

2 Chronicles 12

"You Don't Know What You've Got Till It's Gone"

All right - 2 Chronicles 12 tonight. A couple of chapters before this (2 Chronicles 10), Solomon dies (King David's son, the one who had built the Temple), and his son, Rehoboam, had succeeded him to the throne. And because of the wicked counsel of a bunch of his young friends, all of them looking to position themselves in a new government, Rehoboam ignored the wisdom of the elders who said, "If you want to do anything for the people, back off the taxation that your dad just wiped the people out for years with all of that building program." But he didn't listen to the elders, and he made the taxes of the people even worse than they were, severely crippling the folks, pushing his dad's exorbitant rates even higher.

And the action precipitated driving ten tribes north. Now, Judah didn't go north; Benjamin didn't go north. God never said go north. God had put His name in Jerusalem. But, in rebellion, the north followed a fellow named Jeroboam who happened to be a political tax reformer, making great promises to the people. And in a civil split over taxation, he created a nation in the north that was absolutely wholesale defiant against God and everything God stood for. They lowered the expectations of the priests, they changed the feast days that the Lord had established for His people to different months, they worshipped the calves that they had learned to worship in Egypt (rather than Almighty God), and for 209 years (from 931 to 722 B.C.) this group - the northern kingdom - never had a good king, never had anyone who would really walk with God. It was just eventual that His overthrow of them would be permanent, and, in 722 B.C., the Assyrians came in, whom God had sent for the purpose of annihilating the north. If you wanted to be back where God wanted, you had to return to the south where God had put His name. So that happened in 2 Chronicles 10.

In spite of that foolish taxation, for the next several years, Rehoboam, that son of Solomon, seemed to have gotten on much better. He began to listen to the Word of God and to the prophets of God. In fact, in verse 3 of chapter 11, when the LORD went to speak to Rehoboam through a prophet named Shemaiah, He told him, " 'Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin,' " (those were the two that stayed put), " 'saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'You shall not go up or fight against your brethren! Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me.' " ' Therefore they obeyed the words of the

LORD, and turned back from attacking Jeroboam." And so, though Rehoboam was angry that he had caused this civil split, and he was going after the ringleader, Jeroboam, the LORD, through the prophets, said, "Don't do that. This is something I'm working out, and My hand's upon this." And so he listened. He obeyed the LORD. He did not go after this breakaway group. Instead, he began to build up the cities of Judah in the south. And, from verse 5 down through verse 12, you can read about some of the cities because, as the priests had gone north, there were some who went, "You know, this doesn't feel right at all. We're not where God's name is. We're starting to be asked to do things that we didn't and shouldn't be doing." They began to want to go home, some of them, and he provided a place for the priests from all over the land to come. In fact, down in verse 13 of chapter 11, "And from all their territories the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took their stand with him. For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons" (those were the northern kingdom rulers) "had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD." And so, for a time Rehoboam did some pretty good things of providing, listening to God's counsel, providing for His priests and all.

Verse 16 tells us, "And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel," (that's the northern kingdom) "such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years, because they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years." And so there was a revival of sorts, if you will, and the godly began to gather. So God's blessing became evident to Rehoboam. His dad had, for years, run around and did the wrong thing, but he had come back around to the LORD. His grandpa, David, certainly had lots to teach him. And as Rehoboam's heart began to be right with God (notice from verse 17), so did the people - they did well. God, in His love, didn't leave them alone, but He set in motion plans to help them see who He was and why they should be with Him. But it didn't last.

And the problem, and maybe the lesson for us tonight, is that God certainly wants to bring you to a place where you realize that you have it better now than you've ever had it before; that there really is no pull left from the world to your life unless you begin to entertain the world again. The good thing about being saved is you're saved out of something, aren't you? Not just to something but out of something. And that old adage that we named the study after, "You Don't Know What You've Got Till It's Gone," became, unfortunately, Rehoboam's story.

