

“Asa: Seek the Lord”

2 Chronicles 14-16

This summer we are studying the good kings in 2 Chronicles. We began our study first in Deut. 17 looking at what God expected from His kings of His people. A King of Israel was accountable to God through the prophets, who pointed the kings to God's Word and the priests who guided the king about worship. The Chronicles is a retelling of the history of Israel from David to end of the Babylonian exile for the generation of Israelites who returned to Israel. Most of these Israelites were born in Babylon so they never saw the temple in Jerusalem and needed to learn how to worship God as God prescribed in His Word.

So the Chronicler highlights the good points of the kings of Judah so that the people would learn what pleased God then so they can please God now as they have returned to the land of Israel. That's how we have to read Chronicles; through the eyes of a returned exile who 1) needs to learn not to repeat the mistakes that got them into exile and 2) to renew your covenant relationship with God who, just as He promised, has graciously brought you back to the place of worshipping and serving.

God is all about forgiveness and restoration. When we've sinned He patiently waits for us to ask forgiveness and restore us in our relationship with Him through faith. God's Word is true. He will fulfil His promises. We have to learn to trust Him as we wait for His promises to come true.

This morning we want to look at King Asa the son of Abijah. We looked at Abijah 2 weeks ago and saw that he was one whose *“heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God”* (1 Kings 15:3). The Chronicler records one great victory he had over the northern kingdom of Israel. He declared his allegiance to God, the temple worship in Jerusalem, the Davidic kingship and the Aaronic priesthood. But he only reigned 3 years and the sense from Kings and Chronicles combined was Abijah had sporadic moments of faithfulness but not much more.

So how about his son, Asa, Solomon's great-grandson? Let's read 2 Chronicles 14:1-8,

1 And Abijah rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. Asa his son succeeded him as king, and ***in his days the country was at peace for ten years.*** **2** Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. **3** He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. **4** He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his laws and commands. **5** He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, ***and the kingdom was at peace under him.*** **6** He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No one was at war with him during those years, ***for the LORD gave him rest.*** **7** “Let us build up these towns,” he said to Judah, “and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; ***we sought him and he has given us rest on every side.***” So they built and prospered. **8** Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah, equipped with large shields and with spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand from Benjamin, armed with small shields and with bows. All these were brave fighting men.

So what did the returned exiles need to be reminded of as they came back to Israel and rebuilt Jerusalem?

Obeying God's Word Brings Peace **(14:1-2, 6-8; 15:19)**

Notice the emphasis on rest and peace. The reason they had rest and an absence of war is because “*we sought Him and He has given us rest on every side*” (v.7). Asa's description was a positive one: he did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God”. He obeyed God's words by acting on them. He did what was right based on his relationship with God. The only way you can do what is right is if you know what God says is right.

The Chronicler emphasizes the rest and peace in similar terms to when Solomon was reigning and when he was walking with God. The reason why this is so strongly emphasized was because whenever Israel rebelled against God, he would send a neighboring country to make things difficult for them. The absence of war for Israel was a sign God was pleased with them because they were obeying Him. God promised Israel blessings in the land if they obeyed Him but difficulties if they did not. Because the land was a gift from God and failure to walk with God resulted in loss of enjoyment of the land.

God has not given us – His church - land nor we aren't guaranteed peace and rest from opponents of the gospel, but there is a very real presence of rest available to the child of God. When we become a child of God through faith in Jesus we have peace with God.

Rom. 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our sins have been paid for since we believed Jesus alone paid the price for our sins on Calvary. But this inner peace can also be shattered in a number of ways, particularly through worry or anxiety. God promises us inner peace when we trust Him;

Is. 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Phil. 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In Matt. 6 Jesus warns us not to lay up treasures here, to watch out for what we keep our eyes focused on and that we can't serve both God and money. “Therefore” He says don't be anxious about all these things that the ungodly chase after. Seek first His kingdom and all the things we need God will take care of. Anxiety is the opposite of peace. When we are walking with God, trusting Him for our needs He gives us His peace. Asa reminds us of that.

During the times of peace Asa made the wise move of being prepared for future attacks. He built up his army and refortified cities and walls that had been damaged under his grandfather's rule. When things are at peace and all is well you must guard against the time when trials and attacks will come. Sure enough that's what happened with Asa 10 years later:

⁹ Zerah the Cushite marched out against them with an army of thousands upon thousands and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. ¹⁰ Asa went out to meet him, and they took up battle positions in the Valley of Zephathah near Mareshah. ¹¹ Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, “LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. LORD, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you.” ¹² The LORD struck

down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled, ¹³ and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar. Such a great number of Cushites fell that they could not recover; they were crushed before the LORD and his forces. The men of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder. ¹⁴ They destroyed all the villages around Gerar, for the terror of the LORD had fallen on them. They looted all these villages, since there was much plunder there. ¹⁵ They also attacked the camps of the herders and carried off droves of sheep and goats and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

Because he was walking with God and was prepared for potential attacks, Asa . . .

