

# THE MARKS OF A RENEWING PURSUIT

2 Chronicles 12-16

## I. REVIEW

- A. Over the past season as a church, we have been preaching through the books of Chronicles. We have done this in order to better understand, strengthen, and establish the purposes that God has for us in this season as we are called to partner with his work in *building his house*.
- B. These books were written to the Jewish exiles who had returned from captivity in Babylonian and were charged with rebuilding the house of the Lord that had been destroyed (1 Chr 9.1-2). These books are designed to inspire a people looking at the “ruins” around them to reorient their perspectives, align their vision and values around God’s patterns, and give them confidence and courage in the work.
- C. The book of 1 Chronicles narrates King David’s consuming desire to build a dwelling place for the Lord. Although God did not allow him to build the temple, David oriented all of his labors to *make preparations* for Solomon to build the Temple.
- D. The book of 2 Chronicles follows two primary themes throughout the book. First, we see the obedience of Solomon to *build the Temple* (2 Chr 1-7). The remainder of the book (2 Chr 8-36) narrates the outworking of the *pattern of disobedience and renewal* that God gave to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7.14.

<sup>12</sup>I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. <sup>13</sup>When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, <sup>14</sup>if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. <sup>15</sup>Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. <sup>16</sup>For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. (2 Chr 7.12-16)

- E. As we work through these stories, it is important to remember that God desires a people who will *live with him in his presence* (worship and communion) and who will *order their lives around his commandments* (obedience).

## II. THE STORY OF ASA

- A. After Solomon’s death, the kingdom of Israel was divided in two during the reign of his son, Rehoboam. This caused the nation of God’s people to be divided throughout the rest of their history into *Israel* (the ten northern tribes) and *Judah* (tribes of Judah and Benjamin).
- B. After Rehoboam’s kingdom was established and he was strengthened, he abandoned the Lord and continued to not seek his face. Because of this, the Lord raised up Shishak king of Egypt to oppress the people of Judah. The Lord sent a prophet named Shemaiah to Rehoboam to tell him why they were experiencing the chastening hand of the Lord through Egypt.

<sup>5</sup>Then Shemiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the Lord, ‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shisak.’” (2 Chr 12.5)

- C. In response to the word from the prophet, the king and his princes humble themselves by declaring God’s righteousness in his dealings toward them. God receives their humility and relents from completely destroying them by the hand of the Egyptian king. However, it is important to recognize that the people do not pray, they do not seek the face of the Lord, and they do not turn from their wickedness (idolatry).

<sup>7</sup>When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves... "They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance... <sup>8</sup>Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him (2 Chr 12.7)

- D. After Rehoboam's death, his son Abijah began to reign over the kingdom of Judah (2 Chr 13.1). During this time, there was war between the kingdom of Israel (under their king Jeroboam) and Judah. The people of Israel came to battle with an army twice the size of Judah in order to destroy them.
- E. Abijah understands the promise of God to David and the importance of rightly ordered worship and declares to Jeroboam their allegiance to the Lord God.

<sup>4</sup>Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim... and said, "Hear me, O Jeroboam and all Israel! <sup>5</sup>Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? <sup>6</sup>Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord... <sup>8</sup>And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made you for gods. <sup>9</sup>Have you not driven out the priests of the Lord... and made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? ...<sup>10</sup>But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him. We have priests ministering to the Lord... <sup>11</sup>we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken him. <sup>12</sup>Behold, God is with us at our head, and his priests with their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you. O sons of Israel, do not fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you cannot succeed." (2 Chr 13.4-12)

- F. Because of this, the Lord fights on behalf of Judah and gives victory over their enemies.

<sup>17</sup>Abijah and his people struck them with great force, so there fell slain of Israel 500,000 chosen men (2 Chr 13.17)

- G. After Abijah's death, his son Asa becomes the king over Judah (2 Chr 14.1). During his reign the land of Judah had rest for ten years and he did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord. We see that Asa turns to the Lord by removing the idols and worship to other gods and by orienting the people to seek the Lord and obey his commandments.

<sup>2</sup>And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. <sup>3</sup>He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim <sup>4</sup>and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. (2 Chr 14.2-4)

- H. After a period of ten years, Zerah the Ethiopian came out against Judah with a million-man army led by 300 chariots. In the face of this test, Asa calls upon the Lord for salvation and Judah experiences the deliverance of the Lord.

<sup>9</sup>Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots... <sup>10</sup>And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle... <sup>11</sup>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; let not man prevail against you." <sup>12</sup>So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. <sup>13</sup>Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until none remained alive, for they were broken before the Lord and his army. The men of Judah carried away very much spoil. (2 Chr 14.9-12)

- I. This pursuit of the Lord and the deliverance ushers in a season of great spiritual renewal among Judah.