Notice verse 1 of chapter 12. "Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him. And it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt - the Lubim and the Sukkim and the Ethiopians. And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to" (the city walls, if you will, of) "Jerusalem." So when Rehoboam began to see God's blessing upon his life, when he began to taste and see that the LORD was good, and how God favored those who would favor Him, he then did something really foolish. He walked away. And because of his place of influence, many people stumbled right along with him. I want you to notice (from verse 2) that God waited two years for this to straighten itself out. Remember we had read (just in the previous chapter) for three years, he did well. But it was in the fifth year that the LORD said, "Well, wait a minute. We can't let this go on." And though He had, in His patience, waited two years to let this kind of play out (and I'm sure that He had spoken to Rehoboam), that he might wise up, if you will, he didn't. And though God was patient, Rehoboam was determined. It's kind of like when you need the Lord, you're there in church, and you're praying, and everybody's praying for you, and the minute you don't need Him, off you go. Rehoboam was kind of like that. He had a big revolt in his kingdom. The minute he took over, he had a guy turn on him and the people run from him. Part of it was his own doing. But he went back to the LORD and said, "I want to follow You. I made the wrong choice." And God said, "Great," and for three years things went well. And then he got to a place of prominence, and he didn't need God's help anymore, and so he quit seeking the help of the LORD. It's kind of like he kicks Him to the curb. But God waits for repentance. He's patient. He doesn't immediately deal with our sin. He waits for us to wise up.

And when that didn't happen in two years (because now, verse 2, we're at the fifth year), then Plan B kicked in, and God allowed Egypt and a guy named Shishak, who happened to be their king at the time, not only to attack Judah with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand men (by the way, a huge army), but they began to take every walled city within shouting distance of Jerusalem and Judah. Judah was absolutely brought to its knees. Everyone fell. And it got to the point where this army was breathing at the very walls of Jerusalem itself. Now what would you expect, then, from Rehoboam? And the answer was he was afraid, and he didn't feel good about what had taken place; and now we read in verse 5 that this fellow

Shemaiah (which, by the way, was the same guy in chapter 11:2 that had brought the word about "leave alone the northern kingdom, I'll deal with them"), the prophet, well known by this point - accurate guy, "came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak." ' ' So, "Here's the explanation for your dilemma, Rehoboam. You've set Me aside. I've set you aside. You don't want anything to do with Me, then I'll just put you in the hands of someone that'll have something to do with you."

And we read in verse 6, "So the leaders of Israel and the king" (Rehoboam himself) "humbled themselves; and they said, 'The LORD is righteous.' " Or, literally, "The LORD is right." Verse 7, "Now when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, 'They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they will be his servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations.' " Rehoboam and his men agreed fairly quickly that the punishment fit the crime. They were caught. It had been two years. God had been set aside. They were guilty. God was good; they were not. And, listening to the prophet, they had a fear because there were bloodthirsty men outside the walls that wanted them dead. It produced repentance. And notice that the LORD, in His graciousness, quickly moved by their humility and sorrow, stopped them from being destroyed. They are repentant. "They are repentant," the LORD says. They have turned, we read there in verse 7. They've humbled themselves. "I will not destroy them." But then we read in verse 8, "Nevertheless I'm going to let them suffer for a while so that they learn this lesson for good and that they're able to make a distinction between serving God and serving in the kingdoms of the world." Look, how good you have it in the Lord and how little can be found apart from Him, once you come to know Him, is not such an easy lesson to learn. I think it's one that you constantly fight with. You know, the world has these offers to us. And God sends us His Word, and He hopes to correct us, and He wants to have us focus clearly. But, so often, to learn that you have it better now than you've ever had it before requires some humbling circumstances. I like what the LORD says here through the prophet. He said, "I'm not going to destroy you. I'm going to give you deliverance. I'm going to give you a reprieve. The city is not going to fall under My wrath. But I'm going to let you be slaves to this fellow in Egypt. I'm going to let him have a dominance over your life for only one reason - I want you to learn to

distinguish between walking and serving God and then serving other things in the world." And God was willing to bring that lesson home to the people that He loved, and it was a hard lesson for them to learn. And it's a kind of lesson that takes some time. You know, the old grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. In fear, they decided putting the LORD first would be the right way to go. But what happens when the enemies leave? I think I've mentioned to you before, when we had the Whittier earthquake, this place was packed. People were in here, man, crying, "God....." (Pastor Jack lifts his hands up in the air) It lasted about four weeks. When September 11th happened, we were overflowing with people - for about four weeks. And it wasn't really a lesson that ever sank in. It was a knee-jerk reaction. It was emotional. It was kind of like Rehoboam and his guys hiding in Jerusalem, afraid of the Egyptian army. "God is right. We're wrong. We deserve everything we get." And the LORD said, "I'm going to keep you from destruction, but I want you to learn the lesson well enough to where whether there's pressure upon you or not, you'll never make that same mistake again." So He was going to force them to live with the consequences of their choices long enough to come to the right conclusion once and for all. So, if they had a chance to make the same choice again, they'd make the right one - even without the pressure. It's that old "burn me once, shame on you; burn me twice, shame on me." And that's literally what the LORD says to them. For the past two years, anyway, they had chosen other kingdoms of the world over living in fellowship with God and obedience to Him. Now, they find the consequences of those choices knocking at the gate, and God said, "I will spare you the destruction these guys want to bring upon your head, but I'm going to subjugate you in such a way that you realize how good you have it in the LORD." And God clearly states His purpose here. He wants them to learn by contrast. "You've had it good. Now have it bad for a while. And I'll keep an eye on you. But learn where it's best."

