

Rehoboam: If You Will Be Kind

by Russell Kelfer

The sermon explores Rehoboam's failure to lead with kindness, resulting in the division of his kingdom and a cautionary tale on leadership.

Duration: 25:14

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 9:30, 2 Chronicles 10:1-18, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:2, 1 Peter 5:5-6

Topics: "Rehoboam"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the downfall of a young king who failed to lead with kindness. The sermon is divided into four parts, starting with the end of an era and the young king's attempt to step into the shoes of the wisest man who ever lived. Despite the advice of experienced individuals, the king chooses to listen to his young and inexperienced friends, leading to the destruction of his kingdom. The sermon emphasizes the importance of kindness in leadership, drawing from the biblical teachings of 1 Peter 5:2-6. The preacher encourages leaders to tend, nurture, and guide their followers willingly and cheerfully, rather than being domineering or arrogant.

Transcript

An era has ended. The wisest man who ever lived is dead. A dynasty has drawn to its conclusion.

One of history's most powerful men has gradually drifted away from allegiance to the God who made him what he was. You see, they just buried King Solomon. This king, who in his prime possessed such wealth that rulers traveled for miles just to behold his fortune, who possessed such wisdom that his servants knelt in awe just waiting for words to fall from his lips, has died.

Somehow, it seemed this man was too powerful to die, too itched to die. But the psalmist recognized the fallacy of that kind of thinking in Psalm 49 when he reminded us of these words, the ransom for life is costly. No payment is ever enough.

He should live on forever and not see decay, for all can see wise men die. Foolish, senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. Their tombs remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, even though they named lands after themselves.

But man, despite his riches, does not endure. He is like the beasts that perish. So do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases, for he will take nothing with him.

When he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. The scriptures say of this man Solomon, wiser than all men was he, richer than all men was he, and yet like all men, he had to die. And when he died, he left it all behind.

In his youth, his every word had borne testimony to the grace of God. But the scripture says, as Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart away from God. And because as Solomon grew old, the light of his life was no longer God, those glowing years of faithfulness faded into tarnished years of idolatry instead.

And all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't make Solomon a man of God again. And so the final days of his life caused an epitaph to be written on the tombstone that had fallen from his own pen. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.

Now he's gone. And the volumes of history must needs turn their pages to yet another chapter in the life of the people of God. A chapter that's destined to mark the beginning of an era of division and strife of needless death and destruction is etched into the fabric of the holy word God brings to life yet another of his living legends, Solomon's son.

He was a man destined to reign on his father's throne, but destined as well to draw asunder his father's kingdom. The story begins to unfold for us and we will be reading this morning in second chronicles beginning with chapter nine, verse 30, second chronicles chapter nine. And there we read these words, Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all of Israel for 40 years.

And then he rested with his fathers and he was buried in the city of David, his father. And Rehoboam, his son, succeeded him as king. And so another generation awakens to take control of a nation.

An administration characterized by youthful exuberance rises to the throne and a whole era of tradition and ostentatious formality gives way to the harsh realities of young men on their way up the ladder of success. And at the top, at least for the moment, is a young man, the son of his father's favorite wife. His name is Rehoboam.

Now history is not too kind to Rehoboam and he took a nation which was the talk of a then known world for its strength and its natural resources and through his immaturity and his greed he turned it into a civil war battleground and eventually into a has-been kingdom. Once again you see God is clearly defining in scripture through these biographical sketches how to and how not to be a leader in the kingdom. And in the case of this man it was instruction by negative example, how not to do it.

The title of today's lesson is If You Will Be Kind. Our outline, part one, the end of an era, second chronicles 9 30. Part two, high noon at the palace, second chronicles 10 1-6.

Part three, If You Will Be Kind, second chronicles 10 7-18. And finally part four, Learning to be a Leader, 1 Peter 5 2-6. Let's begin our journey now, a journey through the pages of the life of this young man who now attempts to step into the shoes of the wisest man who ever lived.

Let's look and see just how much wisdom rubbed off on Mr. Rehoboam and we will continue reading now in second chronicles beginning with verse one of chapter 10 as it unveils his first major incident in his reign as king. It reads like this, second chronicles 10 1. Rehoboam went to Shechem for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king. It was coronation time and when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard this, Jeroboam was in Egypt where he had fled from King Solomon.

He returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam and he and all of Israel went to Rehoboam and here's what they said. Verse four, Your father put a heavy yoke on us.

Now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us and we will serve you. Rehoboam answered them, Come back in three days. So the people went away and then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime and they said, How would you advise me to answer these people? What should I say? Verse seven, They replied, If you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.

But Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders and consulted the young men he'd grown up with who were serving him and he asked them, What's your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, Lighten the yoke that your father put on us? Verse 10, The young men who'd grown up with him answered, Tell the people who said to you, Your father put a heavy yoke on us. Make our yoke lighter. Tell them this.

My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke. I will make it heavier.

Tell them my father scorched you with whips. I will scorch you with scorpions or knotted whips. Three days later, Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam just the way the king had asked them to.

He'd said, Come back in three days. And the king answered them harshly, rejecting the advice of the elders. He followed the advice of the young men instead.

Verse 15, So the king did not listen to the people for this turn of events was from God to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam. When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen, here's what they said. What share do we have in David? What part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel, look after your own house, O David.

So all the Israelites went home. But as for the Israelites living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them. King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor.

But the Israelites stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

You ever look back on your life or the life of someone in history that you were studying about and thought to yourself what a difference it would have made, how differently would have all turned out and not been for one major wrong decision, one major mistake. So often the difference between the greats of the ages and the goats of the ages has been told in the story of one simple wrong choice, one wrong decision. And having made that decision, they perhaps altered the entire course of history.

Now the passage we just read is such a moment in time. Here you see is a chance for healing and reconciliation. Here's a chance for a demonstration of humility and meekness.

Here's a chance for the ways of God to overshadow the ways of man. Here's a chance for the man of God to demonstrate the heart of God. Enter the saga of Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

We might call it the tale of Rebob and Jerry. Now Jerry is the leader of the minority party at the time, a man who opposes the harsh totalitarian policies of Rebob's dad, Saul. But you see, men didn't oppose Saul very long and stay around to talk about it, so Jerry's been in exile in Egypt just waiting for a chance to

come back.

And now he sees his chance. Saul's funeral procession had barely disbanded when riding into town like a band of outlaws in a class B western movie comes Jerry with more than half of Israel by his side. The music swells.

The angry entourage approaches the palace. The music softens. It is high noon.

Out comes Rehob. Up steps Jerry. Everyone's quiet and Jerry speaks.

He says, your dad made our lives miserable, Rehob. He put a yoke on us we could not bear. He put us in forced labor camps, forced us to build the temple and that extravagant palace.

We've had it. But we're men of peace. We've come bringing an olive branch.

Here's our offer. Lighten the load, Rehob. Ease the burden.

Be reasonable. Be kind. And we will remain your servants to the end.

Is that too much to ask? Rehob's eyes were cold as steel, but he had enough of his father's wisdom to know that you don't make a decision like that without seeking counsel first. So he tells Jerry to find the nearest Holiday Inn and cool his heels for three days while he ponders the possibilities of this proposal for peace. His first move, you see, was a wise one.

He went to the elderly men, the ones who had always served his father and counseled him, and he asked them what to do. And their response is classic. Memorize it.

They said this, if you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants. If you will be kind, they will always serve. What a godly dose of wisdom to God's leaders.

If you will be kind, they'll serve. No syllabus on Christian leadership ought to be without that verse. It is God's word to those who would lord it over their flocks, over their employees, over their families.

It is a word of wisdom from the elderly to the young. It says don't get enamored with newfound power. A position of authority, you see, is not a license to motivate by fear but to lead by love.

Oppress those you lead and you're only buying time till the revolution. Lead by example and you build a following. Lead by intimidation and you build a platform on beams of sand and when the winds of adversity begin to blow they crumble and so do you.

Wise words. If you will be kind, they'll serve. That should have settled it for Rehab.

He could avert a revolution, assure a smooth transition into power, and build a following that would guarantee him a successful reign. More successful perhaps than his father's. All he had to do was take the advice of some men who had paid their dues and learned what life was all about the hard way.

