

The Story: A Kingdom Torn in Two

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Braemar Baptist. Happy New Year. It's the first time I get to say that to most of you. It is good to be back with you this morning.

And I don't know about you, but the frenetic pace of the holiday season, a few people this morning have said to me, so how was your holiday? Do you feel rested? Uh, well.

So my holiday was a week in my in-law's house, who were amazing hosts, but it was with in-laws and cousins and nieces and nephews and lots of activity and people coming and people going, people staying late, people coming early, people eating too much, people not eating enough. Lots of games, lots of puzzles. So I feel wound, but in a good way. It was nice to get out of routine, but I'm sure glad to be back in it.

So this morning we'll be beginning, we'll be looking at the book of 1 Kings chapter 12. And you can grab your Bible and have it handy, but you know I'm a screen person, so.

[1 : 11] Back in September, we started a journey together intended to better help us understand God's interaction with this world as it's been revealed to us in the Bible, and it's called the story.

The story involves a study of the narrative portions of the Bible, and they've been arranged together in this work, this book, as a chronological story to make it a bit easier for people to be able to follow. And believe it or not, we're now nearing the halfway point of this journey. And I think it's an excellent time for us to take a moment to recap our journey so far, quickly.

What we've really been discovering as we've worked through this together is that there are really two aspects to the story. There's God's upper story, and God is always at work doing things, and what He plans to do will happen, regardless of what's going on down here.

And that's good to know. And then we also find out that there is our lower story. Doesn't mean lesser, just lower. In which God allows each one of us a certain amount of freedom to write our story how we choose.

[2 : 29] We can have a lot to do with how our story is written. And what we need to be mindful of as we continue to work our way through this is the fact that God's story is ultimately the most important one.

Probably not surprising. It's also the one that will prevail. And so the more closely we're able to align our story with God's story, the better off we will be, not only while we're here, but for all eternity.

In case you're wondering, the way that we connect our story with God's upper story is something we call faith. And faith is choosing to trust God and His plan more than our own, which we've probably all found at different points in our lives can be easier said than done.

Am I right? Because we don't want to give up control. Noel has called me a control freak. I said, no, that's not true.

But I guess it kind of is. We want to be in charge, don't we? We want to write our own story. We want to know what's going to happen. We don't like the unknown, the unexpected.

[3 : 50] We want to write our own story. I want to take a moment. Pastor Luwam isn't here, but I want to thank Noel and Pastor Luwam for preaching and launching us back into our series on the story over the past two weeks while I was away.

And I listened. They don't believe me that I listened, but I listened and I like them both. So let's do a quick, as I said, a quick recap.

So we saw at the beginning that when God created the world, he placed two people, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, and he gave them a choice. He said, you can follow me or you can do your own thing.

And of course we know what they chose. And while I have to admit that I've been personally disappointed with the choice they made for obvious reasons, what resulted from that choice, I can

also recognize in my own life that I've probably done the same thing on numerous occasions. I've been aware what God wanted me to do. I've been aware of what God called me to do in a given situation. And yet I made my own choice.

[5 : 06] Can you relate to that? As civilization developed, things steadily got worse to the point that God felt that the best option would be, for technologically wired people, a hard reboot, starting over.

And he worked through a man named Noah, who saved himself and his family, and at least two of every creature, in an ark, so that the earth could be completely repopulated after this worldwide flood that destroyed everything.

Eventually, eventually, after the world was rebooted, up and running again, God's plan led him to start a brand new nation from scratch, using this very old couple named Abraham and Sarah.

And God's plan was to use this new nation to more clearly reveal himself and his character and his nature to us. And most importantly, to reveal his design to provide Jesus as the way for all people to come back into relationship with him that had been destroyed because of sin.

Just as God had planned, Abraham's descendants grew into this great nation. But they were being held as slaves in Egypt until God raised a leader named Moses who delivered them and eventually led them to what was called the promised land which they took control of.

[6 : 48] And for a number of years, they occupied that land, functioning as what we would call a theocracy. Big word. God was supposed to be king until the people finally said, you know what?

We want to be like everybody else. Give us an earthly king. And that actually brings us to where we are today. We're in the era, era, however you prefer to say it, of the kings.

And so far, we've seen three kings in succession. Saul was first, then David, then Solomon. And during the reigns of David and Solomon, the nation of Israel reached its apex.

They were at the top of their game. But sadly, it only took a few years for that glory to spiral down into chaos and ultimately division.

We're now at the place in the history of the nation when the kingdom is going to literally be torn in two. And as we keep going, we're going to see things steadily going from bad to worse, just when you thought that wasn't possible.

