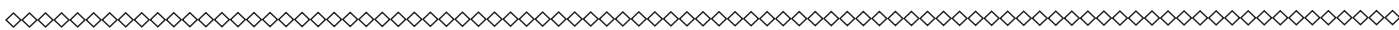




Pastor of the
International
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in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: 1 Kings 2:1-4
Title: Wise Advice
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Through the journey of life we often enter into turning points in which the direction of the future is different from the past. Such intersections happen whether we want them to or not. During those moments when the future is uncertain, we need wise advice to help us make the right decisions and to face the future with confidence.

Such intersections took place in the history of ancient Israel. The selling of Joseph into slavery by his brothers; the exodus of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery; the establishment of the monarchy under Saul; the transition from kingship from David to Solomon; the division of the kingdom into two separate nations at Solomon's death; the fall of the northern kingdom; the destruction of the southern kingdom -- these are most of the major turning points in the history of ancient Israel. Each of these moments brought dramatic changes in the lives of the Israelites. Each meant a step into an uncertain future.

Today I want to focus on one of those moments in the Old Testament: the transition from the reign of David to that of Solomon. The depiction of this is given in the first two chapters of First Kings. But I want to zero in primarily on one short segment of this, David's speech to Solomon in 2:1-4. Actually, the speech includes vv. 2-9,¹ and we will touch on some aspects of the larger speech. But the most relevant part of his speech to us today is found in the first four verses. Hear the text as I read it:

1 When David's time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: 2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, 3 and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. 4 Then the Lord will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: "If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel."

The text is often called "David's Last Will And Testament" because it contains his final speech to his son, Solomon, before his death. This was a tradition among ancient Israelites and such is recorded several times in the pages of the Old Testament. Most of the time such passages contain the wise reflections of the aged person who is approaching death. Occasionally the words are a mixed bag of wise insight and personal grudges by the individual that are passed on to the son who is to assume leadership responsibilities. Such is the case in 1 Kings 2:2-9. The first segment, vv. 2-4, contains basically wise insight, while vv. 5-9 contain basically personal grudges of David mainly against Joab and Shimei. In the background of these two negative words lay the ancient Hebrew concept of 'blood guilt' against the household of David. Both Joab's unjust actions and Shimei's curse on David were understood to put a stain on David's family and could jeopardize the legitimacy of his family's continued reign over Israel.

Today, I want to focus on the 'wise advice' segment of vv. 2-4, since they stand as sources of helpful insight as our church moves into one of these intersections in its history. A transition time from one pastor to another is always such an intersection that will bring new direction and some uncertainty, at least at the

¹NRSV (vv. 5-12): 5 "Moreover you know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. 6 Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. 7 Deal loyally, however, with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from your brother Absalom. 8 There is also with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a terrible curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim; but when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, "I will not put you to death with the sword." 9 Therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol." 10 Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. 11 The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. 12 So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

beginning. The counsel that David offers Solomon in verses 2-4 can provide us with very 'wise advice' that can help the church move through this intersection successfully under God's leadership and blessing.

Understanding how to get through this transition period involves taking a careful look in three directions. We need to look back at what has happened in the past; look around to see what is going on now; and to look up to see the ways of God.

BODY

I. Look back.

The backward look is always important when facing decisions and an uncertain future. Failure to keep history in view dooms us to repeat the mistakes of the past. A clear understanding of our history can help us avoid making those same mistakes over again.

Solomon needed to learn from David's reign.

The reign of King David is at best a mixed bag of successes and failures. Solomon stood to learn much from reflecting on his father's reign.

David came to the throne through the default of Saul, and he brought the twelve tribes of Israel together in national unity for the first time in their history. In their past the ten tribes in the north and the two tribes in the south had been very different from one another. The north was prosperous and stable, while in the south the countryside was mountainous and very arid. Consequently it was much poorer and the people struggled to make a living herding sheep and goats. When David established Jerusalem as the capital of the unified country it became the economic magnet pulling large numbers of people into it in southern Palestine.

David successfully drove out the Philistine enemies from the west and secured the borders on the east side in the Trans-Jordan region east of the Jordan River. For forty years (1 Kgs. 2:11) David reigned over a relatively peaceful and prosperous people. He established Jerusalem as the capital of the unified country, and the city prospered significantly during his reign. He brought the tabernacle there as the center of worship, and wanted to build the temple but God wouldn't allow him to do so.

