

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Not Business as Usual, No. 2*

Civil War

May 3, 2020 (video)

*2 Chronicles 10:16-19 (NIV)*

I mentioned last Sunday that we'd be looking, for a few weeks here, at some times of Scriptural history where it was anything but business as usual, and I think that would be a hard thing to do without a look at the dividing of the nation of Israel that happened after the death of King Solomon. You can find the report of that division in two places – both Kings and Chronicles give us the account, or at least you find the flashpoint of the separation. I'll read about it here from the Second Chronicles version. Chapter 10 puts it this way:

*16 When all Israel saw that the king (that is, Rehoboam, the son of Solomon) refused to listen to them, they answered him: "What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, Israel! Look after your own house, David!"*

*So all the Israelites went home. 17 But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.*

*18 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. 19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.*

Times of large-scale transition almost always have both a measure of opportunity and a measure of threat or peril attached to them. Because of the level of uncertainty in those times, people get uneasy – anxious, edgy. My family always used the term, "squirrely," and all sorts of things can happen: some good and some not so good.

You know what that's like – when it's announced your boss at work is retiring, or maybe you're getting a new teacher, or a new governor or president. Whenever we know something new is coming that can change our world, people get squirrely.

This was true in times past too, and especially when there was a transition of kings – and even more especially when a transition would come after a long and, by many measures, successful rule – as was the case with Solomon.

There had always been some points of contention between Israel's northern and southern tribes. With the conquest of Jerusalem, David brought them more together than anyone else, but with Solomon's death came a turning point.

Solomon, of course, was the son of David – of the tribe of Judah, and so he was, of course, a southerner. Likely due to his heavy hand as King, at some point in his rule, he had been challenged by Jeroboam, who was a northerner and who'd served in Solomon's court.

Of course, you know how the saying goes, "If you come at the king, you'd best not miss."

Well, Jeroboam came at the king, but he missed, and so he had to escape to Egypt for his life.

Yet upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam returned to seek the kingship for himself.

Meanwhile Solomon's son, Rehoboam, prepared to take over, and part of that preparation involved a meeting with the northern leaders. We're told the essence of that meeting earlier in Chapter 10, there in verse 4. The northern contingent simply told Rehoboam, "Look, your dad Solomon treated us unjustly. He worked us mercilessly and he taxed us heavily, but if you'll lay off a bit, we'll support you!"

All things considered, this was not a huge request for Rehoboam to meet in the interest of keeping the nation together and the people happy. But unfortunately, human hubris is a powerful thing.

What happened with Solomon is a great example of what so often happens to those who occupy places of leadership for long terms. You see it time and again in history. You see it today in politics, in business, in families, in churches: the longer someone is in power, the more control they typically gather to themselves, and the more they are tempted to take advantage of those they govern.

Solomon had done this, and the northern tribes had been hit especially hard, and so the question at hand was, "Would the son follow in the footsteps of the father? What sort of leader will Rehoboam, Solomon's son, be?"

And we discover, unfortunately, that Rehoboam was neither his father in terms of wisdom, nor was he his grandfather in terms of leadership ability. He asks for three days to gather counsel, he winds up choosing the worst counsel offered him, and so he offends the northern delegation to the point of their rejection of the Davidic line of kings.

In that moment, he splits the kingdom, and Israel would never be the same.

Now, the split here had tragic consequences for both the northern and southern tribes, although maybe a bit more profoundly for the northern ones.

This fellow Jeroboam – the one whom the northern tribes choose as king – actually winds up being a worse tyrant to the northerners than Rehoboam would have probably been, and so defines such a legacy of sin that 15 of the 18 northern kings who followed him are said to "have walked in the sins of Jeroboam."

Jeroboam, for generations, became the standard of sinful behavior.

Interestingly, his sins that were so terrible as to define the description of all those kings were not things like adultery and murder, like David, nor were they the commission of mass polygamy like Solomon. Jeroboam's noteworthy sin was his choosing to adapt Israel's conception and worship of God – which God judges as a far worse offense.

Which tells us something about God, doesn't it?

But what of this division of the Kingdom – ancient Israel’s civil war?

Surely it was an anxious time. Generations of people had known only a common rule under Saul and David and Solomon. They were a people who identified as the people of God – the people of the Davidic dynasty, a nation who had been so militarily and economically and charismatically strong, wealthy, powerful and wise – seemingly unstoppable in every way.

Now they were ruptured – splintered and weakened, and each would face its own conquest in a matter of a few hundred years.

That which was at one point nearly unthinkable would soon become reality for both north and south – a shocking, unprecedented thing through which to live.

One thing we see here in this far-from-business-as-usual event in Israel’s history is how completely inaccurate the image of a nation that we see on its surface can be in reality. We see how powerful undercurrents of turmoil and weakness and vulnerability, which had been swirling beneath the surface for a long time, can explode, and in just a moment, change the course of a nation.

And those undercurrents of sin never just go away on their own. They may get pressed down or pushed aside – at times so effectively that all who look on might have the impression that everything is just fine, but ultimately there are moral fundamentals that are required to keep a nation upright and stable.

And their absence becomes strikingly evident in times of transition and crisis.

You see, what happened to Israel was not just human political failure. What happened to Israel was all about the divine repercussions of long-term, ongoing, well-hidden, but present just the same, sin. And reading about it here should remind us that, just as no nation is ever far from God’s mercy, neither is any nation ever far from God’s justice.

