

TEXT: Isaiah 22:15-25

TITLE: *YERTLE THE TURTLE CONDEMNED IN THE CHURCH --
SELF-RELIANCE CONDEMNED IN TWO CONTRASTING LEADERSHIP MODELS*

BIG IDEA:

SELF-RELIANCE LEADS TO CONDEMNATION – WHETHER THE FAULT LIES WITH THE LEADER (AND HIS PRESUMPTUOUS SELF PROMOTION) OR WITH THE PEOPLE (AND THEIR PROCLIVITY FOR HERO WORSHIP)

INTRODUCTION:

In the first half of the Oracle of the Valley of Vision directed against Jerusalem, we saw the big picture of what happens when a nation forgets God and chooses to trust instead in their own defenses. God brings devastating panic and bondage and confusion. We saw Isaiah weeping over the apostasy of God’s people who were immersed in a culture of self indulgence and frivolity when they should have been weeping in genuine repentance over their careless indifference and carnal partying. This unbelief on their part constituted the unpardonable sin.

In the second half of the chapter, the same theme of condemning self-reliance is developed by looking at specific case history of two particular individuals – Shebna and Eliakim. We have jumped from the big picture to a very specific Pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey approach. These two prominent leaders represent two very different types of failures that lead to the same end result.

2 CONTRASTING LEADERSHIP MODELS INVOLVING PROMOTION AND CONDEMNATION

I. (:15-19) EXAMPLE OF PRESUMPTUOUS SELF PROMOTION LEADING TO CONDEMNATION = SHEBNA

Pronunciation: *sheb-naw'*

A. (:15-16) Exposing Self Promotion

“Thus says the Lord God of hosts, ‘Come, go to’”

1. Prominent Role of Shebna

“this steward, to Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household,”

Might sound to us like some type of lower level servant – almost like the butler in a Downton Abbey – but actually this position is second only to King Hezekiah; he is functioning as the chief of staff; he is in charge of the daily affairs of the kingdom; like the position Joseph had in the house of Potiphar and royal court of Pharaoh (Gen. 39:4; 41:40)

Young the phrase *“this steward”* probably contains a shade of contempt . . . this position, borrowed from Egypt, was probably “a threat to the true nature of the kingship and the theocracy”

He controls **access to the King** – very critical function

[cf. Isa 36:3,11, 22; 37:2]

2. Perverse Intentions -- Challenging the Authority and Heritage of This Outsider

*“What right do you have here,”
“And whom do you have here,”*

Almost identical question that the prophet had for the nation back up in **verse 1**

Exactly what are your intentions? What are you trying to accomplish? What is your motivation? How loyal are you to God’s agenda and God’s kingdom purposes?

Motyer: The first interrogative (*ma*) questions Shebna’s personal right, the second (*mi*) implicitly denies him a position by reason of family name.

Oswalt: Probably Shebna had come out from the city in a handsomely equipped chariot (v. 18) to survey the work on his memorial. He may have been feeling particularly expansive and pleased with himself. If so, these biting words must have been especially humiliating. This kind of experience was typical of the prophets: when they were least wanted, in moments of fear or pride or self-sufficiency, that was the moment they appeared.

He is outed as a **usurper**

Name of his father not given; possibly from an Egyptian family; from the intensity of the prophet’s rebuke it would seem that more was involved than just his mindset of selfish ambition; probably was advocating for some type of Egyptian alliance to protect the nation against the Assyrian threat

Beall: It may be simply that Shebna was advocating pro-Egyptian policies (see chaps. 30-31).

Van Parunak: Isaiah here suggests that he is an opportunistic intruder with no real interest in Jerusalem.

3. Presumptuous Self Promotion – Seeking a Kingly Legacy in Jerusalem

*“That you have hewn a tomb for yourself here,
You who hew a tomb on the height,
You who carve a resting place for yourself in the rock?”*

The king’s tombs were very impressive back in those days; just think of the Egyptian pyramids

Motyer: His tomb-making aimed at **permanence** (hewing, rock), **prominence** (on the height) and **self-perpetuation** (your resting place/‘a dwelling for himself)

Young: Shebna wants a luxurious sepulcher, and this personal desire overshadows his concern for the welfare of the nation.

