

Lessons From the Life of King Asa (ii)

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Date: 11 August 2019

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[0 : 0 0] we're going to wear our bibles open at second chronicles chapters 15 and 16 which continue the story of king asa of judah and as we turn back there let's seek the lord's help our great god we come to you the great teacher and we pray that we would be humble to receive your word that both preacher and congregation alike as we sit under your word you would build us up you would correct and teach and challenge and that lord those who do not know jesus would be drawn to him and saved in his name we pray amen there were two men who served together they ministered together they prayed together they struggled together one continued in the christian life right to the very end and he could say famously for i am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come i have fought the good fight i have finished the race i have kept the faith henceforth there is a crown laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all those who have loved his appearing of the other man it was said he was in love with this present world and he deserted he left off following the lord and started behaving as if he had never known jesus at all of course the faithful man is the apostle paul the other was his friend demas two men who had known the teaching of the lord who had served and yet one continued and one did not you see it's not really how we start the christian life that matters it only matters how we start that we actually start when we often hear testimonies we hear about how people enter the christian life and that's a wonder but it's really that we started that's the most important thing it's how we continue with the lord that really matters it's how we go on with our walks on the lord and in testimonies it's great to hear how people are walking with the lord and they hear and in the now because it's in the present that we know the lord yes he's helped us in the past but it's in the present time that we know his greater presence with us and in the reign of king asa we see a man who starts off so well we learned that last week all the wonderful things that he did as a king but in the last four years or so of his life he goes completely off track spiritually and we're going to see this in these last two chapters of asa and second chronicles last time we looked at his early reign and second chronicles 14 and we're looking at the text more as a character study and seeing what practical lessons we can glean from ace's life we saw that these lessons are bang up to date for us living as 21st century christians even though they were written hundreds and hundreds of years ago ace is a king who starts off so well despite the spiritual disobedience of his father and his grandfather and his grandmother when an enemy army was outnumbering them and the millions they attack judah king asa seeks the lord he prays and god grants them deliverance and it's a wonderful prayer for times of difficulty we looked at it last week it's in chapter 14 verse 11 then asa called on the lord his god and said lord there is none like you to help the powerless against the mighty help us

oh lord our god for we rely on you and in your name we have come against this vast army
oh lord you are our god do not let man prevail against you such a prayer of faith in his
early years rather than relying on personal ability and strength he depended on the lord
his god well today we're going to look at chapters 15 and 16 chapter 15 details another 20
or so years of asa's reign and for those 20 years he continues to walk with the lord then in
chapter 16 asa faces another test it's a lesser test than the one he faced before and this
time he fails it quite spectacularly and really makes no reference to god at all it's striking in
those verses that god is not mentioned at all when asa references it doesn't make any
reference to god in any way whatsoever so first then we'll look at remaining faithful in
chapter 15 verses 1 to 7 asa remains faithful secondly in the rest of chapter 15 he leads
the country in religious reformation religious reformation and then finally asa perseveres in
disobedience in chapter 16 so remaining faithful religious reformation and persevering
disobedience in chapter 16 so first then in the first seven verses of chapter 15 remaining
faithful asa had just won a great victory the greatest victory of his whole reign he defeated
a vast enemy army because he had trusted and relied on his god to save the people now
a prophet by the name of azariah comes to asa with a message from the lord verse 1 the
spirit of god came upon azariah the son of oded and he went out to meet with asa asa's
message azariah's message is very interesting and it's very instructive for us as well what
would you have been expecting as king asa you just won a huge victory yes it was by the
lord's strength but you'd won a huge victory what would you be expecting the prophet to
come and say to you well probably you'd be expecting for a massive pat on the back well
done asa you've been fantastic you've been faithful you've done the right thing you've
defeated the enemy army thumbs up to you gold star that is not what azariah says to him
at all doesn't say that to him at all azariah comes to him he doesn't congratulate the king
on his victory rather he gives a message of encouragement to remain faithful to the lord
his god he says the lord is with you when you're with him if you seek him he will be found
by you but if you forsake him he will forsake you very very seems almost strange for him
to have said that on the the the next day of asa's great victory but the prophet was
pointing towards something which is very true in the christian life when things go well
when we have a mighty spiritual triumph that is so often when things start to go wrong
spiritually because we start to let the guard down we start to think well we've just had a
great victory we can relax a little bit and that's when we start to fall off so azariah comes to
asa and says remind remember asa when you are with the lord he is with you if you
forsake him he will forsake you and then he goes on to give an example in verses three to
six for a long time azra was