The sins of Israel – the sins of arrogance and immorality, and maybe the worst: the mischaracterization and neglect of God – will surely take down even the most powerful and wealthy of peoples and nations. And a crisis – whether caused by God or allowed by God, however you understand it – will only, typically, accelerate that self-destruction.

You see this in our nation today.

Now, yes, of course there is still good going on. There is helping, there is giving, there are sacrificial offerings of time and talents – and we celebrate those things. Those remind us that God is still very much present here.

But at the same time there is great discord in our nation. You can feel it: a growing sense of unrest and ugliness and an “attack mentality” in so many.

Now, I’m not talking about the exercising of our rights to ask questions and even to protest. I’m talking about the underlying determination to take people out, this dangerous arrogance, name-calling, threatening, the loss of civility and patience, and the inability to discuss and debate.

It’s all swirling beneath the surface. It’s been there for quite a while, and it’s more of a threat than we know. This is why, as followers of Jesus in our nation today, we need to see clearly the what’s really going on – we need to see the arrogance and immorality and neglect of God in our nation – and we need to lead our people in calling upon God for mercy and forgiveness.

Truly, it’s more important to call upon God in repentance in these days and to pray for His mercy and forgiveness than it is even to find a cure or vaccine for this virus. Because, you see, the virus is just the latest crisis to expose the real thing that threatens us – which is our neglect of God.

Because at worst, a virus may end our earthly life.

But our neglect of God will end our lives forever.

We who follow Christ in these days have a sure hope in Him, regardless of what may happen in our land – in our world.

But just as we have a hope, we also have a duty to lead our nation in repentance and mercy and to remind our people of what’s really important here and of Who really will save us.

That is always the duty of God’s people – to point those around to God, and especially so in times that are not business as usual.

It’s in that posture that I invite you to come to the Lord’s Table today – a posture of repentance and a posture of intercession on behalf of our nation and of our world.

In the midst of this unusual time, let’s ask the Lord for mercy and healing – certainly, but even more, let’s ask Him for forgiveness and for a re-awakened sensitivity to Him – to who He is and what He wants from us as His people, His creation.

Certainly, these days are not business as usual, and they could be the thing that leads us – as a nation, as a world, and as individuals – to either great defeat or great victory. Let’s pray that God would lead us to victory, as we share at His table.

For this service, we’ve made the elements available in the foyer of the church building, which we’ll continue to do as long as we worship in this way. You can come and get those, or you can certainly take some bread and juice even now.

Let’s take those and prepare to receive them as the body and blood of Jesus, given for us.

We’re going to recite the liturgy together – I’ll lead and you respond with the words as they’re printed on your screen, OK?

I’ll begin with the invitation:

*You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins,  
who live in love and peace with your neighbors,  
and who intend to lead a new life,  
following the commandments of God and walking in His  
holy ways,  
draw near with faith,  
and take this holy sacrament to your comfort;  
and humbly kneeling, make your honest confession to  
Almighty God.*

Let's pray the General Confession together:

**Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
maker of all things, judge of all people,  
we confess that we have sinned,  
and we are deeply grieved as we remember  
the wickedness of our past lives.  
We have sinned against You, Your holiness and  
Your love,  
and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.  
We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry  
for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the  
things we should.  
Our hearts are grieved,  
and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without  
Your grace.  
Have mercy upon us.  
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father,  
for the sake of Your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,  
who died for us.  
Forgive us.  
Cleanse us.  
Give us strength to serve and please You in  
newness of life,  
And to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus  
Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

We continue our confession as we pray together the  
prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy  
name.  
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it  
is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us  
our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us  
from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the  
glory, forever. Amen.**

I'll pray the Collect:

*O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great  
mercy  
has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You  
with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy upon  
us,  
pardon and deliver us from our sins,  
make us strong and faithful in all goodness  
and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our  
Lord. Amen.*

Let us pray together for inner cleansing:

**Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are  
hid:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the  
inspiration of the Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love You and worthily  
magnify Your holy name,  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love  
Your only Son, Jesus Christ,  
to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption,  
who by His sacrifice, offered once for all,  
did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the  
sins of the whole world,  
we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son,  
Jesus Christ,  
who in His holy gospel commanded us to continue a  
memory of His death until He comes again.  
Hear us, O merciful Father, we ask, and grant that as we  
receive this bread and this cup,  
may take into ourselves His most blessed body and blood.  
Amen.*

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread, and  
when He had given thanks,

He broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said,  
"Take and eat; this is My body – given for you; do this  
in remembrance of Me."

And then, after supper He took the cup, and when He  
had given thanks,

He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of this, all of you,  
for this is My blood of the New Testament,  
which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of  
sins;

do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."  
This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for you.  
Take it and eat, remembering always that Christ died  
for you.

Feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with  
thanksgiving.

[Eat]

This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was  
shed for you.

Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed  
for you and be thankful.

[Drink]

Father, how we thank you today for the grace You've  
shown to the world through your Son, Jesus;

The grace that invites repentance,  
The grace that allows change,  
The grace that brings transformation – even for nations.  
May your grace rule in our lives – that we might take up  
our part in calling a nation and a world back to You – its  
maker and savior and healer.

In Jesus name, amen.

[Closing Song]

May the Lord take these not-business-as-usual days in  
all our lives and use them, not for division and destruction,  
but for up-building and transformation, that we might, as  
people and as a nation, embrace Jesus more and more and  
more, until He comes to reign here – until we see Him face  
to face. Amen.