[8 : 07] Because we're going to read about one king after another that made foolish decisions and led the nation of God further and further away from him. Now, most people in our congregation have been Christians for a long time.

I think I can say that safely. Even me. But at different times in our lives, even some of you may have stopped to think, what on earth are we doing studying an ancient book that explores a history that is so far removed from our own?

Really? What's the connection? Or perhaps you've thought, I believe the Bible is God's word and that it's truth, but what possible insight or application can it have for me in my life here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in 2020?

And the answer is that we're studying it so that hopefully we can avoid making some of the same mistakes that these individuals made.

Now, everyone has been driving this week, most of you. Fun, right? Hasn't it been fun? Not that fun, always. I've said to a few people, most of you know I worked for the Alberta Motor Association for four and a half years.

[9 : 31] So media would phone me, I was in media relations, they would phone me and say, Kent, why are we having this conversation again? I would say, because it happens at the same time every year and everybody forgets how to drive.

It doesn't matter. so we don't learn the lesson. This is years ago.

It gets worse. The next bus is coming down.

The next bus is coming down. The next bus is coming down.

No injuries. Hey! Guys! Oh boy.

[11 : 06] Get out of the car! At least he's standing on the way down. Wow.

That was painful to watch, wasn't it? Especially if you're one of those cars that's coming from up the hill that suddenly realized, oh no, it's too late to turn back.

So what would have really been helpful in that situation? Any ideas? It would have been helpful, I think, if someone could have gone back and warned these people what was ahead.

If they'd been able to give them advance notice that there was a real disaster up ahead that they could potentially avoid if they took another route. if they had gone another way.

And friends, that's exactly why God has preserved the Bible for us. So that our lives don't end up in disaster. The Bible says in Romans 15, 4, let's read this together.

[12:23] for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we may have hope.

Have what? Scripture provides us with so many valuable things. Insight, wisdom, and examples of how to avoid bad decisions and make good ones.

I've been doing some research lately and it seems that they have confirmed something that all of us should be aware of. The human mortality rate continues to hover around 100%.

Still 100%. If you had checked, it's been updated, still 100%. I have a couple of questions for you to consider this morning.

When you die, what would you like to be remembered for? All of us, if we had some time, could probably think of some things that we would want to be remembered for.

[13:32] And the second question is, if you actually died today, how is it that you would be remembered? And as you think about those two questions, how would you like to be remembered?

How would you actually be remembered? Could they be answered the same? Or might they be very different? I have good news.

We're starting a new year and as change and resolutions are on our minds, there is no time like the present to consider ways to bring these two things closer together.

Because what you choose to do today is what will determine the legacy of what you leave behind tomorrow. This morning, as we consider the legacy of the kings we're going to be studying, now in the portion of this story, we'll be gaining some perspective and insight that will help point us towards some strategic decisions that we need to make to get us on a solid course for the rest of our lives.

That's my promise. And if you're a younger person here today, you need to recognize that the changes you make in your life, the wise decisions that you make now, have even more opportunity to change your path, the direction of your life, and ultimately your legacy.

[15:12] And I'm not saying for those of us who are older that we're out of luck. It's not at all. Do you know the secret to a great memorial service? It's a life well lived.

This morning, we're going to be considering the examples we have from three different kings in this portion of the story. And through each of them, we're going to gain some insights. And the goal is to have your pastor be able to tell the whole truth at your memorial service, whether that be me or someone else.

I don't know if you have, but I have attended some memorial services and funerals where it felt as though it may have been a stretch for someone to come up with nice things to say.

Have you been to one like that? Everyone's smirking. Maybe you can relate to that experience where it felt like, wow, this is not the Bob Smith that I knew.

He sounds better than I remember. But I've also been at services where the person's legacy, the way they lived their life, has clearly impacted many people.

[16:38] The first king we're going to look at this morning is the son of Solomon. And he's the one Solomon chose to succeed him as king. And his name is Rehoboam.

Good job. The strategic decision that we, if we look at his life, we can learn from Rehoboam is this. Heed wise counsel.

Listen to wise counsel. So when we get to this part of the Bible, we learn that Solomon has died and it's time for the transfer of power. And what we find is that Solomon, as wise as he was, has been pretty tough on his people in terms of taxing them heavily, conscripting them into labor to maintain his extravagant projects.

And by now, people were ready for a break. The Bible says in 1 Kings 12, 1 to 7, I'll read this for us, so have a listen or have a look in your Bible.

Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. When Jeroboam, son of Nebat, heard this, he was still in Egypt where he had fled from King Solomon.

[17:57] He returned from Egypt. 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. They replied, If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.

I have a question for you. In your life, where do you go for wise counsel? I'm not looking for the answer of the Bible.