without the true god without a priest to teach without the law there's been much debate as to what years that actually refers to it could refer to the time and in the book of genesis and when god had called abraham the people were without the law it could refer to the time of mooses and before the law had been given and up in mount sinai probably though it refers to the time of the judges when god's people most um they they departed from the lord and the furthest away place possible they're in a spiritual roller coaster ride there's ups and they're downs and they do what's right in their own eyes but any shape or form it's a time when god's people were extremely unfaithful to him and asa would have known exactly to what azariah was referring and he says don't be like the people of israel in the past don't go way off track remain faithful to god and he will stand by you asa azariah tells them to continue to continue to seek the lord to continue to seek him even after a such a victory don't grow complacent don't leave off following don't stop praying don't stop listening to god's word don't stop coming and meeting with the lord on your own and with his people you're to continue to seek your god because if satan can't get us by causing us to fall into some terrible great sin he's going to try and make us be spiritually stale that's what he wants if he can't get us by making us fall into terrible terrible sin he wants our spiritual lives to grow stale to lead us down that way to stop praying satan doesn't want us praying satan knows the power of prayer he doesn't want us to pray he wants us to stop praying so that's the message continue to seek your god continue to persevere remain faithful asa don't let the guard down need to be constantly on our guard spiritually and we're told in the new testament satan roars around like a prowling lion looking for someone to devour or to remain on our guard because i don't know if your life's anything like mine i'm sure it is we can be so prone to wander in the christian life it's so easy it's so easy to wander far harder to remain faithful prone to wander lord i feel it prone to leave the god i love take my heart oh take and seal it said the hymn writer as a prayer because he knew how easy it was and this is a warning from azariah don't let the guard down continue to seek the lord and this theme of seeking the lord is extremely prominent in all of the bible but especially in the book of chronicles and especially here in second chronicles in chapter 15 did you notice that as we went through verse 4 verse 4 and it says but in their distress they turned to the lord they sought the lord they sought him and he was found by them and you've got verse 12 again and they entered into a covenant to seek the lord the god of their fathers again in verse 13 you have something similar all who would not seek the lord the god of israel were put to death verse 15 all judah rejoiced about the oath because they'd sworn it wholeheartedly they sought god eagerly and he was found by them so the lord gave them rest on every side when something's there repeated four times we should take a little break and look at it because that's how the hebrews emphasized something that was important now what is