But David's reign was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. ² As a husband and as a father David's record is largely that of failure more than success. The Bathsheba affair where he had

²"The majority of what we learn about David's life and times is contained in the accounts in Samuel. In Samuel the writer forges a contrast between Saul and David, "a man after his [God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14). D. M. Gunn's analysis of the narratives about David focuses on two primary themes: David as king and David as a man. In his first role as king, David acquires the kingdom and assures his tenure in office (the accounts about David and Saul, the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba) and founds a dynasty (the birth of Solomon, the rebellion of Adonijah, the elimination of other contenders and factions). These narratives are intertwined with the theme of David as a man: a husband and father (Michal, Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom, Solomon, Adonijah). The accounts are overlaid with themes of sexuality and political intrigue. Sexuality is a motif in the accounts of the sin with Bathsheba, the death of the child from an adulterous union, one son's rape of a daughter, the competition for the father's bedmate Abishag, Uriah's refusal to visit his wife, the seizure of David's concubines, and the childlessness of Saul's daughter Michal. Violence and political intrigue are interspersed in the accounts of David's wars, Saul's attempts on David's life, the violence of Joab and his brothers, the murder of Uriah, fratricide among David's sons, the slaughter of the helpless Absalom, and David's plans for the deaths of his enemies soon after his own death. The account of David's relationship with Bathsheba not only prepares for the eventual accession of Solomon, but it also sets in motion a curse that will dog the remainder of David's life: death and sexual outrage will follow, and "the sword will never depart from [his] house" (2 Sam 12:10). The one word "sword" becomes a key term unifying aspects of the narrative from Samuel through Kings. The entire account of David is presented as the interplay of his public (kingship) and private (father, husband) roles as they impinge on the question of who will succeed him to the throne. Gunn also accents the themes of giving and grasping: whereas some accounts present David or other characters as somewhat passive in their roles, in others they seize or grasp at favor and power. For example, the king who will not seize the kingdom from Saul (2 Sam. 2-5) is nevertheless willing to seize a woman who is the object of his desire (Bathsheba); she who is seemingly passive in her seduction will later seize the kingdom for Solomon. Overall it is the story of how David gains the throne, loses it temporarily in the face of rebellions, only to regain it again, and then lose it in death. It is an intricate picture of human greatness and folly, of wisdom and sin, of faith and faithlessness, of contrasting perspectives and conflicting desires. The narratives about David also abound in irony. For example, the faithful Uriah unknowingly honors a king who has been unfaithful to him; Uriah retains his ritual purity during warfare by refraining from sexual intercourse during time of war, only to be sent to his death in battle by a king who enjoyed sexual congress with Uriah's wife instead of going to the battle (2 Sam 11)." [Raymond B. Dillard, "David," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, online: accessed 31 July 2010]

her husband Uriah killed in order to take this woman into his harem is a sordid part of a dark history. He brought individuals into leadership such as Joab and eventually became trapped by them and powerless to discipline them. Some of his own sons tried to kill him in order to come to power in his place. Only by God's help was he able to prevent this from happening on more than one occasion. David made plenty of mistakes during these forty years, and much of his reign was characterized by bloodshed and intrigue in the royal court that brought much unhappiness and apprehension.

Had Solomon carefully reflected on all this, especially with the help of spiritual advisors like the prophet Nathan, he could have profited greatly. But from the subsequent history in 1 Kings chapters two and following, we can see that his reflection was very selective. He saw only what he wanted to see: power and personal glory and material success. The deeper spiritual insights to be gained from David's failures escaped him, and thus he made most of the same mistakes that his father had made -- and some worse than David's. To his credit he did learn some of the religious values of his father in seeking to lead the country to worship God, rather than idols, although he wasn't strict enough in this. Measured by the standards of Jesus, one would have to say that David failed to live up to what God wanted him to achieve. And at the end of the day the same will be said for Solomon as well.

IBC church Cologne needs to learn from its past.

As this church moves into the intersection of seeking a new pastor, it needs to reflect back on its past and learn from both the successes and failures of the past. The history of the IBC church in Cologne falls into three distinct segments.

1991-1999: the period of beginnings. Under the leadership of two Southern Baptist missionaries and three interim pastors - Hogue (1991-1996); Hatfield (1996); Philips (1997); Howard (1997); Oglesby (1997-1998) -- the church experienced the blessings of God from a small beginning to a congregation of nearly 200 people. In a very positive partnership with the Friedenskirche Baptisten Gemeinde in downtown Cologne the church reached numbers of people with the gospel of Christ as the IBC church worshipped in their facilities during these years.

