

## Humility: The Measure of Wisdom

By Carrie Cavanaugh

Although neither the word “humility” nor “pride” show up in the story of Rehoboam claiming the throne, it was nonetheless the first scripture that came to mind as I thought about writing on the topic of humility. To summarize, upon Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam came to claim the throne and it looked like he would have the loyalty of the whole nation. The people, however, had struggled to fulfill the demands of his father and so they went to Rehoboam to ask that he would treat them gently. Rehoboam starts off well by asking his father’s old advisors what he should do. They tell him, “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.” But he wasn’t satisfied with this advice, so he went to his peers and asked them. The men his age told Rehoboam to tell the people, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” Rehoboam took this message to the people and consequently lost most of the kingdom, a proud and foolish decision (1 Kings 12).

Although he had done nothing to deserve it, God’s blessing was on Rehoboam at the beginning of this story. For God had told David that one of his descendants would always sit on the throne. Further, Rehoboam was Solomon’s assumed successor and initially he had the support of the nation behind him. But how often do God’s good gifts become misused in our hands? Rehoboam’s pride, seemingly a consequence of his popularity and assumed future power, caused him to make the choice he did.

If only Rehoboam would have had humility enough to hear the plea of his people, or at least the advice of those older and more experienced than he and his friends. I define humility as rightly understanding one’s position before God and men. That is, for Rehoboam, he, like all mankind, was utterly sinful and fatally finite. He does not meet God’s standard. In fact he had nothing good to give God on his own. Therefore, even though God may have entrusted him with authority (this is true of any gift - intellect, education, wealth, influence, etc.), it is by God’s goodness and not his own deserving. Therefore he is no better than those he had authority over. This spiritual equality is good reason to listen to others and not only listen, but look to their interests. Self-service is hard to justify in light of humility.

More than just listening though, a humble leader is ultimately in power to serve those under his oversight. Solomon’s advisors knew this; they advised, “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.” A leader earns the loyalty of others by serving them. Rehoboam, however, failed to see the power in humility and as Robert Frost would say, that made all the difference.

Humility is also closely related to wisdom. In this story Rehoboam is revealed as the fool that he is. In the Bible calling someone a fool is more than just not thinking things through. Rather, it points to moral failure. Rehoboam was a fool in the fullest sense. His poor choice was made out of a lack of humility, a faulty understanding of who he was before God and in relation to other people.

Wisdom, then, is knowing where true authority lies, what is of ultimate worth, and realizing the full weight of God’s goodness to us. The scriptures tell us that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the God. In other words, realizing that He is the ultimate authority. We are also told that all earthly authority is put in place by God himself. Therefore wise leaders should recognize both who has the ultimate authority and the source of their own appointed authority. This in turn brings humility. Wisdom is discernment, rightly valuing things. The world teaches that power and fame are of great worth, but true wisdom knows that to those who are given much, much will be expected. Pride can’t stand in light of this. Further, a man’s heart is the proof of his worth rather than how many people follow his leadership. Since no man’s heart can meet the mark, humility is all he can claim. Finally, knowing the extent of God’s goodness to us is a powerful wind to fill the sails of humility. Even Rehoboam, who did not yet know the fullness of the



mystery of the gospel – Christ’s perfect work of salvation – still had seen God’s provision, protection, and guidance even when God’s chosen people failed to uphold their covenant duties.

We all face the same choice that Rehoboam did, so let us learn from it. Let us make the wise decision. Let us be humble enough to listen to those under our authority. And further, let us steadfastly serve them and thus earn their loyalty.

