

Game of Thrones: 4. Rehoboam - Like Father, Like Son

1 Kings 12:3-14

August 12, 2018

Pastor Tami Luckhardt

This is episode four of our message series, Game of Thrones: not the HBO series about the medieval fantasy epic but I promise you there is just as much intrigue, adventure and danger. We are talking about the queens and kings of the Old Testament starting with King David. Last week we took a leap forward in history to learn from Queen Esther who unexpectedly found herself queen, at a specific time and for a specific reason. Today we're going back to the family line of David and we've arrived at his grandson and the son on King Solomon, Rehoboam. He is infamously remembered as the king who divided the Kingdom of Israel. How'd you like to live with that title attached to your name? The kingdom that his father and grandfather built and ruled over for 120 years, Rehoboam managed to break in just 3 days.

But now, to be fair, Rehoboam had big shoes to fill. You may remember that his grandfather, King David, was a great warrior. At the age of 12, he killed the giant Goliath with just one smooth stone because he put all of his trust in God. David was a man after God's own heart, and one of the most famous kings that the world has ever known. But he messed up big time by pursuing Bathsheba and then when she was pregnant, he had her husband, Uriah, killed so he could marry Bathsheba. But David was beside himself with remorse and God forgave David. You may remember that David went from hero to zero and hero again because of God's grace.

David's son, King Solomon, was no easy act to follow either. He was given the gift of wisdom to such an extent that nobody has been as wise before or since. He built the temple of the Lord and had riches beyond measure. He started out really well as king but soon he strayed. He began to worship false gods, amassed huge personal wealth, had 700 wives and 300 concubines and forced his own people into a life of slavery. Solomon did not end as well as he began and unlike his father, David, he did not seem to repent. So Rehoboam, Solomon's favorite son, grew up watching his father live a life of excess and privilege. And not surprisingly, he ended up to be much like his father. My mother would say *that* apple didn't fall far from the tree.

When Solomon's died, Rehoboam was 41 years old and he inherited all of his father's wealth, power and title. He was to be the ruler of the Lord's chosen people. He also inherited his father's advisors and they were ready and willing to assist this young king make a good start, succeed his father and complete the transition. But Rehoboam took things too personally and immaturely. He put himself first. He put himself on the throne. If we pay attention, the mistakes that Rehoboam made can be example and a warning to us on how we are to live our lives. It might be helpful here to know a little bit more about Jeroboam. Contrary to what his name might imply, Jeroboam is not the twin brother of Rehoboam. Jeroboam was an official advisor to King Solomon. When Solomon started exploiting his own people, Jeroboam stood up to him. And you know what happens when you stand up to a king? Your life is in danger! So Jeroboam has been in exile many years. But as soon as he learns of Solomon's death, he returns to Israel.

So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders

*who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. "How would you advise **me** to answer these people?" he asked.*

At first, it appears that Rehoboam wants to do what is right by asking the elders for their advice. But notice he uses the word "me" when consulting the elders. "How would you advise **me** to answer these people?" he asked. He was intentionally establishing the hierarchy of command with him at the top. It was all about Rehoboam! The old hands at the court suggested a brilliant and radical that was kinder and gentler. They advocated using a servant model rather than a superior model, a humble and healing heart rather than a hot and heavy hand, providing not a forceful response but a favorable answer.

But Rehoboam rejected their advice and instead consulted the young men whom he had grown up. The literal translation of the Hebrew word "young men" is "The Boys." These were his 40 year old buddies, his gang. His Peeps!, They were his unofficial advisors that were untrained, unqualified, unskilled, unwise and untested.

He asked them, "What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, 'Lighten the yoke your father put on us'?"

Notice the nuance in how Rehoboam asked the question this time. "How should **we** answer these people?" He was purposefully aligning himself with his buddies, reinforcing the frat boy mentality. And their response? "You're the king now. Show them whose boss!" The recommended words were so harsh, arrogant and offensive, it was enough to kill any hope of reconciliation. His words were calculated to mean business, silent opposition and impose punishment. Rehoboam apparently had not learned from history and instead of showing mercy and compassion, he doubled down on them and promised even more pain and more afflictions. If we can learn from his mistakes, we have the potential to be better servants and followers of God than he could be.

The first lesson that we can learn from Rehoboam's life is to humble ourselves before God and others.

Whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. Matthew 20:27-28

Everything in Rehoboam's life revolved around people serving him. He put his needs and wants first: what he wanted, when he wanted, how he wanted. All Rehoboam had to do was serve the people for this moment and he would have won their respect, their gratitude and their admiration. They would have been loyal to him and probably would have died for him. But he couldn't do it. Whether this came from a place of pure arrogance or a place of fear and self-doubt, he couldn't humble himself. He thought respect was something due to him because of his position and title. He thought that power and privilege were his right. He thought that loyalty was something that was purchased with fear.

If you read on in the book of 1 Kings, you will see that while Solomon had taken David's kingdom and made Israel one of the greatest kingdoms of the day, Rehoboam, within 3 days, literally set into motion the destruction of all that his father and grandfather had worked for. Because of his iron fist approach, the ten tribes in the north, seceded to follow Jeroboam, and became the nation of Israel. The tribe of Judah stayed with Rehoboam and formed the southern nation of Judah. "And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of their

lives.” (1 Kings 14:30) Rehoboam reminds us to not let pride rule our thinking. Theologian, Albert Schweitzer said,

“Whatever you have received more than others—in health, in talents, in ability, in success... all this you must not take to yourself as a matter of course. In gratitude for good fortune, you must render some sacrifice of your own life for another life.”

Rehoboam didn't get it. Rehoboam never connected with the people. He didn't listen to them. He certainly didn't care about them. He put himself above God and everyone else. But Jesus calls us, he commands us to serve and love one another and share our gifts and good fortune.

The second lesson that we can learn from Rehoboam's life is that we should surround ourselves with people of good character who don't just tell us what we want to hear but will instead challenge us to grow and be better people.

In July of 1969, Senator Ted Kennedy was the driver in a single-vehicle car accident that occurred on Chappaquiddick Island, Mass. The late night accident was caused by Senator Kennedy's negligence, and resulted in the death of his 28-year-old passenger, Mary Jo Kopechne, who was trapped inside the vehicle. According to his testimony, Kennedy accidentally drove his car off the one-lane bridge and into the tide-swept Poucha Pond. He swam free, left the scene, and did not report the accident to the police for ten hours. The next day, the car with Kopechne's body inside was recovered by a diver, minutes before Kennedy reported the accident to local authorities. When seeking advice from his group of advisors, protecting the Kennedy dynasty, not telling the truth, seemed to be the most important objective in advising Ted. Eventually, Kennedy pleaded guilty to a charge of leaving the scene of a crash causing personal injury, and later received a two-month suspended jail sentence. Learn from our mistakes. Learn from others. Learn from their advice. Rehoboam, like Ted Kennedy, was too self-centered to do that. If only Rehoboam had heeded the wisdom of his father, Solomon:

As iron sharpens iron, so friends sharpen each other. Proverbs 27:12

Rehoboam wasn't really seeking advice as much as he was just wanting people to tell him that he was right and agree with him. He lacked character and not surprisingly, he had surrounded himself with others who had serious character flaws. When we surround ourselves with people of good character, we gain a mental sharpness that helps us see with clarity and refinement. True friends don't just tell us what we want to hear, they challenge us to be better and build our character.

In the book “Empowering Leadership” author Michael Fletcher says that if it's true that God is interested in transforming us into the likeness of Christ, then our focus should be on character. We can develop our character if we can:

- Be quick to repent
- Be self-aware
- Live generously
- Exhibit kindness under pressure
- develop self-control in areas of former weakness or sin,
- learn to listen instead of talk,
- treat people with respect (especially those who grate on us)
- be quick to forgive

learn how to be a peacemaker
develop courage
These are the things that give a person real authority.

In the kingdom and in life, authority does not come from a position. It flows from your character. We can all name people we've worked for who had a position of authority but had no real authority in our lives. We were forced to do what they said because they were our boss but we never truly respected them. In contrast, there are people we gravitate toward because they seem to have a special quality that sets them apart. They live life from the inside out. They seem to draw on an inner strength, an inner grace. They are centered people. They seem to know who they are, as well as who they aren't and they are comfortable with that. They have a quiet confidence, a strength of soul. When we think of them we think of words like integrity, trustworthy, dependable, and generous. They have authority because they have character.

Jesus and the religious leaders of his day are perfect illustrations of this point. The scribes and the Pharisees of the first century were people of position, and because of that they had power. They occupied roles that allowed them to set the spiritual environment and set religious agendas for the nation. They were in positions of authority. Jesus, on the other hand, had no official position in Israel. He was called Rabbi, which means teacher, only because he had a following. His authority came from who He was as a person. Remember, most people had no idea that He was the Son of God, but they could tell He had authority.

