

1Kings 12:1-20

The Proud Rejection of Good Advice

1Ki 12:7 *And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.*

Talk about a good inauguration gone bad – we certainly find an example of that here. We're told in the very first verse of the chapter that *Rehoboam went to Shechem; for all Israel was come to Shechem to make him king*. From all over the kingdom they came and their purpose in coming to Shechem is made plain. They came to make Rehoboam the next ruling monarch.

The nation had reached a high point under Rehoboam's father, Solomon. The nation had become the singular super power of the region. The temple had been built and the glory of God had descended and filled the temple – or in other words revival had come. And the nation was prosperous – so much so that silver was so much in abundance that it's value actually depreciated. The prospects must have seemed very bright for continuing this period of prosperity and supremacy.

And all that was necessary was for Rehoboam to take note of some complaints and adopt the principle for governing that was suggested to him by those elders who had stood before his father, King Solomon. *If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever* – they say to Rehoboam in verse 7.

The advice of these elders takes us back to the virtue that we studied last week. Peter exhorts his readers in 1Pet 5:5 to *be clothed with humility*. And in the next verse he writes *humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time*. That's basically what the elders who stood for Solomon were now saying to Rehoboam. *Humble yourself – use your authority to adopt a servant's posture and hear what your subjects are saying and answer them with good words*.

This proved to be too much for Rehoboam – especially after he listened to the advice of his immediate peers. After all he hadn't come to Shechem to negotiate, he had come to Shechem to be crowned. And so Rehoboam would proceed to demonstrate the truth of his Father's proverb that *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall* (Prov. 16:18).

And so the king's inauguration day, instead of being a time of celebration and thanksgiving, the way it had been for his Father, Solomon, would become a day of disaster instead and Rehoboam would learn that heavy handed tactics can backfire in a big way. Rehoboam's pride blinded him to the disaster he had created and it wasn't until he sent Adoram, who was over the forced labor, to take up his task of forcing the labor, only to be greeted by being stoned to death – it wasn't until that incident that Rehoboam suddenly realized that the Israelites meant it when they disowned his rule and so we find Rehoboam

hastily having to make his escape and flee back to Jerusalem. He came to Shechem for his coronation and instead had to flee for his life back to Jerusalem. This is why I say we find an example of an inauguration gone bad.

We also see, in this narrative, an illustration of the second point in our study last week – which was the point of the consequences both positive and negative that spring from being clothed with humility or the failure to be clothed in humility. I would like to zoom in on that point this morning by paying particular attention to the rejected advice that these elders gave to Rehoboam. Although Rehoboam didn't see fit to follow this advice I would hope that as a Christian you would see the value of that advice. Look at it again with me in v. 7 - *If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.*

And what does this advice amount to but this –

Use Your God-given Authority to Serve

I want to draw your attention to the value of this advice given by the elders to Rehoboam. And I want focus on that advice with the hope that you'll find it more valuable than Rehoboam found it. I believe it's recorded for us for that very reason – that we may find it valuable. Consider then first of all that the value of this advice is seen:

I. For What It Can Accomplish

When the elders who stood before Solomon advised Rehoboam to serve his subjects and speak favorably to them they gave their advice knowing that in return for such service Rehoboam would gain the loyalty of those over whom he reigned. I think it's worth noting that these elders were not suggesting for a moment that Rehoboam diminish his authority. Where pride dominates a man's heart he may be tempted to think that way.

It may very well be that when his own peers spoke to Rehoboam they dismissed the counsel of the elders with the kind of rationale that would have suggested that to serve his subjects would have involved the diminishing of his authority. *You are over them, they are not over you* they would have said. And to serve them leaves the impression that you are under them rather than over them.

Pride reasons that way. Some of you may recall the story that Ron told us in Sunday School last week – how he was pulled over by a cop because he had a burned out tail light and when Ron reminded the officer that he was supposed to be a public servant the officer replied by saying *I don't serve anybody*. Whether he realized it or not the officer was wrong. He serves a boss that has the ability to fire him. He serves a city or a county government that has the authority to pay him or not.

The officer's remark was nothing short of unabated pride and revealed what is a typical mindset that says *it is beneath me to serve. I am to be served but I serve no one*. The elders who gave their advice to Rehoboam were not, however, suggesting that he relinquish any of his authority. On the contrary their words indicate plainly their view that if Rehoboam

used his authority to serve them, they in turn would be his servants. They had after all come to Shechem for the same purpose Rehoboam had come to Shechem. Note again what it says in v. 1 *for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king*. Their expectation was that he would be their king.

So the advice of the elders was not designed to diminish his authority. Their counsel was designed, rather, to gain the loyalty of his subjects and I believe you can set it down as a true Biblical principle that loyalty is gained through service. Or if I could state it another way – service begets service. Look again at how the elders state their advice *If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, ... they will be thy servants for ever*. Service leads to service – or at least it should.