going on here the prophet is actually echoing words to king asa that were echoed by david to his son solomon when he was being set forth as crown prince and set apart to build the lord's temple it's back in first chronicles chapter 20 and verse 9 you can hear the the ring to it and you my son solomon acknowledge the god of your father serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind for the lord searches the heart he understands every motive behind the thoughts here it is if you seek him he will be found by you but if you forsake him he will reject you forever what is azariah doing he's echoing he's echoing to them the covenant warning which the people had known from the very beginning if you seek the lord you will find him if you forsake him he will forsake you and there's something else here in these verses it's maybe a slight tangent but it's one that i come up against recently and i think it's quite important as a minister i'm often asked the question about seeking god god's seeking us and how god elects his people to salvation how he writes the name in the lamb's book of life some people have a knowledge of scripture but they excuse their unbelief and unwillingness to accept jesus by saying there's no point seeking god i am probably not one of the elect anyway if i was then god would find me and i'll be okay i don't have to do anything myself that way of thinking is completely alien to the bible the new testament teaches that god seeks us for example the parables in luke chapter 15 about the lost items also the words spoken to zacchaeus the son of man jesus came to seek and to save the lost but the bible also teaches that we are to seek god absolutely it does act 17 27 says god did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him we are to seek god even while god seeks us the bible holds the two together and in the christian life there's no point saying god does everything we don't have to do anything that is not the teaching of the bible it's true that god does it but we are still to search for him to seek him and to use the means that he has given to grow bible reading prayer fellowship with himself that is what azariah reminds asa as david said to solomon we are to seek god every day in our lives to seek him that's what prevents us from going spiritually astray to seek our god of course we do that by reading by praying by encouraging one another by loving one another having fellowship with each other it's never about seeking a special experience which some other people have apparently had but rather about seeking the lord himself and the promise is that those who seek him will find him that's the wonder of it if you seek you will find not you might find you will find you will find god if you seek him with your whole heart that's the promise another lesson that we have from azariah's message to asa is found in verse 7 but as for you be strong and do not give up for your work will be rewarded now this of course reminded asa of the words of the message given to joshua a way back at the beginning when the people entered the promised land asa was to be faithful in leading the people as joshua was who directed the people to depend on god remember joshua was not put off by the giants

that he saw as he entered the land but rather he prayed to the god he got to his god and he led the people in faith in the strength of his god and asa had done the same back in chapter 14 and he was to continue to do the same except he forgets that message later on his life but for these 20 years or so that's exactly what he does these people could give of course asa as well fills um his life with people who are spiritually wise azariah the prophet comes along spiritually wise people these people could give him spiritually sound advice encourage him and his walk just as um the next prophet that um later on comes but asa doesn't listen to him but he's a wise man and here is something like this we should keep in contact with people who will tell us the truth the unadulterated truth of the word of god we should seek people who will tell us when we're going astray seek people who will tell us not just what we think we want to hear but people who will actually tell us like it is like azariah the prophet like the prophet who comes later hanani the seer many a young christian has been kept from foolishness by the words and counsel of older godly christians to have a paul that we would go to who would tell us as it is brother sister you're going astray where is your prayer life what it once was where is your bible reading now your church attendance is dropping a little bit you're letting other things get in the way of worship and of prayer and a bible study to warn us and of course that can be quite hard to take we don't want warnings we don't want rebukes but faithful are the wounds of a friend and that's what we need and it can actually be quite straightforward to do i remember a couple in a church i used to serve in a couple they befriended a group of young people and all they did was they had the young people back to their home regularly they opened the bible they prayed with them they encouraged them they taught them how to pray and that built all those young people up in the lord who are we filling our lives with people who give us what we want to hear or people who will tell us the word of god as it is what kinds of people are we filling our lives with who do we look up to in the lord who can encourage us and inspire us to ever greater service well secondly in in the second half of chapter 15 asa responds to that message and he responds extremely positively there's religious reformation in verses 8 to 19 the encouragement by azariah the prophet leads asa to even greater spiritual reforms than he had done previously back in his early reign he already as verses 4 to 6 of chapter 14 he commanded judah to seek the lord again that word seek again the god of their fathers to obey his laws and commands he cuts down the asherah poles the false altars are destroyed now in verse 8 he goes even further by removing all of the idols in the land now these are statues that the people had set up to worship the false gods and what he goes on to do is to repair the altar that was in front of solomon's temple which had suffered damage during the reign of king solomon and his grandfather as well he not only removed the idols but positively encourages his people to worship the one true god he removes the barriers and then encourages the people to go but the reformation goes even further