B. Explaining the Problem of Self-reliance on the Part of the Leader and His Selfish Ambition -- Seeking Fame and Power and Perks

What type of leadership did Shebna demonstrate?

Cf. our political leaders

Cf. our spiritual leaders in the church

Look at the example of the apostles themselves when they engaged in self promotion –
Matt. 20:20ff; Mark 10:35ff

Certainly Shebna is no type of Christ

C. (:17-19) Pronouncing Condemnation

1. Contrast Between Majestic Sovereignty and Imagined Sovereignty

“Behold, the LORD is about to hurl you headlong, O man.”

“And I will depose you from your office, and I will pull you down from your station.”

Statements like bookends or another chiastic structure here –

Young: The cognate accusative lends force to the statement, *throw thee out a throwing*.

Van Parunak: The word rendered “*mighty captivity*” is literally “hero, champion.” It is likely a sarcastic statement: “*The Lord will carry thee away, you Big Man.*”

2. Captivity as a Nobody in a Vast Abyss

“And He is about to grasp you firmly, and roll you tightly like a ball, to be cast into a vast country;”

Motyer: Presumably, Shebna was removed to Assyria in one of Sennacherib’s forays, but this is not recorded. Shebna’s self-glorification, epitomized by his *splendid chariots* brought no security.

3. Death, Dispossession and Degradation

a. Death

“There you will die,”

Oswalt: Not *here* in dignity and honor (v. 16), but *there* in disgrace and ignominy. In many different ways the Bible tells us that true honor and glory come to us as gifts from God. That which we grasp for ourselves, like the manna kept overnight (Exod. 16:20), will only decay and grow foul.

b. Dispossession

“And there your splendid chariots will be,”

His private collection of fancy toys and fast sports cars – all of the things he spent his life accumulating and worshipping

Van Parunak: One way a king honored a high official was to provide a special chariot:

Gen 41:43 *And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”*

c. Degradation / Humiliation

“You shame of your master's house.”

No honorable legacy for Shebna – he will be remembered all right – but for all the wrong reasons

Beall: v. 19 indicates that ultimately Shebna would be banished, though for the time being he was apparently only demoted to scribe.

II. (:20-25) EXAMPLE OF HERO WORSHIP RESULTING FROM DIVINE PROMOTION BUT STILL LEADING TO CONDEMNATION = ELIAKIM

Pronunciation: ee-LAI-uh-kihm

A. (:20-23) Extolling Divine Promotion – 8 Key Points to this Description of the raising up of Eliakim:

Only 4 short verses – but beautiful and powerful – express so much truth that is compressed into such a small window – this is why we study the book of Isaiah – we would be impoverished spiritually to the extent that we miss out on these precious gems that God has provided

1. The Significance of the Time Reference (repeated in vs. 25)

“Then it will come about in that day,”

Lord of Hosts is in control of all events and all nations and all individuals – no matter how important they might seem in their own right

Eliakim is going to be a **type of the Messiah** to come – there are end times implications for all that is said here

There is a special day coming that God wants His people to look for and anticipate

2. The Emphasis on Divine Initiative – repeated use of “I”

“That I will summon”

The exact opposite of self promotion as seen under Shebna; accomplishing the role reversal
2 Kings 18:18

3. The Identification of *Eliakim* – Threefold reference:

a. Significance of designation as *“My servant”*

Van Parunak: This phrase is applied to our Lord in **Rev 3:7**. Later in Isaiah he will frequently be called *“the servant of the Lord.”* The Messiah is the ultimate one with authority over David's house, and in this sense Eliakim, the royal steward who serves faithfully in the place of self-serving Shebna, is a type of our Lord as Jehovah's faithful servant. . .

b. Significance of name *Eliakim* -- means *“God will raise up”*

c. Significance of designation of his father – *“the son of Hilkiyah”*

“Yahweh is my portion”; so Eliakim is a legitimate heir; not a usurper

4. The Investment with Authority to Govern

a. By virtue of his Clothing

*“And I will clothe him with your tunic,
And tie your sash securely about him,”*

Clerics like to put on special clothing and gain for themselves instant respect and credibility –

something that distinguishes them from the laity; “Look at me, I am special”

Oswalt: The terms used here for *robe* and *sash* appear elsewhere only for garb worn by the priests. This does not mean necessarily that the court officers had usurped the prerogatives of the priests, but rather that there were standard terms for ceremonial clothing.