Now you may recall that in our last study I pointed out that humility is the oil, so to speak, that makes every relationship function properly – whether we're talking about husbands and wives, parents and children, church members and church elders, citizens and civil government, or employers and employees. These authority structures reach their highest level of efficiency and effectiveness when a mindset of service undergirds the exercise of authority. And the way to gain that service from somebody under you or somebody over you is to make sure that you yourself are serving. The elders from Solomon's day recognized that the way to be served is to make sure you yourself are serving others.

When I think back over the many places in which I've worked throughout the years – my favorite company that I ever worked for was a printing company up in Naperville, Ill. I think I can honestly say that it's the only place I've ever worked where I ever heard the employees sing the praises of the company they worked for. And it was no wonder that they felt that way. The owner of the company had no children and he did all he could to make his employees his family. He donated the largest amount of money that the IRS would allow to the retirement plan of his workers. He always made it a point to take to dinner those who had worked for him for 10 years. In retrospect he stands out in my mind's eye as a perfect example of one who served and as a result those who worked for him were motivated to do their best.

On a higher plane you could say that Christianity was meant to function this way. I made reference last week to Christ washing the feet of His disciples. We should note with regard to His condescending service that He never set aside His own authority. *Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am* – He says in Jn. 13:13. He then goes on to say in the following verses: *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you*.

The apostle John would take Christ's example even further in his first epistle. So he writes in 1Jn. 3:16 *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*. Doesn't such a statement take our service to a very lofty ideal?

We, as husbands, should be willing to die for our wives. We, as parents, should be willing to die for our children. We, as Christians, should be willing to lay down our lives for other Christians and especially should we, as Christians, be willing to lay down our lives for our Savior. This is after all how He served us. He condescended much further than to merely take on a servant's role to wash the feet of His followers. He went to Calvary's cross for them. He gave His back to be whipped for them. He gave His face to be beaten for them and He gave His hands and His feet to have nails driven into them for them.

The Christian, then, upon discovery or reminder of the greatness of such love will find himself desirous to serve in return. What an accomplishment, then, is the salvation of Christ. It takes those who are self-serving – those who, like that police officer I referred to a moment ago, who would never serve any one – and it transforms them into those that are willing and desirous to serve – to serve Christ by serving others – to serve Christ by utilizing their authoritative functions to serve.

So the advice given by the elders who stood before Solomon was certainly valuable in terms of what it could accomplish. By way of contrast we may also note that their advice was and is valuable:

II. For What It Can Prevent – {cf. 12:12-15}

We should note from these verses that the hand of God was providentially directing this matter. *The king hearkened not for the cause was from the Lord* we read in v. 15. It is indeed one of the tragic ironies of scripture that the wisest king in all the Bible lost out with God in his later years. His many foreign wives stole his heart and we're told in the previous chapter of 1Kings in 11:9 that *the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice.*

And in an act of chastisement Solomon was told that a large portion of the kingdom would be rent from him and given to another. And so we acknowledge God's providential rule in the chapter now before us but it would be a mistake to say that God, somehow in His providential rule, forced the hand of Rehoboam and made him go against his will to adopt the unwise counsel rather than the counsel of those who advised his father.

No, you see, it wasn't necessary for God to force Rehoboam's hand – all He had to do was to leave Rehoboam in his pride and by being governed by pride rather than humility that leads to service the result of the divided kingdom became inevitable. And so we're able to conclude that where pride prevails division will inevitably follow – irreparable division in this instance. The kingdom of Israel would never again be united.

You know, of course, that the application of this truth can be applied to so many realms. I've been watching a DVD documentary series on the life of John Adams, our second President. The series takes you back to Colonial America and shows vividly the strife between Great Britain and the Colonies. There are some scenes in this documentary that don't exactly make you proud of the rebellion that was instigated by the colonists. One

scene in particular shows how the British ship-master who was trying to unload his cargo of tea was stripped and then tarred and feathered. Another scene shows how the British soldiers at the Boston massacre were provoked into firing into the crowd of rabble rousers. Interestingly enough, John Adams defended those British soldiers in their trial and he won their acquittal much to the consternation of the citizens of Boston.

The thing that I find striking about the birth of our nation is that it came about much the same way that the kingdom of Israel was divided. Pride prevailed and humility was nowhere to be found. I suppose a study of world history would reveal that many nations have been born as a result of pride prevailing over humility.

And as I pointed out in our study last week – the breakup of marriages, the dissolving of families, the alienation of children from their parents – in just about every instance, if not in every single instance, pride and the absence of humility that leads to service are the major catalysts.