But you see that would have required one thing this man didn't have. The humility to be a godly leader. So instead he calls a meeting of his college fraternity buddies all of whom were as wet behind the ears as he was and he asked them what to do.

His courageous contemporaries answer like this. Put the pedal to the metal man. Loose translation.

Turn up the thermo and let them roast. Let's show Jerry and his half-baked posse what real oppression is. Tell them your dad's going to look like a teddy bear next to you.

Tell them they ain't seen nothing yet. So you see the votes are in. The aged vote for temperance and mercy.

The young men vote for a reign of terror. Rehab turns a deaf ear towards experience and he listens to those who excited his emotions and inflated his ego instead. And beloved in one day this young king simply by taking the wrong advice ripped to shreds the kingdom of his grandfather David and finished off what was left of his father Solomon's empire.

In one day mind he destroyed what it took God two generations to build and all because he did not understand that the basic quality needed to be a leader is kindness. Peter did understand that in one of his letters to the young leaders club in first Peter chapter five he wrote some very insightful words. Beginning with verse two first Peter chapter five I'm going to read from the amplified translation.

He said this, tend, nurture, guard, guide, fold the flock of God that belongs to you. Not by coercion, not by constraint, willingly, not dishonorably motivated by the advantages and profits of the office but eagerly, cheerfully, not as arrogant, dictatorial or overbearing persons domineering over those in your charge but rather being examples, patterns, models of Christian living to the flock. Then when the chief shepherd is revealed you will win the conqueror's crown of glory.

Verse five, likewise you that are younger and of lesser rank be subject to the elders, the ministers, the spiritual guides, giving them due respect, yielding to their counsel. Clothe, apron yourselves, all of you with humility, the garb of a servant so that its covering cannot possibly be stripped from you with freedom from pride and arrogance toward one another because you see God sets himself against the proud, the insolent, the overbearing, the disdainful, the presumptuous, the boastful and he opposes, he frustrates, he defeats them but he gives grace to the humble. So humble yourselves, demote yourself, lower yourself in your own estimation under the mighty hand of God and in due time he may exalt you.

I believe that Rehob read those words and heeded them the history of Israel would not have had its pages stained with this sea of rebellion that followed. You see his elders tried essentially to say the same thing but he wouldn't listen. On the back page of today's lesson if you get the transcripts or on the table over there, there is a chart dividing this passage from 1st Peter chapter 5 into how to and how not to be a leader and our assignment for this week should we choose to take it is to use that godly grid as a guideline to determine how you and I are doing in the areas of leadership to which we're assigned.

Pastors, elders, teachers, employers, supervisors, parents are we simply becoming Rehob's? Men and women who lead with arrogance and condescension are we learning to be the kind of shepherds that Peter talked about in 1st Peter 5? Let's look more closely at God's prescription for leadership found in 1st Peter 5. In a nutshell it says this the man of God leads by guiding, encouraging and demonstrating. He never leads by coercion or greed or intimidation, never. Let's look at them.

The first characteristic of a godly leader is sensitivity. He is to lead men and women the way a shepherd leads his sheep. Nurture them, feed them, care for their needs.

If he will be kind they will always serve him. So he's to be a feeding shepherd. Secondly, he's to be a guiding shepherd.

He's to protect those that he leads from harmful influence from the attacks of an enemy that would catch them unaware. Thirdly, he's to be a guiding shepherd. Peter says he not only stops when he knows that the growling wolf lurks behind the rocks ahead but he takes them by the hand and he leads them to higher ground where greener grass and fresher air await them.

You see God's kind of leader guides his sheep. Fourthly, God's kind of leader he says foals his sheep. He lovingly envelops them.

He circles around them removing things from them that will trip them up but leaving enough things there that they need to experience if they are to grow. He lovingly surrounds them with his love. So God's kind of man or woman leads sensitively.

Rehab didn't understand that. He didn't see his responsibilities as a leader. He saw his privileges as a leader.

Immaturity envisions leadership that way. You try it. You give a position of authority to a young child before they're ready and you watch what will happen.

But there's more. According to Peter, a godly leader is not typified only by being sensitive but by a spirit of encouragement. You see according to Pete, the godly leader leads willingly.