I'll tell you ahead of time, before we finish the chapters, Rehoboam would learn this lesson for only a short a period as possible before going back again from the LORD and never returning. But that wasn't God's plan.

In verse 12, we read this, "When he" (speaking of Rehoboam) "humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely; and things also went well in Judah." Or, basically, God's blessing and mercy returned to him and the nation every time he would just let God be God in his life. And when he chose otherwise, everyone suffered. And yet verse 14 says, "And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD." The end of his life, we

find a wicked king with a wicked son to follow him to the throne, and the people suffering; and yet God gave him every opportunity to learn where real life could be found. And He did so by putting him into a position where he had to realize that the consequence of his sin followed him even when the forgiveness of God was available.

Much of our spiritual growth inevitably follows this same path of learning that God calls to these folks here. Because God would want you to distinguish the benefit you have being His people from the life in the world, "the kingdoms of the nations," as verse 8 describes them. But it is just life without God no matter how you look at it. To the world and its ways, which also seek your life and want to garner your allegiance, following and loyalty, God would have you to learn well, as His people, that it is only in His kingdom that you find real life; so that when you get an offer to choose otherwise, you won't. You'll just go, "Nah, I'm going to stick with Him. He has brought me this far."

I really can't understand, and maybe you can't either, who would willfully walk away from their relationship with God to serve another master or pursue life in another kingdom. I don't get it. I think I came to Jesus because the kingdom of this world never delivered what they promised. Maybe you did as well. You know, you were out there trying to make it work out, and it wasn't working out.

The LORD, with great fascination with Judah (who was making such poor choices), had Jeremiah say this to them in His name; he wrote this, " 'For pass beyond the coasts of Cypress and see, send to Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate,' says the LORD. 'For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water. Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered? The young lions roared at him, and growled; they made his land waste; his cities are burned, without inhabitant. Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head. Have you not brought this on yourself, in that you have forsaken the LORD your God when He led you in the way?' " (Jeremiah 2:10-17). I mean, the LORD was just absolutely amazed that, having tasted and seen of the LORD, people would decide to go somewhere else.

"Taste and see that the LORD is good;" (Psalm 34:8) "blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" You have it good tonight. You know that. Even though you may not get everything you want or in the way that you want it, or you believe somehow the world isn't giving you your fair share, it doesn't really matter. You have it wonderful in the Lord, do you not? And to walk away from your life in Christ to seek some substitute or replacement - and you may very well find that the world begins to look pretty good again. We just finished Hebrews 11, and there's a passage there that says, "For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country" (Hebrews 11:14-16). In other words, if you start entertaining the life from which you came out, you might very well start going, "Well, that looks a lot better than the life I have now," the life of waiting upon the Lord and seeking God and having to walk with Him. You read about Rehoboam's life here, and you say to yourself, "Unbelievable!" And yet people do it all the time. They repent, they agree with God about their sin, the consequences kick in, and the minute they stop kicking in, they quickly see no need for Him, and the crisis subsides, and they're off again to the races.

Five years later, when the consequences of Rehoboam's choices were waiting at the gate, Rehoboam repented and turned back to God who, in His goodness, delivered him from what may have been sure death, allowing only the consequences to last to remind him of the bad choice he made. That's not unfair. That the Lord would say to us (and say to you and me), "Look, here's the lesson by contrast. Look what your life might have been." But it only worked until he got back on top, and the minute things began to go well again with his life, he took off. You don't know what you've got till it's gone.

And a life with Jesus is marked by peace, it's marked by joy and rest. In the world you'll have tribulation, but even then you can be of good cheer because He's overcome the world that you live in (John 16:33b). Any other kingdom, in the long run, will take your life. In the shorter term, it'll disappoint you. It won't bring to you what you hope for. It won't deliver on its promises. When Jesus called you to follow Him, He said, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). That's not true of the world. It's a much harder road. It demands a far greater price.