- b. By virtue of his Commissioning
“I will entrust him with your authority,”

All authority derives from God; He gives it to whom He will
Look at the Great Commission where the Head of the Church invests all of us with His authority to evangelize and disciple the world

- 5. (:21) The Characterization of His Leadership – Shepherding Model vs Domineering
“And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.”

Beall: Eliakim will exhibit paternal care and love for his people, not self-serving pride.

1 Thess. 2:11

Genuine care; self-sacrificing love
Still requires strength to protect and provide and guide and nurture

- 6. (:22) The Exclusive Sovereignty of His Governing Role -- Metaphor of the Key of the Kingdom

*“Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder,
When he opens no one will shut,
When he shuts no one will open.”*

Motyer: *Key* – the authority to legislate and make binding decisions

Symbol of Power, control, authority

This language goes way beyond Eliakim; specifically applied to Christ in the NT (**Rev. 3:7**);
People are either inside the kingdom or shut out on the outside; Christ holds the key –
He is the Door to the sheepfold – only way of entrance; **John 14:6**

Look at how Christ gave Peter the keys to the kingdom in similar delegated fashion (**Matt. 16:19**)

- 7. (:23a) The Security that Provides an Anchor of Stability for God’s People
“And I will drive him like a peg in a firm place,”

Initial connection would be with the image of tent peg – anchoring the tent securely to the ground; but the next 2 verses make plain that the reference is to a peg driven into a wall to hang objects on;

The peg of the Messiah is one that can never be removed (not so for Eliakim)

Our lives our built on the Solid Rock of Jesus Christ, the anchor of our soul; not shifting sand

Solid Foundation

8. (:23b) The Majestic Glory of His Legacy

“And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.”

Shebna desired a majestic glory for his legacy ... but was consigned to an ignominious death in a far away country in relative obscurity and shame

Van Parunak: Two metaphors are combined chiastically.

- **A throne.** The expression probably means, not “glorious throne,” but “a throne on which glory sits,” that is, he will be the podium from which the family's glory will shine forth.
- **A nail.** The purpose of the nail is not to hold boards together, but as a storage mechanism, on which things of value are hung.

Note *“They shall hang upon him.”* The people see his reliability,. He is far more reliable than Shebna. But the people are still addicted to self-reliance. Now they put their trust in him, and as a result, judgment must fall.

B. (:24) Problem of Self-reliance in the Form of Hero Worship on the Part of the People

So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars.”

Cryptic verse – but the key to understanding vs. 25 – goes way beyond the problems of nepotism

The tendency of humans is to put their trust in a prominent leader – one who has special charisma; or special giftedness – they **hang their hopes** on their identification with him rather than trusting directly on the Lord God.

- This happens in the arena of political governing
- This happens in the arena of the church

It is incumbent upon the spiritual leaders not to encourage such behavior (even though they may like the attention and the perks) but rather to point people to faith in Christ; emphasize that they are but the channel; they are using spiritual gifts they have been given; they do not have inherent greatness

Motyer: . . . the trust which should be reposed in the Lord is transferred to a human being. Just as an individual is not sufficient for himself (Shebna) neither is he sufficient for others (Eliakim). . . The collapse comes by a combination of internal weakness (*give way*) and external action (*be sheared off*), for no-one is sufficient to be “*the trusted one*” nor will the Lord allow it.

C. (:25) Pronouncing Condemnation

“In that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken.”