2000-2008: the dark period. Under the leadership of David Wilson, the church turned away from its Baptist heritage toward pentacostalism and suffered a downward slide that brought it in March of 2008 to less than a dozen people. Turbulence and chaos prevailed and numbers of people turned away from the church because of its disunity and lack of faithfulness to scripture and its Baptist roots. The judgment of God came upon the church and brought it to its knees in failure.

2008-present: the reawakening period. During the last two years the church has come back to life again. By returning to its Baptist roots and honestly seeking to follow God's Word, the church has experienced once more the blessings of God with a stable attendance of sixty to eighty people. An eight thousand Euro deficit has been erased and replaced with a twenty thousand plus Euro surplus. We moved from meeting in an abandoned warehouse in Kalk to the excellent facilities of the Nathanael Kirche. Through much hard work in projects like the Mid-Afrika Festival, the Interkulturelle Woche festival, the Cologne Missinale conference, we have been able to gain acceptance and credibility throughout the city as a legitimate congregation of Christian believers. A spirit of harmony and warmth of fellowship have replaced the fussing and fighting of previous years.

What can we learn from our past? One lesson is very clear to me: when we have been true to our Baptist roots and to the Word of God, the church has been blessed by the Lord. When we turned away from that, the punishment of God came down hard on the church and almost closed its doors. There's much to be learned here.

II. Look around.

When seeking to gain wisdom to make decisions about the future, one needs to look around and see what is taking place in the present movement.

Solomon needed to see the needs of his day.

What was going on in the royal palace in David's last days? Chapter one of 1 Kings describes the chaos that was erupting in Jerusalem. Adonijah rose up and sought to become the king in David's place. Through a pack made with David's military leader Joab, he proclaimed himself to be king. But most of the religious leaders, including Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet refused to go along with this, as well as many other leaders and David's own soldiers. King David was informed by the prophet Nathan and hastily anointed Solomon as his successor, as he had promised to do years before. Panic enveloped Adonijah and his followers and they sought refuge at the altar in the Tabernacle.

Solomon came to power at the death of David in the midst of political instability and great uncertainty. On his deathbed David advised Solomon to deal with troublemakers in the royal palace (1 Kgs. 2:5-6, 8-9):

5 “Moreover you know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. 6 Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace....

“8 There is also with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a terrible curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim; but when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ 9 Therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.”

In the early days of Solomon’s reign he made sure that both these men were executed.³ Additionally he had the rebel Adonijah executed as well after promising to let him live (cf. 1 Kings 2:19-25). The priest Abiathar who had supported Adonijah earlier was removed from office and Zadok took his place (cf. 1 Kings 2:26-27, 35). With vengeance and violence Solomon ‘cleaned house’ ruthlessly. This unit of scripture text concluded in 2:46 with the declaration: “**So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.**”

One can conclude that Solomon was being politically smart by these actions. But Solomon wasn’t being spiritually smart. He set in motion a pattern of violence that would mark his entire forty year reign (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:42). Solomon focused on material prosperity and succeeded in building a materially prosperous kingdom that far surpassed that of David’s. But it came with a heavy price. He taxed the people to death and used forced labor to do most of the construction work.⁴ At the end of the day the Israelites were suffering heavily under his iron fisted rule.⁵ Instead of trusting God, Solomon sought political alliances with the surrounding power house countries such as Egypt and cemented these alliances by taking one of the daughters of the king as a wife. Toward the end of his reign he had some 700 of these women as wives and another 300 as concubines (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:3). Gradually they turned away from God to follow their pagan gods and this brought down God’s wrath upon Solomon in punishment.⁶ Periodically, God would raise up an enemy against Solomon to inflict punishment on him.⁷ In spite of Solomon’s wisdom, he didn’t grasp clearly how to serve God and how to reign over God’s people according to God’s ways. He basically took the political philosophy of human thinking in his day as the way to rule. Coupled with his focus on materialism, this approach zeroed

³Joab’s story: 1 Kgs. 2:28-35; Shimei’s story: 1 Kgs. 2:36-46.

⁴Cf. 1 Kings 9:15-22 for a detailed description of the slave labor that Solomon used.

