls us to love and

love deeply.

Who are people you have seen who show sacrificial love? Why is it important to think of others and not just us? What is the significance of love as connected to Jesus Christ? What are examples of sacrificial love you have seen in your life? How can sacrificial love change the world?

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