Where do you go for wise counsel? If you're like most people, you may not actually seek it out that much. You probably just try to figure things out on your own.

[19 : 20] But we see here that Rehoboam should at least get some credit for seeking out advice. He realized he didn't have the answer and wanted to make a wise decision.

Or at least he started in the right direction. But when he didn't like the advice he received, maybe you can relate to this, he made a big mistake.

He went looking for the advice he was looking for. Does that make sense? I look for advice.

I get advice. I don't like that. I'm going to keep going. Do you know the concept of proof texting in Scripture? Digging and finding a single verse that makes your case, that makes your argument. Using Scripture to back you up. You should back Scripture up. Back up Scripture. Bad English. So the Bible says in 1 Kings 12, 8, let's read this together.

[20 : 24] Oh, I didn't, I'm not advancing my own slides. But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him.

Checked with his buddies. Do you have people in your life who are allowed to tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear?

The Bible says in Proverbs 27, 6, let's read this together. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Do you understand what that's saying? A wound, something hurtful, something hard to hear from a friend is more trustworthy than someone who wants your favor trying to make you happy, trying to tell you what you want to hear.

All of us have blind spots. Do you recognize that? Areas in our lives where we can't see everything, sometimes anything, clearly.

[21 : 35] And that's why we need people, we need advice from people who love us and care about us and will say the hard stuff. People who are allowed and not afraid to say tough things.

Sometimes we think our way may be the best way and maybe it is, but sometimes it's really, really not. The Bible says in Proverbs 12, 15, let's read this, the way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

Pretty self-explanatory. Yeah, I think this is a good idea. Yeah, I'm just going to go ahead and do it. Well, when was the last time that you were given advice that you didn't necessarily appreciate or want to hear?

Can you think of any examples? Did you take it to heart? Did you hear it? Did you receive it? Did you heed some wise counsel even if it was uncomfortable?

The Bible says in Proverbs 19, 20, let's read this, listen to advice and accept discipline and at the end you will be counted, oh, sorry guys, you may gain wisdom in the future.

[22 : 56] Two different translations I switched in my notes. So I have this one on the screen, listen to advice and accept instruction that you may gain wisdom in the future. Listen to advice and accept discipline and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

Two different translations. We should all seek to have some godly mentors in our lives. People who have been there and done that.

People who have learned some things that could help us to avoid some mistakes that we might make. They could show us some of the crashes that are up ahead.

Because Rehoboam took the wrong advice, the northern tribes of the kingdom up here actually rebelled, broke away and formed their own nation of Israel.

So from now on when you look at Israel as a nation you'll see the kingdom of Israel at the top and the kingdom of Judah at the bottom. The tear right here.

[24 : 12] Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the line of David and to Rehoboam. And this new kingdom of Israel was formed and a new king was chosen.

And his name was mentioned in the passage we read earlier. Do you remember it? Jeroboam. And it's Jeroboam who will teach us the second strategic decision that will help us so that the pastor can tell the truth at your memorial service.

Jeroboam's strategic decision that we can learn from is this. Live to please God rather than people. every one of us here today is affected by peer pressure.

In some way in some way we are. The pressure from our friends our colleagues our family members spouse whomever.

We feel a pressure to fit in don't we? We feel a pressure to be accepted to be liked and appreciated by others for who we are or we'll pretend we're not who we are for the same result.

[25 : 36] So another question for you. When you make decisions in your life is it in light of or with the perspective of receiving the favor of or approval of the people around you rather than saying what's really important to God.

And that's exactly what happens to Jeroboam when he becomes king. He decides to compromise his faith in God in order to keep the people closest to him happy.

Bible says in 1 Kings 12 26 and 27 this is a big chunk let's read this together Jeroboam thought to himself the kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David.

If this people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem they will again give their allegiances to their Lord Rehoboam king of Judah.

Yes king of Judah. Yes I didn't switch my translations everywhere. Thanks for reading. So Jeroboam begins to think that if the people have to travel back to Jerusalem to the temple to make sacrifices there's a chance they may become loyal to Rehoboam again and maybe kill him.

[27 : 05] So he's perceiving risk. He's perceiving perception but the wrong way. So despite the trouble that one golden calf caused for the people of God at Mount Sinai Jeroboam has two golden calves made two's better than one to make people able to worship God at their own convenience.

One major problem these calves are not the same as worshiping God and Jeroboam is pun intended steering his subjects the wrong way.

He's facilitating their needs over God's desire for them. And if that wasn't enough Jeroboam begins making priests we read out of anybody who wants to be just to keep everyone happy.