Trusted God for the Battles in His Life **(14:9-15)**

Asa went out to meet this army that outnumbered him 2 to 1 and then he prayed acknowledging that God alone can help the outnumbered and the over powered. *Help us, LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. LORD, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you.*"

Is that how you and I pray when we are outnumbered or overpowered or overwhelmed? Sometimes yes, but maybe many times no. By the way, where had Israel heard very similar words 'In your name we come against you?' Sounds very much like David versus Goliath – and that's exactly what the Chronicler wants to remind Israel of. The peace references remind them of the glory days of Solomon. The faith in the battle reminds them of the faith of David.

When Israel returned to their land after exile they still had enemies to deal with and threats to subdue. But they always had God and He encouraged them with the words of prophets like Haggai and Zechariah and leaders like Zerubbabel, Joshua the high priest, Ezra and Nehemiah. We're outnumbered all the time. We're often overwhelmed by the ungodly in our day. What can we do? Rely on the Lord because He is our God and He's not going to let any mortal prevail against His purposes.

Sometime after this a prophet pays a visit to Asa to encourage him to remain faithful to the Lord. Notice the timing; after a great victory.

^{15:1} The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. ² He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. ³ For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. ⁴ But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them. ⁵ In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. ⁶ One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress. ⁷ But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." ⁸ When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD's temple.

Now, Asa had already torn down idols and Asherah poles and other forms of idolatry in 14:3-5. Why does he have to do it again? Because . . .

Removing Idols is not a One-time Action **(14:4-5; 15:1-8, 16-18)**

The nations around them worshipped other gods in other ways. The temptation is always there to do what others do. High places were sometimes homemade altars built by God's people to worship God in their own place – as opposed to go to Jerusalem to the Tabernacle because it's inconvenient or because you didn't like those people. The danger of isolated worship is a lack of accountability, no fellowship and can result in a form of legalism or extremism. That's why God always commands us to worship together and not forsake the assembling of one another. We are a body and all body parts are necessary for a healthy body of Christ.

Idols are the habits, interests, excuses and sins that pull us away from God. Somedays we have victory over them and other days we don't. They never completely leave us. Sometimes idols change. You have victory over this and you think 'great!' but then you give in slightly to something else and all of a sudden you trade your time with God for your pursuit of the fun of the idol. Like Asa you keep having to deal with them. But Asa needed the encouragement from the Azariahs in his life and we need to play that role too when we see each other allowing our idols of today take us away from our commitment to God.

So serious did Asa take this that he

¹⁶ King Asa also deposed his grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah. Asa cut it down, broke it up and burned it in the Kidron Valley. ¹⁷ Although he did not remove the high places from Israel, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life. ¹⁸ He brought into the temple of God the silver and gold and the articles that he and his father had dedicated.

Who of us who are older haven't been gently rebuked by a watching child or grandchild who in their innocence pointed out our failure to follow God the way we should be? Or are we bold enough in our faith to graciously confront close family members with the idols in their lives?

Everything keeps going well for Asa. We read in 15:9-15

*⁹ Then he assembled all Judah and Benjamin and the people from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who had settled among them, for large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. ¹⁰ They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. ¹¹ At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep and goats from the plunder they had brought back. ¹² They entered into a covenant to **seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul.** ¹³ All who would not **seek the LORD**, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. ¹⁴ They took an oath to the LORD with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns. ¹⁵ All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it **wholeheartedly**. They **sought God eagerly**, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.*

The 3rd month was the festival or Feast of Weeks, better known to us as Pentecost. The celebration of God providing a harvest. At this time Asa used it to call God's people together to renew their commitment to . . .

Seek the Lord Constantly Through Worship **(15:9-15)**

Notice the emphasis on seeking the Lord with all their heart and soul, wholeheartedly, eagerly. They entered into or renewed their covenant with God in worshipping Him and getting to know Him

more. That's what seeking God means in this chapter; the consistent meeting together to know Him.

Unfortunately the story of Asa doesn't end here. We continue reading,

15:19 There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign. In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah. ² Asa then took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the LORD's temple and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus. ³ "Let there be a treaty between me and you," he said, "as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me." ⁴ Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel Maimand all the store cities of Naphtali. ⁵ When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and abandoned his work. ⁶ Then King Asa brought all the men of Judah, and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using. With them he built up Geba and Mizpah. ⁷ At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. ⁸ Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand. ⁹ For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." ¹⁰ Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people. ¹¹ The events of Asa's reign, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. ¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians. ¹³ Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his ancestors. ¹⁴ They buried him in the tomb that he had cut out for himself in the City of David. They laid him on a bier covered with spices and various blended perfumes, and they made a huge fire in his honor.

Here's the last lesson from Asa's life;

A Good Start Doesn't Guarantee a Good Finish **(ch. 16)**

A good 35 years of faithfulness doesn't guarantee a good finish. Which was only 6 years away. What happened? When this prophet confronts Asa from trusting his neighbors and money to buy him a victory instead of God he reminds him of the victory over the Cushites 25 years earlier! You relied on God then; He won a great victory; what happened? We don't know exactly what happened but he drifted away from God somehow. He didn't renew his own commitment. He forgot he was in a covenant relationship with God.

And then instead of repenting when rebuked he lashed out. He arrested and beat up Hanani. God chastised Asa with a disease in his feet. He still refused to repent and ask God's forgiveness. A sad ending. Overall, a good king but he ended poorly. Pride? Success? Better than everyone else? Idols? What happened? Essentially, he stopped seeking God wholeheartedly and eagerly.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net