

Asa's Prayer

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[0 : 00] We're reading in 2 Chronicles chapter 14. And we read again at verse 11. And Asa cried to the Lord his God, O Lord, there is none like you to help between the mighty and the weak.

Help us, O Lord, our God. For we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude, O Lord. You are our God.

And let not man prevail against you. We're continuing maybe a little on our theme that we had last week when we were thinking about the need of prayer.

This evening we were looking at a prayer of this man, Asa, who cried out to the Lord in this time of need. And have you been blessed in prayer since we met last week?

Have you found yourself continuing in the construction work of God's kingdom and building, being part of that building work, that construction work, by crying out to the Lord in prayer?

[1 : 09] Many of you will have been maybe refreshed and blessed in times of prayer. Many of you, like myself, would be encouraged in prayer, but also finding ourselves maybe struggling in prayer as well.

I'm wondering what our prayers are doing. We go through so many different emotions and the ups and downs when it comes to being a people who are praying to God.

But I trust above all that you are all a praying people, praying for one another, praying for the cause of Christ, praying for God's people far and wide, for his kingdom to come.

But imagine this for a moment. If all of your prayers that you've offered up to God were written down in a book and it was free for anyone to come and read this book, to read your prayers as you've offered them up to God, how comfortable would you be with that?

How comfortable would you be with other people hearing or reading the prayers that you've offered up to God? At a prayer meeting, we come together, we gather together for public worship of God and we hear prayers offered up in public.

[2 : 26] You'll hear ministers praying, you'll hear men being called upon to pray. But is that the way we always pray?

When you hear a minister praying, do you think that's the way he prays when he's at home by himself? When you hear others come up to pray, do you think, well, that's how they must pray at home?

And you're wondering to yourself, maybe that's the way I should pray in my own quiet times and maybe not to be quite as open as I am. And if you've ever prayed with someone else, maybe just two of you together, you pray maybe in a different way, a very different way to what you pray in your own quiet time.

In your own times when it's, the word says when you go into your closet, you close the door behind you and you offer up your prayer to God. I'm sure for most of us, that quiet time of prayer will be quite different in many ways to praying in public.

It will be far more personal, far more honest, far more open with God in our quiet time of prayer. The things that we dare and utter to anybody else will offer up to God.

- [3 : 44] We'll pour out our hearts more readily before him. So how would you feel if someone saw those prayers? You may be afraid of people seeing them, but no doubt if somebody else saw your prayers written down, it would be an encouragement to think, it's not just me.
- I'm not the only one who has these thoughts or who struggles in these ways. I'm not alone. And that's the wonder of reading the scriptures and reading through God's word and how many personal prayers you see recorded for us.
- Very open prayers, very honest prayers, prayers offered up in times of joy, prayers offered up in times of sorrow and struggle and all of these different kinds of situations.
- Many of the Psalms that we sing, they are prayers offered up to God and you read through them. And the reason we love the Psalms often so much is because we relate to them.
- They speak to us in a very personal way where you see the Psalmist honest and open before God. And it's amazing just how many prayers you read throughout the scriptures.
- [5 : 04] Just even as we read here, this one verse, a prayer offered up by Asa. It's not a long prayer. It's not full of big words.
- And yet it's such a powerful and appointed prayer as well. You think of some of Jesus's prayers recorded for us in the scriptures.
- And sometimes we may be surprised by them. And when we see his humanity, you think of the prayer he offered up in Gethsemane when he was praying to his father, that if it'd be possible, this cup would pass him by.
- But he said, but not my will, but yours be done. And you start seeing just the battle that was there, the conflict that was there, even for our Lord Jesus Christ and his humanity.
- And there's such a blessing in us, for us, in these for us to read and to see the reality and the power of prayer. And as we continue to go forward here as a people of God, as we continue to look around us and as we continue to seek to go forward in the work of God's kingdom, resuming many of the things that have been put on hold the last while, great encouragement when we see things starting up once again.
- [6 : 27] As we continue to go forward, continuing with the ongoing work of the gospel in many different ways that didn't stop the preaching of the word and prayerful people.
- As we think of going forward to and reaching out maybe in new ways with the gospel, none of these things will be blessed apart from our praying people.
- That is key to everything that we do. The most important part of our work in the kingdom of God is to make sure our relationship with God is right, individually and collectively.
- We see that as you read on into chapter 15 here. When Azariah came to Asa and said to him, Hear me, Asa, unto all Judah and Benjamin.
- The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will forsake you.
- [7 : 32] So there's real challenge and encouragement there for us to be a people who always keep our focus towards God, to seek the Lord always in this way.
- As somebody once said, we don't pray for the work of the church. Prayer is the work of the church. They're not separated.
- They go hand in hand. And we are to labor in prayer, to go on in prayer, in perseverance, even through the great challenges and the times we feel maybe discouraged in prayer and we struggle in prayer.
- It is a labor, but we are to go on in that. We're remembering, as Asa says here, that our God reigns. He cried out to the Lord, O Lord, there is none like you to help.

