

**Joke:** The man's wife walked into the kitchen to find her husband stalking around with a fly swatter. "What are you doing?" She asked. "Hunting flies". He responded. "Killing any" she questioned. "Yep 3 males, 2 females." Intrigued by his response she asked, "How can you tell them apart?" The husband replied, "that's easy 3 we're on beer cans, 2 were on the phone."

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Chronicles - week 3 - lesson in faithfulness

What kind of encouragement do you need when you're facing a crisis?

That's the question Ezra is answering today in the section of Chronicles we'll be looking at.

First, let me lay a little foundation first.

The book of Chronicles covers a 400-year period of time, called "The Kingdom Period," it's called that because from 1000 B.C. to 600 B.C., Israel was ruled by kings.

Saul was its first king. He didn't do so well. Ezra doesn't spend much time on him.

David comes next. David was human in his sins, adultery, sending the husband out in the front lines to be assured he was killed, just to name a couple yet the writer of Hebrews calls him, "A man after God's own heart." Because David with all his flaws still just ultimately wanted to do God's will.

By the way church that's God's grace. He does the same for us. With all our flaws, sins, and short-comings He still calls us His friend.

Two weeks ago, we saw God ask David to build Him an altar. So he built the altar. But he didn't stop there he bought the field for the altar, and the animals for the sacrifice. He said, "I will not offer to the Lord my God that which cost me nothing."

Next in the line of kings was Solomon. Last week we learned how his gift of wisdom benefited an entire nation.

2 Chronicles 10-13 tell's the story of Solomon's son, whose name was Rehoboam. Rehoboam was not a wise king. When the people asked him to lower their taxes, instead he raised them, and that act along with some other leadership traits split the kingdom forever.

From that time on, Israel was a divided kingdom. The ten tribes in the north were known as "Israel." And the two tribes in the south were called "Judah."

Throughout its history, 19 kings ruled the kingdom of Israel, and the sad part is that not one of them followed the Lord.

20 kings ruled in the kingdom of Judah, and most of them tried to follow the Lord.

Ezra, who is writing to a distraught people, is looking for positive examples to teach uplifting lessons. So Chronicles majors in the kings of the south.

After David, Solomon, and Rehoboam, come two kings whose names both start with A. The first one is Abijah. Abijah reigned for three years, not a lot about him so we're going to

skip him and go on to the second king whose name is a little easier to pronounce his name is Asa.

Asa was not perfect, he did make some mistakes which we will learn from as well, but he was one of the good kings.

Ezra is going to use the life of Asa to teach us three lessons about faithfulness today.

Asa is going to show us that when we are faithful to God, God is unfailing to us.

He's going to teach us that the faithful may have setbacks, but God is still faithful with us still.

And lastly, God is available to the person who is available to God. If we will just give him what we have God can that beyond what you could imagine.

Asa's story spans three chapters of 2 Chronicles. Chapters 14, 15, and 16.

It's in those three chapters we will learn from.

So, let's get started

Around 900 B.C., the king of "Cush," which is modern day Ethiopia, was powerful enough to conquer the kingdom of Egypt. The country north of Egypt was Judah, which was being ruled by young king Asa.

2 Chronicles 14 tells the story:

2 Chronicles 14:8–10 (NIV): 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. 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.

If you do the math, Asa is outnumbered almost two to one. So what does he do. He sees the vast army of his enemies looks back at the men's faces as they are pale in fear and he retreats. . .no that's not what happened he does what we all should do in a crisis: Verse 11. . .

2 Chronicles 14:11 (NIV): 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."

Asa prayed.

And how did God respond to his prayer?

2 Chronicles 14:12–13 (NIV): 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.

Imagine yourself as a young king. Maybe 30 years old. And you get wind that an army much larger than yours is coming against you.

Everyone under your care, every person you love, every thing, every animal, every building, every field in your kingdom is about to be overrun, broken, killed, ravaged, or stolen.

What do you do?

You do what every person of faith should do: you pray.

Now hear this church I really don't think Asa's prayer was a bless me, my family, us four no more type of prayer. It was more than a now I lay me down to sleep prayer. Asa was desperate for his God to move on his behalf. So, he boldly calls on the Lord. "Lord," Asa says, "there is no one besides you to help us. Help us, Lord, because we depend on you. Because without you we don't have much hope"

And what does God do?

He answers. He does even more than what he asks. He not only protects the kingdom and everyone in it, he gives your enemy over to you, so that his army is destroyed, and can never come against you again. And they even carry off a large amount of plunder in the process.