The people were amazed at his teachings, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Mark 1:22

Jesus was the ultimate person of character, the gold standard and it showed in how he lived his life and every time he opened his mouth to speak.

Learn from others. Value other perspectives even when you may not agree with them. Diverse perspectives can help us have a deeper and broader understanding of things. If Rehoboam had listened to the elders, he might have realized just how hard it was to be a king and how much he needed to learn. But he didn't and he destroyed a nation. We might not have a country to run like Rehoboam or the Kennedys but if we don't surround ourselves with people of good character who love us enough to tell the truth, we will destroy the relationships that we value most.

As Christians, and especially as Methodists, we are called to be the change that we wish to see in the world. "The World" can mean your neighborhood, this community, Stewartville, Minnesota, Denver, Colorado, Nanyuki, Kenya. But it also means in your classrooms at school, on your sports teams, in your place of work, in your homes and your relationships, both personal and professional. By humbling ourselves, putting God first in our lives and surrounding ourselves with people of good character we can be that change that the world so desperately needs. Remember, the small, ragtag group of 12 who began following Christ over 2,000 years ago has grown to a following of over 2.2 billion and has changed the world forever. "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 12, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Great and Holy God, we confess that oftentimes we miss the mark. We mess up. We fall short. We disappoint ourselves or others around us. Most of all, we have not done all that you would have us do. We pray for community that supports and inspires us, for worship that lifts our spirits, for the urgent reminder of your Grace that abounds in our lives, for the peace that enables us to embody your Spirit of peace. O Living Lord, remake us. O Holy Spirit, fill us up. Remind us of our calling. Grant us the courage to be your people through the Risen Christ, the only One who sets us free. Amen.

Monday, August 13

Scripture: Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus along with her sons. Bowing before him, she asked a favor of him. "What do you want?" he asked. She responded, "Say that these two sons of mine will sit, one on your right hand and one on your left, in your kingdom." Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink from the cup that I'm about to drink from?" They said to him, "We can." He said to them, "You will drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom my Father prepared it." Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them over and said, "You know that those who rule the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave—just as the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Observation: Jesus kept talking about the Kingdom of heaven, *his* Kingdom. Weren't "kingdoms" about power, about who held the most powerful positions? James and John (and probably their mom, though Mark didn't mention her) thought they'd be smart, and make their bid for power before the other disciples. "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. In Heaven's Kingdom, there is no status seeking. In my Kingdom, we serve.

Application: We know (as James and John did) what earthly importance, power and privilege look like. Down deep, most of us would like to have at least some of those things. But Jesus' teaching was clear: "that's not the way it will be with you." Jesus said he didn't come to be served, but to serve, and even give his life. In what specific ways does choosing to follow Jesus change your approach to life?

Prayer: Loving Lord, I'm human. Sometimes I have ambitious dreams and wishes. Keep reshaping me, making those ambitions into ambitions to serve you and others. Amen.

Tuesday, August 14

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others.

Observation: Though he wrote some profound and challenging passages, the Apostle Paul was deeply practical. In verse 1 of today's reading, he listed four lofty spiritual benefits that can be ours in Christ. But in verses 2-4, he appealed to his readers to live their day-to-day lives, including all their relationships, in ways that made those spiritual qualities into walking, breathing realities.

Application: In verse 3, Paul wrote, "Don't do anything for selfish purposes." In verse 4 he urged his readers to "watch out for what is better for others." What are some of the productive, healthy ways you can put the interests of others above your own in response to Christ's self-giving love for you? What might this look like in your closest relationships?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I think of doing nothing for selfish purposes it feels hard and scary. When I think of having a partner who does nothing for selfish purposes, that feels as though it would be wonderful! Make me that kind of partner. Amen.

Wednesday, August 15

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:1; Proverbs 14:29-32

My dear friends, since we have these promises, let's cleanse ourselves from anything that contaminates our body or spirit so that we make our holiness complete in the fear of God.

Patience leads to abundant understanding, but impatience leads to stupid mistakes. A peaceful mind gives life to the body, but jealousy rots the bones. Those who exploit the powerless anger their maker, while those who are kind to the poor honor God. The wicked are thrown down by their own evil, but the righteous find refuge even in death.

Observation: The behaviors John Wesley named live inside all of us. We don't like that we possess these types of behavior, but we do. We work on becoming less of all of the above, because when we express them, they have an adverse impact on our life and the lives of others around us. That's why God calls us to grow in our capacity to live above and beyond the above characteristics, and ones like them.