[20 : 16] than that the people go on to renew their covenant promises before the lord their god they rededicated themselves to serving god verse 12 they entered into a covenant to seek the lord the god of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul and it's not done so much in the free church but the same principles apply when we join the church we're actually making a commitment to the lord and to his people and here the people renew their covenant vows they're committed to the lord they renew that you see there can be a lack of commitment today in many spheres of life and when you read about in christian literature it's often the males that get the the blame for it and i'm sure i'm sure it is you know young women often say the young christian men won't commit they won't commit they won't do it and i'm sure that commitment extends to other areas of life a lack of commitment and even in the church people fear taking responsibility we are tentative we are indecisive often in our service to the lord but that doesn't describe asa and his people here they get together and say lord we promise we will do better in your service we will wholeheartedly seek you and god of course responds to that by granting them peace on every side because they had set themselves to serving the lord and the ceremony goes on quite graphically they trumpet blast their commitment there's horns there's a whole ceremony of worship to the lord in fact some congregations at the beginning of the new year have covenant renewal sundays which isn't a bad practice at all to renew our vows to the lord for the year ahead that's what asa and the people do here after such a good victory that's when to do it to renew our commitment not just in the hard times but when things are going well because that's when we're so prone to stray god grants them peace when they do that and if we're lacking peace perhaps it's because we're holding back we're not serving the lord wholeheartedly in some areas of our lives and of course there's no greater example of commitment than the lord jesus christ himself he is the one who gave himself wholly to his father's work he could even say that his very meat and his very drink was to do the will of his father his bread and butter was to do the will of his father in heaven this this commitment extends to the agony of calvary's cross where in obedience to his father's plan jesus offers himself willingly for sinners when it comes to god's work this is our greatest example of encouragement to be about his work so that others would come to know the love of god they might know jesus as savior can we see with can we say with asa and with the people of judah that we have entered into the things of god with our whole hearts that's what they do because every time i think about that i'm challenged the wholehearted devotion is what king david says to solomon the people here wholeheartedly committed themselves that's every area of our lives wholehearted devotion and i'm challenged when i think of the example of the lord jesus christ he gave everything for us on calvary he didn't withhold an iota he didn't withhold a jot he didn't withhold a tittle he gave it all and in response what can we do but offer our lives offer everything we have even if the world were all of ours says the hymn writer it would be an offering far too small

it demands our life our love our very alls and that's what god's people gave here because that's what jesus gave for us now some of what the people did may sound very strange to our modern ears they go on to sacrifice 700 cattle 7 000 sheep and goats and anyone who would not take the promises is put to death now that seems extremely graphic to us and our modern ears reading back in these passages but there's actually something very significant going on here that we can learn from these old testament ceremonial laws they're obeying the laws of leviticus they're obeying the laws of numbers and deuteronomy the causes to scratch our heads perhaps because they seem overly harsh but they point to a very serious reality you see in romans 6 the apostle paul says that well the wages of sin is death the wages of sin is death that is what the law of covenant breaking was about and it demanded the death penalty god was teaching his people the seriousness of sin the importance of holiness and serving him and seeking him so that's why there was the death penalty for breaking god's covenant laws justice for our sin actually demands the death penalty god can do nothing else our sin is so serious it's so filthy we are so corrupt we have broken god's laws rc sproul calls it cosmic treason we've committed treason against the king of heaven and treason always has carried the death penalty here the people sacrificed animals because the old testament law was teaching about substitution as they gave their animals over they were symbolically killed in the person's place of course that points forward to what god would do many years later when he gives his own son in the new covenant when the lamb of god is sacrificed who takes away the sin of the world and the penalty falls on him if we think sacrificing 700 cattle and 7 000 sheep was horrendous thing and it was just think of calvary for a moment when the perfect sinless lamb of god our savior the lord jesus christ was sacrificed for us he is the forsaken of the father he's the one who sought his father every single day of his life he's the one who walked with his father perfectly if you seek me you will be found by me that's christ except on calvary we find that he is the one who's forsaken by god smitten by him and afflicted because he took our sins upon himself for our weaknesses for our failures for our unwholehearted devotion christ took it all that's what these laws point to the gruesomeness that is calvary's cross that's what they point to jesus is our substitute and if we believe in him our sins are forgiven and verse 15 the people rejoiced because they'd sworn the oath wholeheartedly and only in christ can you have true joy as the people experienced here when they wholeheartedly sought the lord there's also a curious incident involving the queen mother maaka in verse 16 aces reform extended to his own family again it seems quite strange to us but he's doing something extremely important now asa asa's mother is not mentioned it's his grandmother that's still queen mother so either either asa's mother had died or or maaka is exercising power she's a very important mother-in-law