I wonder if it might have been this passage the Apostle Paul was thinking of when he wrote. . .

Ephesians 3:20 (NIV): Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Ezra is teaching a lesson to a people who are insecure and unsure. They've been away from home for 70 years. They've just moved back into their land.

When you read the book of Nehemiah, you find that other people had moved into the neighborhood while Israel was away in exile, and they're not exactly happy the Israelites are back.

Ezra is teaching us a lesson in our faith and God's faithfulness.

The Lesson is this. . .

You don't have to fight your battle alone. Call on the Lord, and he will fight for you and stand with you.

Hear this church, when you work, you get what you can do. But when you pray, you get what God can do. And I don't know if you are aware of this or not but with God nothing is impossible.

- He can route a million-man army.
- He can supply all your needs, according to His riches in Christ Jesus.
- He can be a friend that sticks closer than a brother.
- He can bring peace in the midst of your storm.

Sometimes He will let you feel outnumbered. . .so you can know that you know that you know that you can count on Him. Trust in Him.

That means. . .

When the bills are mounting you can trust Him. Let me just say this when the bills are mounting you can trust Him that doesn't mean you won't have responsibility in the process. You may have to sell that car you never should have brought.

That doesn't mean there are no consequences with your choices. But if you give to God first he makes what you have left go so much further.

You can trust Him. That means when there is a temptation trying to distract you from your destiny you can trust Him to make a way of escape. The question is will you take His way or continue your way.

Understand church when you're in a mess, be faithful to pray, and God will be faithful to answer.

I'm not saying He will always answer like you were asking. After all His ways are not our ways, but I am saying he will be faithful to answer. Sometimes the answer is no. Not because He's mean, but because He sees the bigger picture. (**show puzzle**) He might say not now wait. The question is are you going to be faithful to listen?

Last week we were reminded that. . .

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV): if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Our land needs some healing amen?

If I will be faithful to pray, He will be faithful to fight.

Ezra's second lesson comes in chapter 15.

Asa and his men are returning to their homes and families.

On their way home, the Lord sends them a prophet named Azariah to encourage them.

Chapter 15, tells us the story. . .

2 Chronicles 15:1–2 (NIV): 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.

Let me pause here and make two very important points. We have been told that He will never leave us or forsake us and that is true.

But yet we just read, If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

Isn't that saying just the opposite. No here's why, point 1 this is the Old Covenant and God didn't live in them like He does in us. Second point is that He doesn't forsake us, but there are times He may let us do what we want to show us that what He wants for us is so much better. To show us that we need to trust Him more, depend on Him more, lean on Him more. He withdraws His blessing if you will to show us that His ways are right,

Proverbs 21:2 (NLT): People may be right in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their heart.

Let's pick up at verse 3. . .

2 Chronicles 15:3–9 (NIV): 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. 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.

On the way home from that great victory, God asks Asa to make it even greater.

During the reigns of his father and grandfather, people had begun worshiping other gods. The gods of the Canaanites.

People built places of worship to Baal all over the land.

And maybe Asa thinks about the First Commandment, “I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.”

So, Asa sends wrecking crews out to tear down the pagan idols that were set up throughout the land.

And he commissions the Levites to refurbish the Temple.

The people are so inspired by Asa’s leadership that they all flock to Jerusalem for a great celebration.

People from the northern tribes start moving south, just to be under Asa's leadership.

Verse 10 says. . .

2 Chronicles 15:10 (NIV): They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign.

The third month of the Jewish calendar is late May or early June. That's significant because they've come together to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

Leviticus 23 says that at Pentecost, the nation was to sacrifice a bull, 7 lambs, and 2 rams.

But what does Asa do?

2 Chronicles 15:11 (NIV): 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.

When David was asked to build an altar to the Lord, he did more than he was asked.

When Solomon was seeking God's favor, he sacrificed more than was expected.

And when Asa and his people made a sacrifice, they do 1,000 times more than they were asked.

Hear this church when people love God deeply, they will give to Him lavishly.

I love this next part. . .

2 Chronicles 15:12–13 (NIV): 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.

That's pretty serious. In our world today we are just praying for leaders that will honor God. Amen?

2 Chronicles 15:14–15 (NIV): 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. Their covenant said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. We will serve Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength." And . . .for those that won't were put to death.

They took an oath, and not a quiet one. There was shouting, and trumpets, and ram's horns.

They were in revival – Everyone rejoiced, and everyone was all in for God.

The last part of verse 15 said. . .They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the Lord gave them rest on every side.

Remember what the prophet said in verse 2? If you seek him, he will be found by you

And then in verse 15, they sought the Lord, and he was by them.