And that is why we come to him. So as we see Asa here, success or otherwise, and it's not dependent on him or the powers of the people or the armies, but the power of the Lord who reigns with them.

[8 : 41] We see in verse two at the beginning of this chapter that Asa's reign began with getting his priorities right. Just the beginning of the first seven verses in this chapter just gives us an overview of the initial 10 years of Asa's reign.

It was a time of peace. It was a time when he got rid of everything that was wrong in the land, all the different idols and false worship that was there. He put it away.

And there's a time of peace because the Lord was with them. The land is still ours, it says, because we have sought the Lord, our God, it says in verse seven, and he has given us peace on every side.

The Lord gave them this time of peace. But then as we go on, and as you see in beginning at verse nine and 10 there, you see Sarah, the Ethiopian, came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots.

So an army arises against their nation. And when trouble comes, he, Asa, and the people, they are ready to trust in God.

[10 : 00] Even when in maybe their eyes initially, victory would seem so far removed because of the great numbers they're coming up against. Almost two against one and they've got 300 chariots as well.

They were a powerful army. Asa had, as it says, mighty men of valor. But even in that, there would have been fear going up against these Ethiopians.

But he's ready to trust God and he's ready to lead the people in this way of trusting and committing their ways to God. And as a people, that is what we want to do going forward as well.

To be a people who are trusting in God and looking towards God. We do not do anything in our own strength. And so as we look to God's help and blessing, we continue to go forward praying unto God.

Praying as Asa here prays to the God who reigns, to the God who is good, to the God who is powerful. He cried to the Lord his God, O Lord, there is none like you.

[11 : 13] That is dependence upon God. And so we look at this passage this evening and three things to see about Asa and the prayer that he offers up here.

First thing is there's a sense of him feeling powerless. And the second thing is he cried out. And the third thing is he went to battle.

So these three things just want to see. He felt, first of all, powerless in many ways. And maybe you would see this as a sign of weakness.

When you think of people, even God's people in the scriptures having a sense of feeling powerless, it's not a weakness because it is a great acknowledgement.

And when we feel weak, when we feel powerless, it's not a weakness in ourselves to say, well, now I have to go to God because I cannot deal with this by myself.

[12 : 21] It's more a weakness to have that kind of attitude because it shows we're not depending on God from the first place. If we are thinking we can deal with things ourselves and in our own strength, and then if need be, go to God, we've got things the wrong way around.

And what Asa teaches us here is that even when there is great times of peace and great times of blessing, when that is interrupted as it is here for Asa and the people of Judah as the Ethiopian army arises against them, it goes from peace to imminent war.

And what do they do? What do they do in this situation? outnumbered and the task of gaining victory in this battle may seem a long way away.

What can I do? Is maybe what Asa would be asking. Well, he knows what to do. He knew what he needed to do.

He knew what his people needed as well. He went to God in prayer. prayer. One person put it like this, he grasped at God's skirts and prayed.