she's been extremely powerful in every way and she's exercising tremendous power over the people in those days the queen mother taught the children and she's exercising tremendous spiritual power but she's not an example to follow she's a wicked evil woman who worships false gods and teaches others to do the same she's got her own asherah pole that she worships from asa walks in he says i'm not having that we're to seek the lord our god wholeheartedly and he burns the asherah pole in the kidron valley which was a place where religious reformation had come in previous days yes the ten commandments tell us to honor our father and our mother absolutely asa was a man who did that but he also knew that his first priority was to honor god and if his parents were asking him to do something that was against god then god's law came first in his life an extremely difficult thing to do but asa does it with the lord's help it was the lord jesus christ himself who said it's luke 14 26 if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother his wife and his children his brothers and sisters yes even his own life he cannot be my disciple to put him first above all that is the cost of following christ putting him first above everything else to honor him above all knowing that those who honor the lord he will honor then lastly and much more briefly in chapter 16 we have persevering disobedience asa faces another test very similar to the battle in chapter 14 this time though it's a much lesser test there are less army arrayed against him there was a million enemy soldiers before now there are far fewer the problem was that asa was at war with the northern kingdom of israel king baasha he comes and he captures some important cities in the north of judah which had this was threatening asa's economy all the important trade couldn't make it through to support judah now pause for a moment what should asa have immediately done when baasha attacked he should have done what he had done back in chapter 14 he has done what azariah said to him to do if you seek the lord you will be found by him if you forsake him instead of praying to god asa goes straight in where angels fear to tread he seeks out king king ben hadad the king of aram they are known enemies of israel and he bribes him with treasures from the lord's own temple the silver and gold that was dedicated to serve the lord he pays to him and says break your alliance with the northern kingdom and side with me instead more than that actually it says he took all the treasures from his own palace he bankrupts himself in order to pay off the enemy and set up this unholy alliance but you know something the plan was stunning any military strategist in history would have said king asa you're the greatest general this nation has ever known you've there's a we've avoided war there's no bloodshed the enemy has withdrawn you've even managed to take some of their goods and build up the country in the south you've done such a great job asa you're a great general maybe asa thought the same no bloodshed it was brilliant a fantastic plan except for one thing he makes absolutely no reference to the lord whatsoever it's a striking comparison back to