And Rehoboam had gone south in his walk with God after just a few years. After he got himself in a position of power, he forsook what the LORD was doing. And because of that, you immediately draw the conclusion that he failed to appreciate what God had given him. He wasn't counting his blessings; he was looking for a way forward. And so he turned from God to other kingdoms, where those gods were brutal at best. Think about those people who turn from Jesus to somehow fulfill their fleshly appetites. It's certainly one of the world's favorite gods. It's a lousy one to serve. But there're a lot of folks just living for their flesh. What a heavy toll they pay each week at the nightclub. Betrayed or used or worse. If you live for the flesh, then you're driven by a god who can't satisfy and be satisfied. Better clothes, plastic surgery, one-night stands, weekends away. Never fulfilled. One thing leads to the next. If you have tasted and seen the gods of the world, that's probably why you came to Christ. I would think. That's why I did. And yet the goodness of God, when you don't acknowledge Him every day, can have you concluding man, you're really missing out on something not being out in the world again. What if your god is money, and you leave the Lord because your only interest is getting ahead in this life? When Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, he said, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts....." Really? Yeah, really. That's what God tells us about this lust to go forward. "It'll drown men," it says, "in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." It didn't say money was evil. It says the love of it is. What if that's your god, and you've turned from Almighty God to that? Paul, when he advised Timothy there in 1 Timothy 6, said, "Godliness with contentment is great" (benefit or) "gain. You didn't bring anything into the world, you're not taking anything out with you. You have food and clothing. Be content. Be thankful. Be satisfied." Go through the Bible, and listen to what God has to say about pursuing wealth; and yet it dominates so many people's lives. But you have it far better, don't you? But you never know what you've got till it's gone. Then you appreciate it.

We're told in the Scriptures that there's great danger in pursuing wealth. When Moses was telling the people about the king and who they would one day have as a king, he said (Deuteronomy 8), "Be sure that when you have a king that he doesn't look to multiply his flocks or silver and gold or lift up his heart. You'll forget the LORD who bought you. You'll forget Him." And you won't know what you've had until it's gone from you. Psalm 62:10 there's a Scripture that says, "If riches increase, do not set your" what? "on them." "Do not set your heart upon them." Don't let that take you away. In Matthew 19:23, Jesus said to the disciples - after

that rich young ruler left - how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. There's so much stuff in the way. And yet you find Christians all the time going, "Oh, I just want to be rich." Really? You don't know what you've got till it's gone. You have riches. The kind that will last. Isn't it in Mark 4:19, where Jesus said, "The deceitfulness of riches will choke the word out, and you'll become unfruitful"? Wealthy folks speak about the fear they have to live with constantly - questioning people's motives, "Are they after me for my money, or do they really like me?" No, they're after you for your money. They worry about extortion, about being sued, about being robbed. They invest in big gates and bigger lawyers. And they call that living. It's not living. But you don't know what you've got till it's gone.

You have peace tonight if you have Jesus. Agur wrote that in Proverbs 30. "God, don't give so little to think about stealing or so much that I forget about You." Just keep me in the middle there, somewhere. I remember Pastor Chuck, years ago at ministry school, sharing with us that he liked to walk in the mountains, but he always liked to carry a walking stick. He said, "It helps me with my footing." He said, "Now, if I had 50 of them, it wouldn't be very helpful. I only need one. I don't need 50 of them." It's kind of like that with money. It's necessary. It's helpful. It can be a great tool. But if it's your god, it'll soon lose value. You can only wear one pair of shoes at a time; only eat so many meals a day. Trust me, I've tried six and eight. It doesn't work so well. (Laughing) And if you always get what you want, whatever you want, it's going to lose the value completely. Because God's right. You chase money, you're ever chasing, aren't you? You never have enough. You don't know the word "satisfied." You die of a heart attack. And the poorest worker who goes to work forty hours a week and then goes home and hugs his kids, takes a couple weeks off a year to go on vacation, he's just happy as can be. Because God has a way of life, and it's different than the life in the world. It doesn't mean you shouldn't strive to do well, but don't let it grab your heart. Many have come to Christ and gotten saved and been delivered and given the pleasures of knowing God - only to turn around and go after an empty basket to satisfy themselves.