⁵Cf. 1 Kings 12:1-4 for a plea to his son Rehoboam to lighten this impossible burden that Solomon had put upon them: “1 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. 2 When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. 3 And they sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 4 ***Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you.***”

⁶Cf. 1 King. 11:3-10: “3 Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not completely follow the Lord, as his father David had done. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods. 9 Then the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this matter, that he should not follow other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord commanded.”

⁷1 Kg. 11:14: “Then the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the royal house in Edom.”

1 Kg. 11:23: “God raised up another adversary against Solomon, Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled from his master, King Hadadezer of Zobah.”

1 Kg. 11:26: “Jeroboam son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother’s name was Zeruah, a widow, rebelled against the king.”

in on power and affluence. In the end, everything he sought to build up and leave to his son Rehoboam was lost when this son made the same mistakes as Solomon and the nation split in two pieces.

What we see in Solomon was an inability to grasp and/or to implement the spiritual wisdom from God into his leadership of the country. He focused on outward, secular priorities and neglected the genuinely spiritual things. This in spite of building a beautiful temple for the worship of God. Consequently his reign was marred by many of the same problems that had plagued David's reign. Ultimately it set the stage for the dissolution of his kingdom soon after his death.

What are the current needs of the IBC church Cologne?

When we look around our church what are our needs? I'm going to be rather blunt and direct with you at this point. From these past two years I see some of the following needs, based upon over half a century of pastoring churches:

First, we still don't yet know who we are spiritually. The history of this church is Baptist. But only a few people in the church fully grasp and appreciate that. I have sought earnestly to communicate that heritage to you, but in all honesty I don't think many understand or appreciate what that means, and just how important it is. A church must have a clear spiritual identity, or else it sinks into 'spiritual schizophrenia.' With such loss of identity it swings from this to that and to something else. People visiting the worship services are puzzled over who and what the church is.

Baptists are a people of the Word of God who stand uncompromisingly for clear biblical principles of worship and ministry. The word BAPTIST is often used to identify many of these foundational beliefs:

B--Biblical Authority. The Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice.

A--Autonomy of the Local Church. Every church is independent of other churches and voluntarily chooses to cooperate with fellow Baptist churches in missions, education and other common projects.

P--Priesthood of the Believer: Every believer is directly answerable to God and communicates with God without going through a priest or a saint.

T--Two Ordinances of the Church: Believer's Baptism: water baptism by immersion of those confessing personal faith in Christ is a prerequisite for church membership, as our church constitution defines. The Lord's Supper is to be observed as a symbolic reminder of Christ's death and as a looking forward to His return.

I--Individual soul liberty. Baptists have no priest or bishops who stand between them and God.

S--Separation of church and state. Baptists have fought and died for the freedom to worship and serve God without governmental interference or restriction.

T--Two Offices of the Church (Pastor and Deacon): Historically Baptists have stood for the pastor and the deacon as the two foundational leadership roles in the church.

These are some of the foundational beliefs that bind Baptists together around the world. They give us a distinctiveness that we can and should be proud of. Over the past 400 years of our history, much Baptist blood has been split on both sides of the Atlantic in order to defend and maintain these beliefs.

I take enormous pride in being a Baptist. That doesn't make me a superior Christian. But it does give me a clear sense of identify. When I visit a Baptist church I expect these basic values to be upheld by that congregation when it calls itself Baptist. For a congregation to not uphold these distinctive values and still call itself Baptist means this congregation is lying and deceiving people who attend its worship services.

The brands of ecumenicalism being floated around today under the banner of non-denominationalism are a recipe for spiritual disaster for Christianity. Every group of Christians needs a clear sense of self-identity. Then and only then can each group find legitimate common grounds for cooperative efforts with other Christian denominations. Out of our self-identity and clear understanding of the identities of other Christian groups can we come together in common efforts to work together. Without this, the picture degenerates into an abyss of nothingness with no clear sense of Christian understanding.

Second, we are in danger to losing the spirit of unity and warmth that has developed over the past eighteen or so months. Petty interests and a desire to control have reared their ugly heads over the past several months and threaten to undo much of the work that God has achieved in recent times. In the coming months you need to work hard at re-building the unity that has been ours since 2009.

Third, we need more workers and fewer bench warmers. If you remember the sermons I preached in January and February of 2009, I laid out the biblical model of a place of ministry for every member of the church. The goal has been for every person in the church to be serving God in some capacity. But we are far from reaching that goal. More people now are serving than were two years ago. But the ministries of the church remain crippled largely because of lack of people willing to serve. When only a few people do most all the work, the church suffers. God's work doesn't get done. I challenge you in the coming months to prayerfully

consider how God wants you to serve Him in this church.