Oswalt: Commentators have had difficulty with this verse because it seems to reverse field so

abruptly. How can Eliakim, who has been so roundly praised, be the one who fails and is cut off? For it is surely Eliakim to whom reference is being made. However, reflection shows that a word on Eliakim's fall is not at all unlikely in this setting. Over and over Isaiah had to say that any word of present deliverance was only temporary and that any word of future hope was beyond the fire. Thus it is not surprising that the prophet would hasten to add that despite his faithfulness and the lofty things said about him, Eliakim was merely human and that if the nation reposed all its hopes in him, those hopes would certainly be dashed. The nation's only hope was in God and in that kind of repentance which would enable whole-hearted commitment.

Surprising conclusion – **The Peg of Man** will disappoint – no matter who the man is I would not want my spiritual fortunes hanging on the peg of Joel Osteen
But the point of the passage is – make sure that you are not hanging your spiritual fortunes on the **best** human spiritual leader you can think of – say John MacArthur or any of the famous preachers on the radio or TV
The Peg of Man cannot support you – it will give way; it will break off and fall – you will be left with a broken life – you must put your faith in the Lord alone

Maybe there was something that Eliakim could have done better to divert the attention of the people back to God ... maybe the fault was all on the side of the people

The Mark of a Diotrephes – when he is confronted and challenged to consider whether he is exalting himself and promoting himself as a **Shebna** – he will lash out and be defensive; he won't even seriously consider the exhortation – His intentions are to promote himself – he just doesn't want to get exposed; He loves to take the seat at the head of the table; he loves the adulation of the assembly; he can't get enough respect and appreciation; he has an insatiable appetite for more prominence and power; On the other hand, Eliakim was no Shebna ... but still the people got it wrong

Borgman: “Even the best of man is only man at best”

John the Baptist had it right: “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” **John 3:30**

CONCLUSION:

Yertle the Turtle

by dr. seuss

On the far-away island of Sala-ma-Sond,
Yertle the Turtle was king of the pond.
A nice little pond. It was clean. It was neat.
The water was warm. There was plenty to eat.
The turtles had everything turtles might need.
And they were all happy. Quite happy indeed.

They were... untill Yertle, the king of them all,
Decided the kingdom he ruled was too small.
"I'm ruler", said Yertle, "of all that I see.
But I don't see enough. That's the trouble with me.
With this stone for a throne, I look down on my pond
But I cannot look down on the places beyond.

This throne that I sit on is too, too low down.
It ought to be higher!" he said with a frown.
"If I could sit high, how much greater I'd be!
What a king! I'd be ruler of all that I see!"

So Yertle, the Turtle King, lifted his hand
And Yertle, the Turtle King, gave a command.
He ordered nine turtles to swim to his stone
And, using these turtles, he built a new throne.
He made each turtle stand on another one's back
And he piled them all up in a nine-turtle stack.
And then Yertle climbed up. He sat down on the pile.
What a wonderful view! He could see 'most a mile!

"All mine!" Yertle cried. "Oh, the things I now rule!
I'm the king of a cow! And I'm the king of a mule!
I'm the king of a house! And, what's more, beyond that
I'm the king of a blueberry bush and a cat!
I'm Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me!
For I am the ruler of all that I see!"

And all through the morning, he sat up there high
Saying over and over, "A grat king am I!"
Until 'long about noon. Then he heard a faint sigh.
"What's that?" snapped the king
And he looked down the stack.
And he saw, at the bottom, a turtle named Mack.
Just a part of his throne. And this plain little turtle
Looked up and he said, "Beg your pardon, King Yertle.
I've pains in my back and my shoulders and knees.
How long must we stand here, Your Majesty, please?"

"SILENCE!" the King of the Turtles barked back.
"I'm king, and you're only a turtle named Mack."

"You stay in your place while I sit here and rule.
I'm the king of a cow! And I'm the king of a mule!
I'm the king of a house! And a bush! And a cat!
But that isn't all. I'll do better than that!
My throne shall be higher!" his royal voice thundered,
"So pile up more turtles! I want 'bout two hundred!"

"Turtles! More turtles!" he bellowed and brayed.
And the turtles 'way down in the pond were afraid.
They trembled. They shook. But they came. They obeyed.
>From all over the pond, they came swimming by dozens.
Whole families of turtles, with uncles and cousins.
And all of them stepped on the head of poor Mack.
One after another, they climbed up the stack.