And I should add here that if, in your thinking, you can readily make the application to others before you can make the application to yourself then there's the strong likelihood that you're being governed by pride rather than humility. How many husbands and wives or parents and children would listen to what I'm now saying and reason to themselves – *that's right*. And the teenager says *If only mom and dad wouldn't be governed so much by pride then there would be no strife between us*. And mom and dad say *if only my son or daughter wouldn't be governed so much by pride then there would be no strife between us*. And the husband says the same thing regarding his wife and the wife says the same thing regarding her husband. We all agree on the principle that pride destroys relationships but then we, in our pride, make the application to everybody else.

And the tragedy is that strife can be prevented. Had Rehoboam heeded the advice of the elders, the kingdom could have remained united and he could have been inaugurated as king. I wonder how many families could have been preserved or how many marriages could have survived by an attitude of humility and service rather than an attitude of pride that led to contention.

Peter actually applies what we're consider now to the wives of unsaved husbands with the aim of winning their husbands to Christ. So he writes in 1Pet. 3:1 *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives*.

Only the final day will reveal how many spouses have been won to Christ as a result of contentious pride being replaced with humility and service – or how many children have been won to Christ the same way – or how many parents have been won to Christ by their children substituting humble service for contentious pride.

The value of the advice of the elders who stood before Solomon is seen then both in terms of what it can accomplish and in terms of what it can prevent. Humble service can bring about mutual love and loyalty and service. Humble service can prevent irreparable division. Rehoboam certainly missed a golden opportunity to be established as king. He

didn't know how to use his authority. He only knew how to assert himself. He never learned how to serve. May we be impressed from his unfortunate experience with what we may accomplish and what we may prevent. It remains for us to consider finally that the value of the advice of these elders to Israel is seen:

III. By the Way It Has Proven itself Over Time

We are told about these elders in v. 6 that they were *old men who stood before Solomon while he yet lived*. If you know the story of Solomon then you know that he began his reign the same way that these elders advised Rehoboam to begin his. We see Solomon's humility and his desire to serve very plainly in **{1Ki. 3:5-9}**.

You may recall from our study last week that I noted how God places such high value on humbleness of soul that such wicked kings as Ahab in the North and Manasseh in the South could find forgiveness and restoration once they humbled themselves. We see that high value of humbleness of soul in the example of Solomon also. So that we read in the next verse following his prayer (v. 10) *And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing*. You know the story – not only would Solomon be granted the wisdom he sought, but he would be granted riches and honor as well so that there would never again rise a king like him in terms of wisdom and riches and honor.

The Lord knows He can trust a man who is humble and so the Lord sees fit to bestow high honor on those that humble themselves. These elders from our text who stood before Solomon would have witnessed this. And before his pride eventually overcame him and he lost out with God, Solomon saw the kingdom of Israel reach its peak of splendor and dominion. And his kingdom was most happy and blessed.

Do you remember the testimony of the Queen of Sheba when she came to visit Solomon? She visited his palace and saw his servants and heard his wisdom and then stated: *It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.* (1Ki. 10:6-9).

His humbleness of soul gained for him not only riches and honor but it gained the happiness of those who were his subjects. It may well be that among those elders who advised Rehoboam could be found those who were on hand when the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon and beheld his happy servants.

And it would certainly appear that those servants gained some of the wisdom of Solomon – enough to recognize that if Rehoboam would adopt the same posture of humbleness and service he could see the same blessed result. These men based their advice on their experience.

And the value of their advice should be perceived by you and by me this morning insofar as God has seen fit to inspire and preserve it in His word. Just because Rehoboam rejected this advice doesn't mean that you and I need to. Here is advice that is good not only because it springs from the experience of those who waited on Solomon at the time when he was on top, so to speak. But this advice should be deemed to be good because we see in it Christ-likeness.

Christ showed His loyalty to His Father and to His followers by humbling Himself to serve. By following Christ's example we may not attain to the same riches and honor of a Solomon. But we will accomplish the aim of seeing loyalty and service reciprocated to us on the part of those we serve – and we will preserve the unity of our church and the unity of our homes and families. And we will enjoy the favor of God to such a degree that our countenances will lead others to recognize our happiness the way the Queen of Sheba could see the happiness of Solomon's servants.

The disciples of Christ when engulfed in their pride saw fit to argue among themselves over who would be the greatest in Christ's kingdom. Rather than simply rebuke them for their pride Christ instead acknowledged that greatness could be attained in His Kingdom. And then He went on to describe that greatness and to contrast it with the world's greatness by saying in Mk. 10:42-44 *Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

May we know this kind of greatness in our church and in our homes. May we strive for it by striving to be clothed with humility and by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God. And may we, in turn, know the blessing of unity and spiritual prosperity that comes through glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.