chapter 14 asa chooses perhaps the easy way rather than the right way and the ends do not justify the means does this sound familiar in your life or in mine have there been times when we have done things or we've tried to excuse them and what they've actually been is sin because that's what asa does here he doesn't seek the lord he forsakes him there's a much smaller test but it's striking doesn't mention god and he fails the lesser test passes the greater one fails the lesser the people of israel you see had never truly learned their lesson even though god had repeatedly delivered them from huge enemy numbers they always turned away from him always now it's not a sin to use human means to get us out of a problem it's not a sin to do that however it is a sin to trust in these things more than we trust our god and to think that they are better than god's ways or to leave god completely out of the decision making process and it's easy for us as christians to fall into the same pitfalls as the people did in the past think in our daily life in our decision making sometimes the big decisions the bigger tests they're easy you know an illness losing a job financial problems lord please help you cry immediately but in the lesser tests of life lord i can do this one myself i can manage i don't need you in this that's what happened to asa that's what happened to king asa a plan may seem brilliant in human terms but perhaps god is something even greater to teach us to trust and depend on him this is exactly what's going on here god sends another prophet to asa this time it's not azariah with a message of encouragement it's hananiah with a message of rebuke sometimes god's word encourages sometimes it rebukes and here it rebukes verse 7 because you relied on the king of adam and not on the lord your god the army of the king of adam has escaped your hand that's a very interesting thing the army of the king of adam has escaped your hand judah was not at war with the king of adam what god is saying through the prophet here is if you had trusted me if you had sought me i would not have only delivered you from the northern nation of israel i would have also delivered you from the king of adam adam would later be a thorn in israel's side i would have given you a double victory like you had never known before if you had only sought me the plan was brilliant but god's plan was even more brilliant and asa denied himself that by not seeking the lord his god if asa sought him basha would have been defeated as would have been hadad and this foolishness would have terrible consequences for asa's children and their children after what does josh jehoshaphat do just a few chapters over jehoshaphat's the son of asa what does he do he makes an unholy alliance with the northern kingdom which gets him into all sorts of trouble because he doesn't refer to god and with asa his anger erupts to boiling point he doesn't listen to the prophet he had stopped listening to the sermons he throws the prophet in jail because he gave him news that he didn't want to hear he fell out with the minister because the lord's word was being preached it's never happened to me yet perhaps but it's happened to others the minister has faithfully preached the word of god and someone has said what are you doing telling us that it's not the minister

is really angry with it's the lord because the lord has brought them a word they didn't want to hear that shakes them up in their comfort in their life we must always receive the wounds of a faithful friend because they build us up and they're meant to encourage us the lord's word is the same it's like a scalpel which does the work we don't want to receive the surgeon's scalpel it causes pain but at the same time we know that that pain will bring healing and that's what the word of god does it might cause us pain for a time but it's done to build us up and Asa ends up really ill in the latter part of his years there's nothing wrong with seeking physicians that's not what he's saying but rather he's depending on those physicians in contrast to not seeking the lord but you know something Asa's whole reign is summed up is summed up really verse 17 of chapter 15 although he did not remove the high places from Israel Asa's heart was fully committed to the lord all his life that's how the chronicler sums him up he goes off paced later on in life but he is a man who is generally marked by his faithfulness to god but we are to continue in that there's nothing worse than ending terribly we're to continue in how we go with the lord

[37 : 40] I love what Charles Spurgeon says with perseverance even the snail reached the ark even when sometimes we're going about as a snail in the lord's service we're to keep going putting one foot in front of the other that's what Asa gave up doing don't be like Asa don't be like him keep going keep going so that on the lord's final day when you meet Jesus Christ he will say to you well done good and faithful servant keep pressing on it's not how we begin the Christian life that matters only that we do begin but how we keep on how we keep on can you say with the apostle Paul on that day for I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come I have fought the fight I have finished the race I have kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the lord the righteous judge will award me on that day and not only to me but all those who have loved his appearing can you say that do you love the lord Jesus Christ can you look forward to him saying well done good and faithful servant let's pray our great God and father in heaven we are challenged a man who started off amazingly who continued amazingly in your service and yet in his final years almost seemed to retire as a man of God father yet there is no retirement in your service help us to press on and even as we grow older in the Christian life to continue serving you with the same zeal that we had when we first knew you as lord and saviour lord forgive us if we have wandered forgive us if we have gone spiritually off piste and lord draw us back forgive us we are prone to wander but you're a loving good shepherd who promises to bring us back knowing that if we seek you we will be found by you lord we want to renew our covenant to you as your children tonight promising to ever greater serve you to read our bibles more to seek you to become more like Jesus that lord your church would continue to grow strong and be a force to be reckoned with in the world this world of darkness in Jesus name we pray amen we pray amen...

Nebraska