Then Yertle the Turtle was perched up so high,
He could see fourty miles from his throne in the sky!
"Hooray!" shouted Yertle. "I'm the king of the trees!
I'm king of the birds! And I'm king of the bees!
I'm king of the butterflies! King of the air!
Ah, me! What a throne! What a wonderful chair!
I'm Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me!
For I am the ruler of all that I see!"

Then again, from below, in the great heavy stack,
Came a groan from that plain little turtle named Mack.
"Your Majesty, please... I don't like to complain,
But down here below, we are feeling great pain.
I know, up on top you are seeing great sights,
But down here at the bottom we, too, should have rights.
We turtles can't stand it. Our shells will all crack!
Besides, we need food. We are starving!" groaned Mack.

"You hush up your mouth!" howled the mighty King Yertle.
"You've no right to talk to the world's highest turtle.
I rule from the clouds! Over land! Over sea!
There's nothing, no, NOTHING, that's higher than me!"

But, while he was shouting, he saw with surprise
That the moon of the evening was starting to rise
Up over his head in the darkening skies.
"What's THAT?" snorted Yertle. "Say, what IS that thing
That dares to be higher than Yertle the King?
I shall not allow it! I'll go higher still!
I'll build my throne higher! I can and I will!
I'll call some more turtles. I'll stack 'em to heaven!
I need 'bout five thousand, six hundred and seven!"

But, as Yertle, the Turtle King, lifted his hand
And started to order and give the command,
That plain little turtle below in the stack,
That plain little turtle whose name was just Mack,
Decided he'd taken enough. And he had.
And that plain little lad got a bit mad.
And that plain little Mack did a plain little thing.
He burped!
And his burp shook the throne of the king!

And Yertle the Turtle, the king of the trees,
The king of the air and the birds and the bees,
The king of a house and a cow and a mule...
Well, that was the end of the Turtle King's rule!
For Yertle, the King of all Sala-ma-Sond,
Fell off his high throne and fell Plunk! in the pond!

And to say the great Yertle, that Marvelous he,
Is King of the Mud. That is all he can see.
And the turtles, of course... all the turtles are free
As turtles and, maybe, all creatures should be.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does one transition from a mindset of being a steward to one of presumptuous self ambition?
- 2) What are some of the perks that spiritual leaders could selfishly strive after?
- 3) How can we better appreciate the sufficiency of Christ who never disappoints our hopes and expectations?

4) Are there any leaders in whom we are investing too much devotion or trust instead of looking directly to the Lord for our hopes?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Young: For a proper understanding of the situation we must briefly consider the nature of the theocracy. The kingdom of God was to be a nation in which God Himself ruled. His human representative was the king, who was to be a man after His own heart. In his entire life the king was to exemplify the justice and righteousness of the God for whom he acted. Indeed, he was a type of the great King to come, the Messiah. In the administration of the divine government, it was to be expected that the king would have helpers; but none would occupy his own central position . . . One office, however, which was very prominent in Egypt is notable in the Israel of David's day for its absence. That is an office corresponding to the vizier. In the erection of such an office, there might very well be a threat to the true nature of the kingship and the theocracy. A king, such as David, who was determined to honor God in all his dealings, and who understood the nature of the theocracy, would see this danger. AT the time of Solomon, on the other hand, when worldliness had entered in and the true character of the theocracy was no longer a concern, such an office might be created. . . In Isaiah's day at any rate the position had grown in significance, so that it overshadowed both that of scribe and recorder and probably other offices as well. . . Probably the safest thing to say is that he was second to the king. His position then, if unwisely or wickedly employed, would be a threat to the theocracy. Inasmuch as Shebna occupied a position of such great significance and was misusing that position, Isaiah calls attention to the office as well as to the man.

Motyer: Eliakim, in contrast, ran the risk of becoming the one whom others trust (see below on verses 23b–25) and in this exposes another alternative to the way of true faith. The reliable office-holder attracts to himself the respect and confidence of people, but should this become a reliance on a human person replacing reliance on the Lord, the end is calamity (25)—both for the person who is thus foolishly trusted and for those who find their security in him or her. Thus human beings are neither self-sufficient (Shebna) nor sufficient for others (Eliakim). In each case there is a fatal usurpation of the place due only to the Lord. Isaiah reiterates the message of 2:22, 'Stop trusting in man'.