Oh you want to be a priest? Good. Yep. Step right up. He's totally lost it. He's lost focus. So it seems that Jeroboam lost sight of the fact that God actually chose him to be king.

He became more and more concerned with what people thought of him than what God was thinking of him. We need to be careful not to become more concerned with what other people think of us and seeking that than with what God thinks of us and pursuing that instead as the goal of our lives.

[28 : 49] Because when we seek to make decisions in our lives and choose a different direction in our lives I believe that we're more caught up in how we perceive others will view decisions and the things that we gain in life rather than focusing on what God wants to do in and through our lives.

we're worried about what people will say, what people will think. Or we don't care what people will say or think, I'm going that way because I think that's the best choice for me.

When we know it's probably not. So don't be surprised by this. I don't want you to feel guilty and go home this afternoon, have your roast beef lunch and then feel guilty for the rest of the day.

because this is human nature, folks. It happens today. It happened in the time of these kings and we can see it in the work of Jesus' ministry as well.

Even though those people could see the many amazing miracles that Jesus was doing. The Bible says in John 12, 42 and 43, let's read this together.

[30 : 07] Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him. But for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.

For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Yikes! For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Who you are trying to impress will determine how you are going to be remembered after you're gone. Got it?

Who you're trying to impress will determine how you're going to be remembered after you're gone. The only opinion that truly matters in your life is that of the one be free in this.

Is that of the one who already loves you more than anyone else ever possibly could? The final king we're going to look at this morning is one of the only kings in scripture, this is sad, who left a godly legacy.

[31 : 29] His name is pretty easy to remember. It's Asa, three letters. And we're going to learn a third strategic decision from him that will help you live so your pastor can tell the truth at your memorial service.

His decision is this, live as a fully committed follower of Christ. Christ. This was no easy task for Asa.

He literally had to go against the flow of even his own family. We read in scripture that he had to depose his own grandmother from the palace because she was worshipping false idols there. He had to kick her out. As hard as that must have been to do, he was committed to living a faithful and godly life.

I think we can add at any cost. The Bible says in 1 Kings 15 verse 11 and then verse 14, let's read these verses together.

[32 : 42] Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as David his father had done, but the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days.

I'm sure that if I asked each one of you who's here this morning, you would say that you are committed to living a life that is devoted to Christ. I hope that we're not here just to check the went to church box on our list, but that we're here to intentionally worship God and to encourage one another on our journey.

And while all of us may start out with the right intentions, it can be easy to get distracted by so many other things, can't it?

Jesus often told stories to reveal important truths like this. They were called parables. And in a story he told called The Parable of the Sower, in which a farmer casts seed on the ground representing the truth of God, and some of that seed lands on four different types of soil.

You know the story, some of you, many of you. Three of those types of soil are not the kind we would want represented in our lives. And the problem here is that there's at least one of them that most of us are likely to be susceptible to, and that's the soil that gets weedy.

[34 : 29] In this parable we read in Luke 8, 14, let's read this together. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

That, more than anything else, is what we see happening in people's lives. How do you want to be remembered in your life?

A good memorial service is, as I said at the beginning, a life well lived. if your life ended today, what do you think would be said of you?

I want to tell you a quick story. One day a man named Alfred opened the paper, and to his great surprise, he was greeted by his own obituary.

it was actually Alfred's brother who had died. But the obituary shared the facts of Alfred's life.

[35 : 48] The obituary stated that he was known for creating the most destructive force known to mankind at that time, dynamite. dynamite.

The facts of the obituary were true. He had invented dynamite. He built up companies and laboratories all over the world, and it had amassed a considerable fortune.

When he had finished reading the obituary, Alfred decided he didn't want his family name to be remembered for destruction. While science had built the foundation for Alfred's own activities as a technological researcher and inventor, efforts to promote peace had always been close to his heart. As a result, Alfred began thinking about giving away his fortune as a means to recognize those that have made significant contributions in physics, chemistry, physiology, or medicine, literature, and peace.

On November 27, 1895, Alfred, Nobel, signed his final will and testament at the Swedish-Norwegian Club in Paris.

[37 : 14] When Nobel died on December 10, 1896, it was discovered that according to his will, his vast wealth was to be used for five prizes, including one for peace.

The prize for peace was to be awarded to the person who shall have done the most of the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding of peace congresses.

just before his death, Alfred Nobel confided to a friend, I want to be remembered for peace, not destruction.

the way you choose to live today is how you will be remembered. You may be thinking now of the life that you've lived so far, and thinking, wow, I've blown it, wow, what a mess.

But while you can't go back and start again, anyone can start from where you are, and make a brand new end.

[38 : 36] May that be your goal for 2020. Let's pray. Let's pray.