So, the lesson is this. . . seek the Lord and He will be found by you.

I love this check this out. . .

Acts 17:26–27 (NIV): From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

(Talk about this). - Esther

This principle, this promise, is for every man, woman, boy and girl alive today.

We just need ambassadors of Christ to tell others of His faithfulness and invite them to encounter Jesus in a fresh new way.

We need revival amen?

How many people do you know who need to know this promise?

2 Chronicles is the book of Revivals. It has five of them in it, and this is the first.

Revival happens under Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah – and we're going to look at all of them.

Ezra is teaching us that the renewal of a nation comes when its people seek the Lord together.

So Asa assembles the people for Pentecost, and it's so powerful that people come from outside the nation – from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and Simeon. And they get serious about God.

The chapter ends with this comment:

2 Chronicles 15:19 (NIV): There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

Think about that for 25 years, there was peace.

Let me just add this. . .when you find God He offers a peace that passes all understanding. There can be chaos happening all around you, but you can have His peace inside you.

Ezra has one more lesson for us.

Asa was fervent for God in chapter 15, but he let his temperature cool down a bit in chapter 16

25 years after the Revival, the Northern Kingdom, under a king named Baasha, begins to threaten the Southern Kingdom.

In order to stop the migration of his people into Judah, Baasha starts to build a border wall. His wall isn't to keep people out, it's to fence people in.

2 Chronicles 16:1 (NIV): 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.

Ramah was around 5 miles north of Jerusalem. It was on the main road that everyone had to travel if they wanted to get into the Kingdom of Judah.

What did Asa do years earlier, when the Cushites came against Judah, remember? Asa turned to God and prayed for His help. This time he doesn't. Instead. . .

2 Chronicles 16:2–3 (NIV): 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."

Where once Asa was filled with fervor, and wanting God's help now he's lulled by leisure. Instead of trusting God and leading his people in battle, he pays somebody else to do his fighting for him.

How many times do we trust in others more than God? Trust in ourselves to try and pick the best answer?

In Asa's endeavor it worked. Baasha withdrew his forces from Ramah. And as the say, "And Asa lived happily ever after."

But he didn't. Instead, God sent another prophet to him. This time the word was. . .

2 Chronicles 16:7–8 (NIV): 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.

He reminding Asa of the battle where He was outnumbered almost two to one.

And church let me just pause here for a moment and remind you that if God did it once He will do it again. Your circumstance isn't new to God. He's not looking down from Heaven thinking well that one caught me by surprise.

He continues. . .

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV): 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."

Asa, when you're in trouble, call on me, and I'll fight for you.

Asa, what happened to your commitment to me?"

Asa, what happened to that covenant you signed? I was ready to rescue you. But you turned your head away from Me.

Asa, what happened to your faith?

Verse 9 what a promise. . .

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV): For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. . .

Listen church, God is looking for fully devoted followers. And when He finds them, He fortifies. He adds strength to them. He does great things with and through them.

The lesson Ezra is teaching us is that He will make you strong and He will show Himself strong on your behalf.

- Joseph experienced that when God provided a way for him to go from the prison to the palace.
- Moses saw that when his back was against the Red Sea.
- Daniel encountered it when God closed the mouths of the lions so he could live.
- Peter recognized it when the angel opened the prison door.

You and I can see it as well when we commit all our ways to Him fully. Not half-heartedly. When you say, without reservation, “All that I have is Yours. All that I am is Yours.”

I love You I worship You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.

Church, the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth, looking for people whose hearts are fully devoted to Him!

And when He finds them, He fortifies them. He goes before them. He prepares a way for them. He brings down mountains and raises up valleys. That’s His reckless love.

I would love to tell you Asa said, my bad I should have trusted God more. . .but that’s not what happened.

2 Chronicles 16:10 (NIV): 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.



Asa what happened to your zeal for the Lord? Church what happened to your zeal for the Lord?

Look at this. . .

2 Chronicles 16:12 (NIV): 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.

Church, if you have let the fire fade. It's time to rekindle the flame. Renew your faithfulness in the One who has always been faithful.

Romans 12:11 (TPT): Be enthusiastic to serve the Lord, keeping your passion toward him boiling hot! Radiate with the glow of the Holy Spirit and let him fill you with excitement as you serve him.

Paul tells his spiritual son Timothy. . .

2 Timothy 1:6–7 (NLT): This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

Before we close, I have to ask:

How's your heart these days?

Is it fully on fire? I pray it is.

Are you praying for God's power to use you to further His kingdom? I hope you are.