

Lesson 3 Lecture

1 Kings 15:9-16:34 and 2 Chronicles 14:2-16:14

What a blessing, privilege, and honor it is to get to lecture another year. As always, I love seeing the familiar faces, but I especially enjoy seeing the new faces. I'm so thankful to all of you who have chosen to devote a portion of your lives to the study of God's Word. Today's reading is clear evidence of the fruit of a life that is lived in a serious commitment to God, and the consequences of those lives lived in opposition to God. I understand that keeping track of who is who and from which Kingdom can be a chore. I encourage you to not get frustrated with the names, or even which Kingdom they're from. The better focus is to examine the behaviors, the actions, and the consequences of these people, and I believe you will find there is a strong relevance to the behaviors, actions, and consequences of today's world. More importantly, our God, who does not change, reveals both His grace and His judgment in today's reading. This is the essential point of studying Scripture – to develop a foundational truth of the character of God for the purpose of building our faith in Him.

I think it might be a little helpful to get a visual of the main characters in today's reading. Therefore, I went to one of my favorite Old Testament reference websites, "*Ancient Jewish Ancestry. Shalom*". Without it, Oy, I'm such a schvitzing Gentile! So let's take a look at this slide. We had the United Kingdom with kings Saul, David, and Solomon. Upon Solomon's death, the Nation of Israel broke into two kingdoms – 10 of the 12 tribes went with Jeroboam to form the Northern Kingdom. The remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, formed the Southern Kingdom. Jeroboam was the first ruler of Israel, and Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was Judah's first king. We're going to cover the period of Asa's rule, which was for 41 years. During that time, we're going to run through 7 kings

in Israel. Instead of playing Biblical Ping-Pong with the two kingdoms, I'm going to take a different tact and speak to the relevance of our reading in our world today.

A couple of weeks ago, Vickie had a medical test that left her not feeling so great at dinnertime. I offered to go get dinner, and we ended up choosing El Pollo Loco. She ran down what she wanted and finished with asking for salsa. I go to El Pollo Loco, order our meals, and head back home feeling good about doing something nice for her. I bring up the meal on a tray, and she looks at it, thanks me, and then asks, "Did you get the salsa?" Whatever good feeling I was feeling about myself disappeared with that question as I had forgotten the salsa. She was very gracious and told me not to worry about it. I could have left it there, but stupid me could not drop it. I then came up with this lame comment, "Oh yeah, the doctor told me you shouldn't be eating spicy or hot food today." Vickie is a master communicator, and the look she gave me clearly confirmed how lame a comment that was.

Now you're thinking this is a funny story, but what does this have to do with the reading? My point is my not writing down all of her order, or making a list, left me in a place where I might forget all of what was asked of me. Did you know God likes lists? Think about it. *He gave us the Ten Commandments. He gave us the Seven Deadly Sins. He gave us the gifts of the Spirit, and He gave us the fruits of the Spirit.* Lists are a great because they are a reference point to check things against – like remembering salsa! In the NIV version of the Bible, the word "remember" is used 181 times in the Old Testament. The phrase "do not forget" is used 15 times in the Old Testament. God knows us, and He knows how easily distracted we are by the devil and the noise he brings into our lives. Anyone in here feel like life is pretty crazy right now? Who do you think is stirring up all the craziness? – Satan. And why do you think he is doing that? – To distract you from focusing on what really matters in life – an intimate relationship with God.