Constable: The oracles against Shebna and Eliakim that follow are the only ones on individuals in chapters 13—27. They show that the choice between faith and works, with its attending results, is individual as well as national. They also provided immediate signs of the prophecies that Isaiah gave here concerning the fate of Jerusalem in the future. Shebna was as self-reliant individually, as the people of Jerusalem were collectively (vv. 15-19). Eliakim was an object of trust by the members of his family and the residents of Jerusalem and so risked taking the Lord's place in their affections (vv. 20-25).

Brian Borgman: Valley of Vision – Pt. 2

Our joy must be rooted in reality; not the frivolous, superficial, shallow type of joy that marks our day; Your problem is you didn't repent and you didn't trust God; moving from national scene to these two examples; Egyptians want to form an alliance with Hezekiah; Shebna advocating for an Egyptian alliance; brings the wrath of God;

Vs. 16 -- Why are you in the position you are in – in Jerusalem, the capital of the people of God; you don't really belong here; no family ties or blood lines; cf. draft dodgers who become part of the White House – you don't belong here; What gives you the right to a full royal burial; the nation is falling apart and he is making sure his tomb is a place he will be remembered for generations to come; using his power and position to make a name for himself

Vs. 17 – “*Behold*” – the word of attention; God is going to act; you think you are BMOC but you are nothing; you are a squirt; He is about to violently hurl you right out of office; Hebrew doesn't have a bunch of adjectives and adverbs like English – they double or triple up words to make a more colorful image; crumple them up like yesterday's newspaper; language is emphatic; getting him as tight as possible so he will fly further;

Shebna a mirror image of the nation as a whole; brought forward as an example of judgment; our political leaders are a mirror image of our society – God has given us what we are;

Eliakim -- “*my Servant*” – important title in Isaiah; given to the Lord Jesus Christ; God will raise up and establish as opposed to Shebna;

Can't imagine looking at any of our current political leaders as a father figure; comfort and source of strength

Will hold things together as a tent peg; brings stability; wickedness in the king would undermine stability; Eliakim is the exception to the rule as a godly leader

Vs. 24 – nepotism = to show favoritism to family members; from immediate family members to obscure fifth cousins; they come out of the woodwork and cling to his fame and position and prestige; he doesn't do anything about it; he will let everyone hang on his peg; he is still a fallen human being and gives in to the pressure of fame and position; it is sad; we like stories that end well; we would like Eliakim to ride off into redemptive history with no spots or wrinkles; the overseer should not be a new convert so that he would not give into pride = the desire to get the fringe benefits out of the position; all of the heroes in the bible have flaws and sins

Principles:

- It is good and right to hope for and work for the replacement of selfish leaders with godly leaders; that's what Geneva was all about and the New England Puritans; all rulers should be subject to God; bad leaders are a scourge in the hand of God – still put there by God
- The best of men are still men at best – fallen and sinful and imperfect; their service will be imperfect
- Eliakim's failures actually point us to the glories of the true Servant of God; Messiah will be the truly selfless servant, exalted servant; shepherd king; who will rule in righteousness; Rev. 3:7; He admits and excludes from the kingdom; Col. 1:17 – holds all things together; shares His reign with His family

Van Parunak:

Joseph was over the house of Potiphar and then Pharaoh; Shebna = foreigner who has weaseled out for himself a position of prominence; had a lot of wealth; digging a big tomb; you think you are so big; didn't come to submit to the Lord; when Manasseh was taken into Assyria is probably when Shebna was hurled into vast country; official conveyance (chariot) to mark his importance;

all those marks of honor will be reversed; you have relied on your money; the city relied on its military defenses; the faithful servant replaces the faithless servant; a throne upon which glory sits; pegs are used to hang valuable things on; the people place their trust in Eliakim rather than in the Lord; no matter how much wisdom or integrity the leader has; we live in a country that values self-reliance (the pioneer spirit);