

Did you make a New Year's resolution this year? I'm sure you did. In fact, I would venture to say that as the ball dropped at midnight or as the sun rose on New Year's Day, we all were thinking of new starts, new goals, new challenges for the coming year. Whether it's to eat less or exercise more, spend less money or spend more time with family and friends, new starts are exciting. They hold out the prospect that things can be different. I wonder, though, how many in this country set a resolution to cultivate a deeper, richer, more meaningful spiritual life, so I thought this morning I would propose a New Year's resolution for us to consider; a spiritual New Year's resolution, which is directly related to Solomon's request for wisdom.

God presented Solomon with a golden ticket, an opportunity to ask for anything He would like and God would grant it to Him. Despite the many options available to him, Solomon asked for only one thing— "An understanding heart". He could have asked for anything; he asked God for only wisdom. Following his example, I propose that this should be our resolution for the coming year, as well: "O Lord, grant me an understanding heart". But lest we ask for something that we neither know nor understand, let's spend a little time on the biblical concept of wisdom. What exactly is wisdom? In our English language, words like wisdom and intelligence are used interchangeably. So, when we call a person wise or smart, we mean roughly the same thing. The only distinction made is wisdom is usually reserved for someone older and more experienced or for a younger person who demonstrates forethought as when we say, "she is wise beyond her years". But according to Scriptures, to pray for wisdom is not the same as to ask to be smart or intelligent. A prayer for wisdom is a prayer to share in the mind of God. It sounds strange, I grant you; perhaps even a bit presumptuous, but that is exactly what Solomon requested— "Lord, grant me wisdom; that is grant me Your mind and insight". You see, Solomon really did ask God for something quite extraordinary. He asked for the ability to discern between good and evil. He asked for knowledge that doesn't really belong to the human race. If you recall in the Garden of Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden. God said to Adam and Eve, "but of this tree...you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat it you shall surely die". But unlike Adam and Eve, Solomon was not seeking this knowledge to be like God apart from God; Solomon was not asking to possess this knowledge as his own personal knowledge to wield as he saw fit, but rather he desired to participate in the very substance of God's unique knowledge. Solomon's prayer, then, was this passionate plea for God to rule his heart and mind, guide his steps,

shape his thoughts and speech, compel his action. In short, Solomon was asking to share in the mind of God Himself so that his life might be lived in such a way as to be identical to the way God Himself would live it if He were a human being. In a way, Solomon's request foreshadowed the perfect life of Christ. The Patriarchs of old knew God by a voice, a dream, an angelic presence. Moses, the chief Old Testament prophet, was granted the special privilege to see God through a cloud, through a cleft in the rock, veiled in the temple. But if Moses knew God face-to-face, then Christ knew God mind-to-mind, which is far better. Christ lived a life in perfect accord with the mind of His heavenly Father. They shared one Mind, one Thought, one Idea.

But lest you think this is too high for us mortals to comprehend or achieve, Solomon shares with us how we too can possess such wisdom. Solomon writes in Proverbs, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". Wisdom is first and foremost fear of God. Notice how it's not knowledge of the Lord that produces wisdom, but fear. This seems to contradict the normal way of things. I respect something the more I understand it, and the more I understand it the deeper my admiration. But Solomon goes against the natural learning process. He says if you want to be wise then step one is fear. Strange the way he puts that, but let's follow his thought to its completion. Now, the fear Solomon has in mind is not a physical fear like the fear we have of death or dying. It's not a psychological fear like that caused by trauma or abuse. It's not even a spiritual fear as when someone is scared of Divine wrath or punishment. No, the fear of God is a total reorientation of our lives, a turning of the mind in which we are inclined to see all things as interconnected in God. For after life experience has taught us the hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life, and we realize that the things that promise us happiness or prosperity or security or a sense of belonging usually turn out to be mere facades, we are free to seek after the true good, which can communicate the supreme joy to all eternity. And that true good is God Himself. The supreme joy, then, is to perceive not an infinite number of random causes, but one Cause, one Mind, one God, moving all things—This is the fear and wonder and awe and admiration that grips us, this heightened sense, which makes life worth living. For true wisdom turns us away from this world and ourselves, and towards the grandeur of God. But in the strangeness that is God, we are turned not 180 degrees, but rather 360 degrees; we come full circle back to the same position we started from, but now we understand all things in God and God in all things. Amen.