

The Story Series
Week 14 : Rehoboam, Jeroboam
A Kingdom Divided
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Here at Trinity, we are on this wonderful journey together. We are making our way through the Bible – cover to cover – to discover God’s game plan for the world. We’ve come to the conclusion that the Bible is not hundreds of unrelated stories, but rather it is one, unified story that tells of God’s unconditional love for you and me. The Bible tells of God’s unceasing desire to win us back despite our sinful nature.

Last week we talked about Solomon, King David’s son. Solomon was the king who had it all. He started strong, but he ended wrong. By the end of his reign, King Solomon was blatantly disregarding the ways of God. Solomon’s rebellion leads to what we will encounter today: God’s people – the people of Israel – being torn in two. The peace and security that God’s people once experienced is no more.

Just as God foretold, the kingdom of Israel becomes divided. There is a map in your bulletin today. It’s an insert, I believe. If you take a look at that map, you will see Israel in the north; Judah in the south – two kingdoms. 10 tribes in Israel; two tribes in Judah. Two territories means two kings: Jeroboam reigning in the north (*say that with me: Jeroboam*), and Rehoboam in the south (*say Rehoboam*). The names are so similar it’s hard to keep them straight. Do you know what the suffix b-o-a-m (boam) means at the end of a name? I don’t know either. But it might as well mean “disaster” because the word “disaster” sums up this part of *The Story*!

This is a difficult section to read in the Bible. Nothing goes right during this time. There’s a phrase that repeats over and over. The phrase is this: “everyone did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Or, other times it reads, “everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes.”

So here is how *The Story* plays out. At the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam is immediately hailed as King in Judah, in the south, but the northern tribes need to affirm his kingship as well. So the people in the north tell Rehoboam, “If you want to be our king, then you need to lay off.” Solomon had imposed heavy taxes and forced labor upon the people. So the elders advised Rehoboam to dial it back and come to the throne with a servant’s mentality. God’s very own Son, Jesus Christ, will say something very similar 1000 years later: “I came not to be served, but to serve others, to give my life for the sake of others.” The elders were giving good counsel. It echoed the will and ways of God.

But Rehoboam chose not to listen to them – to the voice of experience and wisdom. Instead, he went with the counsel of his younger buddies, his friends. They told Rehoboam that if he didn’t show the people who’s boss, then he would never have their full allegiance.

Sadly, that's the advice Rehoboam followed. Rehoboam aggressively proclaimed to the people his rights as the king, and he declared that he would not back down. In fact, he would impose even harsher taxes and forced labor upon them. As Rehoboam announces this, you can actually start to hear the tearing apart of the kingdom. Rehoboam's selfish, cruel decision led to war and disorder and turmoil among God's people.

So we might think, "That's what did it. Rehoboam makes this dumb decision causing all of this pain and suffering for God's people." But the kingdom tearing in two is actually God's doing because of his judgment upon Solomon. If you remember last week, God told Solomon that if his heart turned to other gods – which it did – if Solomon didn't keep the covenant God had established with him, then God would tear apart the kingdom. God would allow disunity and strife to torment his people because of their disobedience.

Many of us – myself included – have a difficult time understanding why God would act in such a judgmental way. Where is the grace and mercy and forgiveness that God has promised to show to us? The easy way out is to say that God's forgiveness and mercy were not fully bestowed upon us until God sent his Son to earth a thousand years later. That's true. But that presupposes now that Jesus has arrived, now that Jesus has died for our sins offering us forgiveness and eternal life, it really doesn't matter *how* we live our lives today. That couldn't be farther from the truth. In fact, now that Jesus has arrived on the scene, God expects even more from us.

Let's be clear: God still does not tolerate idolatry. Commandment numero uno: God demands our complete allegiance. "I am the Lord your God; you will have no other gods before me." God does not buy into us fully giving our hearts to him on Sundays, but then living however we so choose during the rest of the week. God must not just be our God on Sundays; rather, God must be our ultimate concern every moment of our lives. "*Constantly* keep your thoughts focused on me," God says to us. "Learn my ways; live by my commands."

"You will not have any other gods..." It sounds like words of judgment, words of punishment, don't they? "Do this or else." But actually, they are words of blessing and concern. You see, God knows full well that if we give our allegiance to anyone or anything else but to him, we are going to get hurt. Everything else will ultimately let us down. Everything else is temporary. And so God tries to spare us from bringing heartache and pain into our lives by directing our focus solely on him, the source of all eternal goodness and blessing.

It is much like a wife saying to her husband, "Honey, I'm so glad I married you, and I love you dearly, but I just want to date some other guys." Think about that. How long is that relationship going to last? It's not going to work. We get that. So why is it so hard to understand how God demands our full devotion and allegiance? It's the only way that true love will work: full devotion.

Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, they all forgot this basic truth. The question is: Have we? We could easily argue that the very fact we are here in worship this morning declares our devotion to God. Our presence in worship declares that we are putting God first. Although there are lots of other things we could have been doing at this 10:30am hour on Sunday morning (golfing, shopping, sleeping in, tackling chores, whatever...), instead, we chose to come and worship God. I commend you for that. God rejoices that you are here. But having that said, remember that giving our devotion to God on Sunday morning does not constitute complete faithfulness. The Bible says, "In *all* your ways acknowledge God." True devotion to God reveals itself on Monday morning, too. And Thursday afternoon. And Saturday evening.

God desires for us to surrender every moment of our lives to his leading. God has a plan for each of our lives. If we are listening and following God's leading only on Sunday mornings, just think how long it's going to take for us to fully understand God's plan for our lives!

One could surmise that Solomon and the other kings during this time were only listening to and following God's ways on occasion, only on Sunday mornings, you might say. Because they only referred to the map that God had given to them occasionally, they began to lose their way.

They began to wander away from the path that God had shown to them – the path that leads to abundant and everlasting life. The truth back then – the truth still this very day – is that there will only be peace in our hearts and peace within this community of faith if we align our ways with God's ways. In order for us to experience the blessed life God desires for us, God's ways must be our ways. To disregard God's ways is to invite chaos and pain into our lives.

Here's a question for us to contemplate: How will those who come after us remember the church of today? What will the Lutheran church, and more specifically this congregation, be remembered for? When future generations look back upon this time, will they sense faithfulness and devotion to the ways of the Lord? Or will they perceive a lack of faith, no sense of vision, no joy in walking in the ways of the LORD?

That's a question seriously worth contemplating, I believe. The way we live our life matters. What we do, who we are, how we behave, what we believe... it makes a difference, not just for our lives, but for the generations to come. King Solomon made some tragic mistakes and it wreaked havoc on his descendants.

But that coin has two sides. There is another side to that coin. Each positive, faith-filled decision we make today; every loving, supportive action we live out today has the potential to make a positive influence on future generations. We must create a legacy that will positively impact our families, our friends, our workplaces, this very congregation. The true Christian faith – faith marked by loving service to God and to our neighbor – that kind of faith must be modeled by us if it is to be passed on to future generations. We must never forget that.

As Kerri and I strive to be Christian parents to our daughter, Emma, we realized long ago that we can talk about such things as loving and caring for other people, forgiving others, being grateful for what we have and giving generously of ourselves – we can talk about those things all day long, but it isn't until Emma actually sees us live out those things in our daily lives that Emma starts to understand, "So this is what it means to be a Christian." Whether we realize it or not, you and I are shaping the next generation of Christians. The younger generations are watching and listening. Unbelievers are watching and listening. The question becomes: are we revealing to them genuine Christianity by the way we live our lives?

As I've said many times before, our life may be the only Bible some people will ever read. So we must be ever mindful that we are living out true Christian teachings in our daily lives.

A single mother was telling me the other day that her brakes didn't seem to be working right on her van, so she took it in to one of the local automotive places. She's on a limited income, so she was fretting the call from the shop to see how much it was going to cost. Can you see where this is going? The shop owner called back and said, "Ma'am, your brakes are just fine." Didn't see that coming, did you? That is how Christians treat one another: with fairness and honesty and integrity, especially when we could very easily take advantage of someone. Christ's ways must become our ways. Love must be the cornerstone of our lives.

We need to ask God to give us a conviction and a passion to be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ our in the world. Not just for our own sake, but for the sake of future generations. One of the desires of our hearts should be to pass down to future generations an inheritance of faith. God has placed in our hands that responsibility. When it comes to the Christian faith, we need to believe it, pray it, walk it, talk it, live it out, so that we might pass down to future generations an inheritance of faith.

To this essential task God has commissioned you and me. Will we choose to accept it? Will we boldly say, "Yes, God, I want to be a part of this! Here I am! Inspire me to make decisions in my life modeled after the teachings of your Word, so that your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as in heaven."

During this period of the divided kingdom, there were a total of 39 kings. And of those 39 kings, there were only five – count them, five – good and faithful kings who had the courage and the desire to draw people's hearts to Almighty God. Those five kings were the only ones who took seriously God's call to faithful living, God's commission to pass down an inheritance of faith.

I invite you this day to join the rank of those courageous five. In this time of uncertainty and darkness and fear of what tomorrow will bring, let us have the courage to proclaim that Jesus is Lord so everything is going to be OK. Jesus is in control; the destiny of those who put their hope and trust in the Lord is secure. With those five faithful kings, let us be

counted among those who follow the Lord, who, by the way we live our lives, leave behind an inheritance of faith.

This is our calling. This is *The Story* of God's people. This is *our* story! Let it be so! Amen