Application: Which of the characteristics John Wesley calls out in today's question do you struggle with most? The next time you find yourself reacting irritably, or feeling jealousy towards another person, take the time to question yourself and understand what is triggering your negative responses. Then identify healthy outlets for your negative feelings—like exercise (even a quick walk around the block), breath prayers, meditation, a gratitude journal, or playing with your dogs.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, breathe in me so that my thoughts may be pure. Move in me so that my work may be pure. Pull me into your love so that I love only what is pure. Give me strength to guard my heart so that all I do is pure. Amen

Thursday, August 16

Scripture: Luke 14:7-14

When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don't take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give your seat to this other person.'

Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, 'Friend, move up here to a better seat.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up."

Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, "When you host a lunch or dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can't repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected."

Observation: Jesus wasn't urging sneaky manipulation in this passage, a false "Aw shucks" modesty. He was calling us to set aside our obsession with rank and status and be at peace with who we are. Consistent with his entire life and teaching, he urged people to avoid selfishly pushing for their own recognition and advantage, to leave room for honoring others.

Application: Have you ever known (or maybe even been) a person like the ones Jesus noticed who "sought out the best seats at the table"? In what ways can that attitude show itself in school, games, the workplace, even church work? What's the difference between healthy assertiveness, so that you can use your gifts to bless others, and the kind of self-promotion Jesus warned against?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have honored me by loving, redeeming and accepting me. Help me keep growing in my ability to extend that same kind of generosity to others. Amen.

Friday, August 17

Scripture: 1 John 2:1-6, 15-17

My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you don't sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is God's way of dealing with our sins, not only ours but the sins of the whole world. This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments. The one who claims, "I know him," while not keeping his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this person. But the love of God is truly perfected in whoever keeps his word. This is how we know we are in him. The one who claims to remain in him ought to live in the same way as he lived.

Don't love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. Everything that is in the world—the craving for whatever the body feels, the craving for whatever the eyes see and the arrogant pride in one's possessions—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world and its cravings are passing away, but the person who does the will of God remains forever.

Observation: John 3:16 said God loved "the world." Why would verse 15 of this passage tell us not to love the world? Scholar Craig Keener shows the point of these verses: "The world'...here means the system in competition with God. Just as Israel in the Old Testament repeatedly had to decide between allegiance to God and allegiance to the pagan nations around them, the Christians scattered among the nations had to choose Christ above whatever in their cultures conflicted with his demands." Like God, we are called to love all the people in our world. But we are called to separate ourselves from cultural, economic and political parts of "the system in competition with God," just as much as possible.

Application: Verse 1 highlighted the tension John (and all Christians since him) dealt with. He was writing to his converts to urge them not to sin. How could anyone who takes God seriously do anything less? But he knew that at times they *would* sin—so he also reminded them that Jesus “is God’s way of dealing with our sins.” Are there any areas where you are ignoring a God-given inner conviction? When have you been honest about a flaw or struggle, and found that your honesty connected you with the Savior John described: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep drawing me into your kingdom. I know that at times that will make me different from some of the “cool” people around me. Help to crave connection with you more than anything else. Amen.

Saturday, August 18

Scripture: Ephesians 4:29-32

Don’t let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say. Don’t make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy—you were sealed by him for the day of redemption. Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

Observation: In the movie, *Wonder*, young Auggie received a medal for his courage during the year. He told the crowd in the school gym, “Be kind, for everyone is fighting a hard battle. And if you really want to see what people are, all you have to do is look.” Too often we see unkind words and actions tear down community and set people against one another. Today’s reading makes it clear that God cannot possibly find such unkind words and acts acceptable. Being kind requires letting God change the inner sources from which our words and actions spring. We aim to be a community in which we “Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what [we] say.”

Application: Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Living as a Christian demands that we grow up in our thinking: you have to learn to identify your own moods and behavior patterns, to see which ones are going in the right direction and which ones in the wrong direction.... We should regard our moods, and the speech which flows from them, as we might a strong but willful horse, which needs to be reminded frequently of the direction we’re supposed to be going in.... People who are enslaved to anger and malice may think they are ‘free’ to ‘be themselves’, but they are in bondage. If we are marked out by the Spirit’s personal presence living in us, think how sad it makes that Spirit if we behave in ways which don’t reflect the life and love of God.” When have you said or done something that hurt someone else, and asked, “Why did I do that?” What helps you better understand your “interior landscape” to keep you from rashly reacting in ways you regret and wish you could take back?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you fearlessly challenged evil. But you were always ready to extend mercy and kindness to anyone who responded, in even small ways, to your message. Keep reshaping me into your image. Amen.