I could say much more but I feel these are three of the most important needs currently present in this church. May God help you work on meeting these needs.

III. Look up.

After we have looked back at the past and have looked around at the present, we must look up in order to seek God's will and way.

David advised Solomon to seek God.

The first part of David's advice to Solomon in verses 2-4 emphasizes this very point. David realizes that he was about to die: "I am about to go the way of all the earth." His life was quickly coming to an end, and thus plans for the future need to be made. He has already had Solomon anointed officially as his successor (cf. 1 Kings 1:29-40). The question of who would succeed David as king was settled. Now with death near David formally charges (cf. 2:1) Solomon to take control and to rule the country:

"Be strong, be courageous, 3 and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. 4 Then the Lord will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: 'If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.'"

The heart of the challenge to Solomon was to seek God's ways and to faithfully walk in them. The source of that understanding was the Law of Moses, the written record of God's instructions to the Israelites given through Moses centuries before. If Solomon would genuinely adhere to God's Word, then the blessings of God would be upon his leadership of the country. And the descendants of David would lead the nation into the unseen future.

The issue is whether or not Solomon took these words seriously. Clearly the words of revenge in the second part of the speech, vv. 5-9, were taken seriously and carried out with a vengeance. But the subsequent record in 1 Kings 2-11 with the parallel in 2 Chronicles 1-9 casts serious doubt on the sincerity of Solomon's following the spiritual advice given by David in vv. 2-3. Only superficially did Solomon follow God's ways in leading the country. What a missed opportunity here! Solomon could have genuinely walked in God's ways and the country would have been blessed in profound spiritual ways that would have led to a continuation of the united kingdom. Instead, with very shallow adherence and a focus away from the ways of God to human ways of power and greed, the next forty years were marked with material prosperity but little more. And the dynamics of evil were set in motion that would destroy the country at Solomon's death.

We need to seek God as never before in our church.

I want to urge you as the church to seek God as never before in facing the coming days of searching for a new pastor. The future of this church depends solely upon the blessing of God. Read -- and re-read -- Revelation chapters two and three! In the letters to the seven churches Christ both encourages and warns individual congregations of the absolute need of obeying Him. The words to the church at Ephesus are vitally relevant to you today (Rev. 2:2-5):

2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

From these words of Christ, you need to carefully screen out false leaders. Just as in the first century many coming preaching with the claim to represent God, but their doctrine is heresy and false. The Ephesian church checked out these folk and rejected them. They didn't tolerate teaching that was contradictory to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Also, the church at Ephesus was faithful to serve and to do so genuinely. This you need to be doing in ever increasing ways!

But Christ had a serious warning for the church at Ephesus. They had grown cold in their love for the Lord. The profound spiritual experience of their conversion and baptism had worn down with them settling into spiritual shallowness taking its place. Christ issued a stern warning to them: repent of your shallowness, or I will close down the church! That warning holds true today, and applies to you in this church.

I appeal to you to walk sincerely in the ways of God. Don't make Solomon's mistake and see God's blessings merely in terms of money in the bank and numbers of people in the worship services. These are very superficial measurements and can be completely deceptive of the spiritual reality. God wants to do

something far deeper with this church. Let God lead you into levels of spiritual growth and maturity that go way past money and numbers.

Paul made this very clear to the Ephesian church in his letter to them (Eph. 4:11-16) some thirty plus years before the message to the church in Revelation two.:

11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.** 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

CONCLUSION

So I come back to the theme in my first sermons to you as your pastor in January 2009 from this text in Ephesians four. God has something important that He wants to do with the IBC church Cologne. With genuine spiritual maturity you can become a true light of the Gospel to the people of Cologne. It doesn't matter whether you are wealthy or poor financially. It matters not whether your numbers are large or few. It all depends upon whether you are ministering in the name of Christ and whether you are developing spiritual maturity.

King David had some good advice for Solomon. Unfortunately Solomon only partly heeded the advice. Consequently what God could do with him was severely limited. Jesus encouraged the church at Ephesus to get its act together with true spiritual maturity, and warned that He would close the doors of the church if they didn't.

These are wise words of advice to you today. Heed them carefully and genuinely. Then watch the blessings of God fall in abundance upon this congregation!