I love verse 8 (in 2 Chronicles 12). I mean, it just speaks to me. "That they may be able to distinguish between serving Me and serving the world, I'm going to let them live for a while with the consequences of the choice that they made." I think that's a lot of times why we struggle. People have illicit sexual relationships, and the girl gets pregnant, and they're not married, and they go, "Oh, God forgive me."

And God will forgive you, but the baby's coming. Right? The forgiveness is there, but the consequences last so that you might be reminded that there is a way that is right unto the LORD, and then there is a way that is just right to us.

What if your god is fashion? Usually not our problem, but if your god is fashion, you buy things not because they're comfortable or they look good or they're long-lasting, you buy them because they're expensive and because they're "in." Ever watched a fashion show on TV? You want to have a good laugh, watch one of those. I don't know who in the world would buy that junk. Fashion is a weird god to me. It dresses you funny and makes you spend way too much for way too little. But people do it, and they wander around going, "Yeah, what are you wearing?" I don't know. Levi. How's Levi? I'm wearing Levi. How's that guy?

The LORD says to Rehoboam, and to us as well, "If you don't want to serve Me, then let Me allow you to serve the world and see the bondage that comes with it so that you'll be appreciative of the privilege I've given you of serving Me." And I think that's a pretty good lesson to learn at the end of a year. Right? The minute you go back to the Lord, God immediately restores. But so often, the lingering consequences of our choices remain - not because God's angry but because He'd like you to learn, once and for all, not to go there again. He'll dress you in righteousness, but you may still very well get the bills in the mail from that weird fashion show you attended.

There are lots of folks that tend to start in faith, and they end up in their intellects. They turn from the simplicity of faith to some kind of intellectual approach that leaves them usually more confused and in despair than ever. I run into some of these guys. They start off just trusting the Lord, and then pretty soon their head's filled with information, and they only will put their trust in what they comprehend. And right away they're talking to me about stuff I really don't have any clue what they're saying. And they embrace philosophies of higher criticism, and they turn their backs on the Word of God, the simple Word of God. They're out of touch, and I think, sometimes, they're out of their minds, and they're serving the god of their intellect. If it takes too much faith to believe in Jesus, how am I ever going to believe in the absurdity of evolution? It has no proof. In fact, there's proof to the contrary. When Paul wrote to the Romans (1:25) and said, "They exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator," I get that part. But what a choice you make. The god of the intellect may have you leaving your senses.

"So you don't want to serve Me? Serve Egypt for a while." You don't know what you've got till it's gone. And I love the lesson that God would love you enough to let you suffer with it. I know it's not a popular message, but I think it's the right one. How does it feel to live in the world? How is Egypt treating you? How is it going between you and the kingdoms of this world? Where can you really walk away from Jesus and get benefit, do you think? Where can you go tonight to improve your lot? Where? God has brought you out of the world, and if we had every opportunity to have every one of you stand up and say, "Here's where my life used to be, and then I got saved," I think we'll have covered all the bases. Some of the testimonies, to me, are just amazing. And it was all because of the dissatisfaction with life that we cried out to the Lord so that, by the time I get into the body of Christ, I should know that serving my passions isn't the answer; and pleasure won't do it, and gain won't satisfy, and being the smartest guy on the block in my head doesn't do it for me, either. Fashion is nowhere near the answer. There've been plenty of folks who have run down those roads before us so that they can come back and go, "Yeah, it's not there. Don't go there." In fact, you lived there before you got saved. You know.

In the process, the allurements of sin which blinds - and then we forget about all that we've been given - those two things kind of join forces to lead us astray. I forget what I have, and I listen to what the world has to offer, and pretty soon I'm serving a different king. And then God will give me a full plate of it to see what I'm missing. And He allows the fallout to constantly remind you where not to go. I see it in counseling. We see it in the church all the time. Folks make really bad choices, and then they have to live with the consequences for years. Their slate is clean immediately. God forgives the moment you confess your sins. And then there's that built-in lesson teacher, isn't there? Now I fell in the poison oak. Now I have a criminal record. Now I've lost my job. Now I have a persistent illness. Now I have a load of debt. Now I have an estranged family. Now I've got all kinds of stuff clinging to me from the past because I'm not willing to remember that I have it so good - that I would stop looking in other places. Forgiveness is immediate with God. Consequences can be long-lasting. All to hear us cry, "God, I will never do it again." Really? And Rehoboam lasted for a little while. Remind me, teach me, let me never forget as Rehoboam forgot.