It takes no external pressure to motivate him to do his job. He doesn't have to be dragged to the office or dragged to the church or dragged to the field of service. He's there early, quickly, alertly, excitedly.

And then Peter adds the ingredient of eagerness. He's more than willing, he's eager to lead. And more than that Peter says he does so cheerfully.

The godly leader illustrates joy and joy is contagious. If the man in charge has a smile on his face, the whole group around him radiates. If he comes in with a spirit of defeat, the whole staff, the whole office takes on a nature of a loser.

The whole family. God's leader leads willingly, eagerly, cheerfully, Peter says. And then finally the godly leader is a model shepherd.

He or she leads by example. They don't ever just tell you what to do, they show you what to do. They get their hands dirty to demonstrate they're not instructors but shepherds.

And shepherds lay down their lives for the sheep. You see the godly leader won't even do things that he or she may have the right to do if doing them would damage the tender heart of one of the sheep. They won't go to that place or do that thing if they might stumble one who follows.

He or she won't say anything that might be misunderstood or might be offensive to even one sheep. The model shepherd wants to be blameless without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse world. And Peter, left to leave too much to the imagination, gives us specifically what characteristics a leader's not to have as well.

He says God's kind of leader doesn't attempt to motivate by pressure to conform or by guilt or fear of failure. He or she is not motivated by personal gain so the task isn't judged by what it does for them but what it does for others. Never is God's leader, Peter says, arrogant or condescending.

Never dictatorial or demanding. Never overbearing or obnoxious. Not domineering, seeking to control people as an end in itself.

Peter says instead God's leader is clothed in a garment of humility. A garment he wears about him until it becomes characteristic of his nature. He respects the counsel of his elders and graciously submits to whatever authority is over him knowing that only then can he expect those under him to submit to his.

Now I don't know about you but I think Peter had been reading 2 Chronicles. I think his heart must have been racing back to that moment in history when a young man named Rehoboam was given authority beyond his capacity and simply by listening to unwise counsel and yielding to a spirit of arrogance divided the kingdom of God's people and shattered the image of God's nation before an unbelieving world. He'd been given good advice.

He had been told, Rehob if you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer they will always be your servants. Always? Yes Rehob, always. So there he is.

King Rehoboam strutting his stuff, flexing his muscles, exercising his newfound power. His first move as a monarch then is to send Adoniram his secretary of labor out into the field to mobilize the troops and get the show on the road. Rehob follows closely behind to see his subjects cringe in fear as they line up to serve the ruler.

But it didn't happen. They stoned Adoniram instead to death and Rehob runs as fast as he can tripping over his royal roads, hops into his royal limo and races back to Jerusalem like a fugitive out distancing the law. And from that moment the kingdom was divided and the scripture records Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

More about Rehoboam in the next lesson. But this much we know he had the whole world in his hands. All he had to do was humble himself and become God's kind of leader and he could have walked in the shoes of his father Solomon full of wisdom, full of power.

Beloved if God has placed you in a position of leadership in the church, in your home, in your business, in your ministry, pay close attention to the story of Rehob and Jerry. Your call to lead beloved is not the license to drive but the opportunity to serve. It is God's hand laid gently upon you asking you to lead by example, to guide, to guard, to nurture, to fold those he has lovingly placed in your charge.

Lead God's way and men will follow. Never ever forgetting if you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer they will always be your servants. Oh to be God's kind of leader like few we have ever known the kind who gently folds and leads like a shepherd tending his own.

A loving guiding shepherd never drawn by greed always circling around the flock guarding as we leave. Oh to be God's kind of leader to all of God's precepts observe to never ever forget the truth that if we will be kind they will serve. Let's pray.

Our gracious father we worship you and so many of us father are placed in positions of authority and responsibility in the world about us and we listen to the world's arguments and we look at the world's ways

and we conclude that the world's systems are yours and we fail. May we be drawn back this morning to the reminder of the godly wisdom you gave your servant Rehoboam and remember the warnings that Peter gave the pastors and shepherds of the early church and may we carefully prayerfully remember as we go back into the workplace and into the marketplace and into our homes this week that if we will be kind they will follow in Jesus sweet and precious name. Amen.

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