<sup>12</sup>they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul...

<sup>14</sup>They swore an oath to the Lord with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and horns. <sup>15</sup>And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around. (2 Chr 15.12-15)

- J. After twenty-five years of reprieve, Baasha the king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah in such a way that no one could move between Israel and Judah. Because of this, Asa took silver and gold from the temple and entered into a covenant with Ben-hadad king of Syria in hopes that such an alliance would strengthen him against Baasha.

<sup>1</sup>In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah... <sup>2</sup>Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord and the king's house and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria... saying, <sup>3</sup>"There is a covenant between me and you... Go, break your covenant with Baasha (2 Chr 16.1-3)

- K. The Lord rebukes Asa for rejecting him and sends him a prophet. We see that at the end of his life Asa becomes hardened to the word of God against him as he persecutes God's prophet and inflicts cruelties upon God's people.

<sup>7</sup>At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. <sup>8</sup>Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, he gave them into your hand. <sup>9</sup>For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars." <sup>10</sup>Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time. (2 Chr 16.7-10)

### III. THE MARKS OF A RENEWING PURSUIT

- A. The pattern of renewal throughout Chronicles begins with a posture of pursuit — a turning back to the Lord in times when it seems hopeless. From this text we can see four marks of a renewing pursuit of the Lord.

B. The need for *faith*

1. Through this narrative, we see again and again the reality of faith at the heart of true pursuit. We must recognize and remember at all times that a true turning to the Lord requires genuine faith. In essence, faith is believing who God says he is and will do what he said he will do.

2. The author of Hebrews declares the essence of faith.

<sup>1</sup>Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... <sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11.1, 6)

3. Abraham is the father of faith because he believed God at his word, enough to have hope in his promise in spite of hope.

<sup>16</sup>That is why [God's promise] depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring — not only the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations" — in the presence of the God whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup>No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." (Rom 4.16-22)

4. In turning to the Lord we must abandon our own self-salvation strategies and cast ourselves solely upon the mercy of the Lord made available to us through the work of Jesus Christ. To have faith in Christ is to receive in simple belief the truth of God's declaration of righteousness and acceptance apart from any good work of our own.

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom 1.16-17)

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2.8-9)

### C. The need for *courage*

1. Closely related to the reality of faith is the mark of confidence in the Lord which produces courage to stand firm in the face of hardship and trouble.

<sup>11</sup>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; let not man prevail against you." (2 Chr 14.11)

<sup>7</sup>But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. (2 Chr 15.7)

2. The reality of our faith is the means through which we receive God's gracious life. Now, in faith, his life works in us in order that we would stand firm in uncertainty, fear, doubt, and testing.
3. The truth of our faith *always* expresses itself in obedience to the ways of the Lord, even when obedience to his commandments does not make sense, or seems to not produce what he promised in the short-term.

### D. The need for *wholeheartedness*

1. To truly turn to the Lord in this type of pursuit we must forsake any other idolatrous pursuit and live with a wholehearted pursuit toward the Lord and his glory.

<sup>12</sup>And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul... <sup>15</sup>And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them (2 Chr 15.12, 15)

2. Jesus declared the importance of a singular eye and promised that a life oriented toward his kingdom and righteousness would be met with his grace.

<sup>22</sup>The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light... <sup>33</sup>seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you (Matt 6.22, 33)

3. To live in a pursuit of wholehearted obedience to the Lord means that there are not areas of sin that we are complacent with in our lives. We cannot willfully live in compromise in any area of our lives and presume upon God's future grace.
4. To give our "all" means that we pursue a spirit of obedience with a posture of *repentance* (naming sin as sin), *confidence* (receiving God's free gift of mercy in Christ), and actively *waging war against sin* (setting our hearts to obey empowered by his grace and making costly choices to avoid areas of sin in our lives).

### E. The need for *endurance*

1. Sadly, the story of Asa is ultimately a cautionary tale. It shows the temptation to draw back from seeking the Lord as the seasons of our lives unfold.
2. Three common enemies of a sustained pursuit: *complacency* (Rev 2.2-4; 3.1-3; Mark 4.18-19); *offense or bitterness* (Matt 11.6; Heb 12.15); and *pride* (2 Chr 16; Luke 12.19).
3. We must ask God for the grace to respond to his word while it is called "*today*".

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup>do not harden your hearts (Heb 3.7-8)

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own... <sup>13</sup>one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3.12-14)