[13 : 46] There's an image there of just coming and bowing before God. Coming and right down, kneeling before God, grasping at his skirt and pleading with God.

And that's what made all the difference. John Bunyan once said, you can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.

It's about getting things the right way around. If you look in the New Testament, there's that account when the woman who had an issue of blood, who had for 12 years been struggling on with this, trying everything that she could think of herself.

She'd spent everything, she'd given everything, trying to find healing for this issue. But what did she do? Where did she find healing? It was by coming and touching the hem of the garment of the Lord Jesus.

Why? Because she knew he had power. And that is how we are to come. When we feel powerless, as we often do, we are reminded that coming to God is where we will find help and strength and peace and comfort.

[15 : 10] Asa says, Lord, there is none like you. There is no one who compares to you.

And that is still the case today. There is none who can help us like the Lord can. It's a beautiful song of faith, the hymn It Is Well With My Soul.

It was written by Horatio Spafford. And you think to yourself when you sing this hymn or when you hear this hymn, it is well with my soul.

That it must have been written in a situation where everything was going well. Well, it was far from it for Horatio Spafford.

Spafford lived in America. He was an acquaintance of D.L. Moody. He was a successful lawyer. And he got on well in life.

[16 : 13] Much went well for him initially. But his faith was tested on many occasions. First in 1870, when he and his wife lost a son at the age of four to scarlet fever.

Then a year later, they were wiped out financially by the great Chicago fire in 1871. In a very short space of time, his and their family's life was turned upside down.

In recovering from these tragedies that had come upon them, Horatio decided that they needed to get away for a time. He decided to take his family on holiday to England and that later on he would join up with Dwight Moody.

He was on an evangelistic tour there. They planned to go away as a family but at the last minute, a business situation prevented Horatio from going away with his wife and his children.

So he sent them ahead and that he would join them soon after. So they boarded a ship, his wife and his daughters. And they went on ahead without him but the ship that they were on, it collided with another ship and sank.

[17 : 36] And it claimed 226 lives, including the lives of all four of their young girls. His wife survived and sent a note to her husband simply saying, saved alone.

she'd made her way to England, she'd been picked up. Horatio boarded another ship to go and meet his wife. And as they were passing through the seas where the ship had sunk, being aware of the tragedy that had unfolded, it was in that situation that he went back to his cabin and wrote these words of the hymn.

the tragedy he'd experienced in that he was able to pen the words, when peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, there has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

To be able to say that in the midst of such tragic circumstances shows a real power, a dependence, and a faith in God.

Do we have that faith to come to God in prayer? Asa could easily look and say, look at the battle we are in, look at the numbers in our army, they are double our army's strength, we are so small, they are so vast, but no, in his powerless feeling, he comes to God what could he possibly do, the same as what we can do, come to him, and that's what we see.

[19 : 28] Secondly, he cried out to God, feeling helpless and powerless in verse 11, Asa's prayer is a prayer of faith, not long as I said before, but just a dependence on God in these words.

Asa cried to the Lord is God, O Lord, there is none like you to help. Between the mighty and the weak, help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you.

There is a real sense of dependence in these words. Lord, there is none like you. We depend on you. Maybe it doesn't come across as clearly here before us, but what Asa is saying here is, Lord, in the scheme of things, this is nothing to you.

We may be outnumbered two to one, but Lord, I know who I'm coming to. I know what you have done and I know what you are able to do.

And I am coming recognizing that. There is none like you, O Lord. We rely on you because you are able. And the reality is we come to God and we see things through our own eyes.

[20 : 48] We see things as impossible. We see things that we cannot change. And rightly so, because there are things that only God can change.

And that's why we come and cry to God, saying, just like Asa, there is none like you who is able to help between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O Lord, our God, but we rely on you.

A short prayer, but a powerful prayer. John Knox is credited as saying this, a man with God is always in the majority.

And here is Asa, he may be outnumbered two to one with his army as he looks around, but with God, he's in the majority. With God on his side, he is able to go forward.