Abraham and his family are found in the halls of faith because they were all-in, weren't they? They didn't turn to the left. They didn't turn to the right. What the world had to offer them, they didn't want anything to do with. They were all-

in, and that's really where God wants you and me. If you live like that for a year, you're going to be blessed. It's going to be a great year. But if you're constantly living on the edge and reaching across the table and wanting what the world has, and trying to equally bring that together with your faith and your relationship with God, you're going to be miserable. Not only that. You're going to be carrying a lot of luggage around. The Lord says, "Hold this, and hold this, and hold this one, too." "All right." Then you try to get into church sideways, you can't get through the door because there's so much baggage.

Jesus said to those religious guys (John 5:39), "You search the Scriptures. You think in them you have eternal life. They testify of Me. But you're not willing to come to Me. I have life. But you've got to come get it." You don't know what you've got till it's gone. That's true. We have it so good, don't we? How often do you read, as you read through the Old Testament, of those Jews in the wilderness crying about going back to Egypt and remembering it as if it was great? "Why didn't You let us die there? We had great dinners there." Did you really?! Go back and read. They made mud out of spit, these guys. And they remembered it differently. "Oh, those were the cool days." We used to go out on the weekends and do a lot of drugs, and, "Oh, those were the cool days." They were not cool. They were not cool. I hated waking up somewhere and didn't know how I got there or what happened to me. "Oh, that was cool." Idiot! Stupid idiot.

I don't want to keep running back to the light with more baggage from the times of retreat. And that's what Rehoboam was doing. And some of you have done that, too. You've been in and out of church more times than a revolving door. You're back every time there's a problem, and you're gone the minute it's gone. "Yaaah!" I can tell by your face if you're coming or going, usually. Long face or happy face. Usually, "Oh, they're leavin'. They'll be back in a few months." And then you get forgiveness. And God is good, He's slow to anger, He's quick to forgive, He doesn't want you to go astray. But pretty soon you've got all these scars of the past to assure you you've got no reason to ever leave again, and then you leave again. We've got to do better than that, don't we? What do you really want? If He's worth embracing, then let's let go of everything else. You know, once I got married to my wife, I quit looking at other women. They don't compare to her. Even if she's almost 60 now. (Laughing) Two more months, I got it. Two more weeks? No. Two more months. Sixty! I've got an old wife now. (Laughing) I'm so in trouble, I know. (Laughing) The coolest thing is she'll forget about this in about 10 minutes. It'll be fine. (Laughing) But why bother going to look somewhere else when you have the

wife that God wants for you? Why bother going anywhere when God has provided for you? There's no sense. There's no reason. It's a bad choice. Let the world grow dim.

We read (here in verse 12) that, for that period of time that Rehoboam and his young cabinet turned back to the LORD, and they realized the horror of these other nations, and the goodness of God, things got better. Why it didn't last, we're not told; only that they soon forgot how bad it was, and they went out there again. And for Rehoboam, he stayed out there for good. Will we see Rehoboam in heaven? I have no idea. I'd like to think he wised up, and it just wasn't recorded. But verse 14, which seems to be the end of his life because verse 15 tells us (and verse 16) that he ruled for so long, and this is who he was, and he rested with his fathers, and they buried him, and he had his little wicked son come to the throne. But the bottom line is this is the way things ended for him. He ended up having war with him and the northern kingdom, where the LORD said, "Don't have war," and he died. "And he did evil, because he didn't prepare his heart to seek the LORD." He didn't make the right choice. He decided otherwise.

And I guess the question for us is - what are you deciding to do this year? I like new years. You get to have new choices and make new goals for yourself. You really want to live to serve another god and learn how awful that is? Or do you want to prepare your heart to seek the Lord? It's too late for Rehoboam. It's not too late for you and me. We can still make good choices, can't we? How good do you have it? Where do you really want to be, besides with Him? What do you even conceive about being better than what you have? You can prepare your heart. You can worship Him from your heart. You can study with hunger and serve with passion and give it your all. Because it's not getting any better anywhere else. This is as good as it gets here, and this is as bad as it'll ever be. Isn't that something?! It's the best solution for your life, and it only gets better as we go forward. Rehoboam is not a smart guy. He should have learned from his grandpa. Could have learned from his father, who spent years out there with all the money in the world, trying to chase down life without God; and even he concluded, "That's worthless. I can't do this," and the end of his life was okay. But not his son. He forgot what he had with Jesus (well, in the Old Testament sense).

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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