John Knox, though he had many supporters during the Reformation in Scotland, he so often seemed to stand alone at crucial times. But he was able to say that a man with God is always in the majority.

[22 : 02] and we remember as God's people, we have him on our side. Romans 8 was mentioned in prayer earlier.

Romans 8 is such a wonderful passage that reminds us of God with us in every circumstance. The Christian's confidence is there.

Just read verse 31 of Romans 8. What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him freely give us all things?

God with us. That is our cry to the Lord of the impossible. With us it is impossible so often, but with God it is possible.

[23 : 05] We don't just teach our children these things. We don't just share stories from the Bible with young people saying you believe that. We share it with them saying this is what I believe.

This is the God I know. Asa says we rely on you and your name. God is that what we do?

Is that the confidence that we have as we come to God in prayer? Back in the 16th century, the man Walter Raleigh, he once made a request to Queen Elizabeth I.

They had a good working relationship apparently. Now, without going into the details of everything that they were doing, whether it was right or wrong, this story was said that once he came to the Queen making a request, and the Queen replied to him, Raleigh, when will you stop coming to me begging?

Walter replied to her and saying, when your majesty stops giving, and his request was granted. But when we think of God, is God ever going to say to us, when will you stop coming to me begging?

[24 : 29] Because he will never stop giving. He gives us abundantly more than we ask or imagine. So we don't stop coming.

We come begging, knowing we can depend on him. Asa cried out to the Lord, and that is what we are to do.

The final thing we see here is what he did. He went to battle. It's not enough to just cry and to have confidence.

We have courage to go forward. Asa's confidence is seen in what he does. He cried out to the Lord pleading for help.

and then he went in to battle. And so the Lord it says in verse 12, defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.

[25 : 32] And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them. They went forward. Asa's confidence in God leads to courage.

help us O Lord our God for we rely on you and in your name we come against this multitude. He is depending on God.

Never mind though it is two against one. We come against this vast army as part of your battle. Are we ready to believe in what we are asking God for and to go and fight for it ourselves.

If we have God with us, let us be bold going forward. Bold in prayer but also bold in all that we do in his name.

Remembering that he will help us. And just notice what Asa's prayer says. Again, this is how we are to see the cause of God.

[26 : 40] He says at the end of his prayer, let not man prevail against you. This is his prayer to God.

Let not man prevail against you. You see, Asa's not concerned about himself losing this battle.

He's concerned about the cause of God. God. And that's our greatest concern too. Not that we'll win victory.

Not that we'll do anything that will give us glory. But that we see the cause of Christ and his name lifted up. Let not man prevail against you.

We may fall. We may fail in the things that we do. But we still cry, Lord, let not man prevail against you. May your cause go on.

[27 : 43] And you think of people, many people who have suffered in the name of Christ. Whether it's covenanters or missionaries, people have gone far and wide in the name of Christ.

And many people look and say, but they failed. They were put to death. They lost their lives. They made no impression in the land that they went to.

And yet how often over time you see their sacrifice blessed. It's not about ourselves or anyone of God's people getting glory, but that glory be to God in his time.

So are we willing to fight? Are we willing to go forward? Let me leave you with this illustration. A preacher was once watching a stonemason working away on a large slab of marble.

And he was amazed how the hammer and chisely used didn't destroy this piece of marble, but instead brought something beautiful from something so hard and yet so delicate.

[28 : 54] As the preacher watched the stonemason, he said, I wish I could deal such life changing blows to many stony hearts that I see around me. The stonemason, whether it was through his wit or through his understanding of the role of the preacher, said, maybe you could if you work like me on your knees.

It's a challenge. And I rebuke probably to that preacher a reminder about where our work is done, on our knees before God.

Asa cried out to the Lord his God, O Lord, there is none like you to help. And that is where we cry to.

For Asa says, we rely on you and in your name we have come against this multitude. So may we go forward with Asa's prayer and our dependence on God, trusting in him that he is able to help.

May God bless his word to us. We'll sing to God's praise in Psalm 70.