Jesus, Who is our Creator, got a personal taste of these distractions in human form and, thankfully, reduced the Ten Commandments down to two. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. ’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” For the balance of this lecture, I’m going to use these two commandments as the basis of lining up the actions of Asa in Judah and the seven knuckleheads, err... I mean kings of Israel. I believe you’re going to see the undeniable connection of their respective behaviors and what God says about the implications of a life led *for*, or *against*, God. Let’s take a look at a list of Scriptures that I hope will help give us a frame of reference for this analysis:

- *John 14:15: “If you love me, keep my commands.”*
- *John 15:14: “You are my friends if you do what I command.”*
- *2 John 6: “And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”*
- *Luke 11:28: He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”*

Let’s take another look at the first of Jesus’ two commandments: ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ’* What does this mean to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds? Well, guess what I’m going to provide you? A list! Let’s start with *Worship*. Merriam Webster’s online definition of worship includes, “*To regard with great or extravagant respect, honor, or devotion.*” I think the key word in this definition is *devotion*. God welcomes, receives, and is pleased by acts of sincere devotion. Let’s look at Asa’s acts of devotion, or worship to God:

- *1 Kings 15:12: He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made.* These shrines were symbols of sacred Canaanite religious practices. He knew that idolatry was a sin and that the only entity worthy of his worship was God.
- *1 Kings 15:14: Although he did not remove the high places [in Israel], Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life.* Asa did remove the high places in Judah. The high places were places of pagan worship.

Our reading tells us Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord blessed him with 41 years of, at least in the early years, peaceful rule. Now let's look at those who chose not to worship God.

- *1 Kings 15:13: He even deposed his grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah.* Maakah was the daughter of Absalom. If you remember our United Kingdom series, Absalom was one of David's sons that sought to overthrow David. Maakah was Asa's paternal grandmother, but her failure to worship God led her to being deposed as a royal grandmother. There are serious consequences to not worshipping God.
- From 1 Kings 16:31, 32, and 33 – Ahab served Baal and worshipped him. Baal was the god of rain – the people worshipped him in order to bring rain from heaven that the crops might be productive. Immorality was also part of Baal worship. Ahab set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

We see blessings on Asa for his worship of God, and we see destruction and the angering of the Lord on those who choose to worship anything other than God.

Another way to demonstrate a way to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds is through *Acts of Faith*. Hebrews 11:6 emphatically tells us, “*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*” Let’s take another look at our reading and see what examples we find of those acting in faith and those not acting in faith.

In the face of Zerah the Cushite preparing to attack Judah with an army of thousands upon thousands and three hundred chariots, Asa sought the Lord in 2 Chronicles 14:11: “*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.”*” I like the NKJV version of this verse that says, “*Lord, it is nothing for You to help*”. Asa recognized that Zerah’s attack was not only against Judah, but also God Himself. His prayer is a strong statement of great faith. Think about this for a moment, when you consider just Genesis 1:1 – that God made *from nothing* the entirety of the heavens and earth, for Him to mount up a defense against an army is truly nothing to Him. There is no greater drain on His might and power to stop a nuclear attack than there is to heal a relationship or an illness. His might and power is that overwhelming. We saw God’s deliverance of Judah as an example of a central truth of the character of God as shown in Ephesians 3:20, “*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.*”

Another example of the blessings of acts of faith is in the story when the Spirit of the Lord came upon Azariah, son of Oded, and he went to encourage Asa. As a

result of this encouragement, Asa led the people to make an oath to God. From 2 Chronicles 15:12, 14, they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul. 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. I love what J. Vernon McGee says, “*If you mean business with God, God will mean business with you.*”

As much of a good example of faith was Asa, sadly, he was an example of what happens when we divert our faith in God to others or ourselves. Beginning in 2 Chronicles 16, 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. Asa is now in the 36th year of his 41 years of reign. Baasha, who is the third in the line of the kings of Israel during Asa’s reign and has killed his predecessor, Nadab, is on the attack against Asa and Judah. For reasons we don’t know, instead of turning to God, Asa took some of the temple treasures to Ben-Haddad, the king of Arum and ruling in Damascus. Asa chose to place his faith in Ben-Hadad to fight his fight. Although Ben-Hadad’s efforts drove back Baasha, Hanani the seer would be sent by God to rebuke Asa for not placing his faith in God. Consequently, the Lord’s covering of peace would be removed, and Asa would spend the rest of his days in constant battle with his enemies. He also would be stricken with diseased feet, and he chose to only place the hope of his healing in physicians. To be clear, there is nothing wrong with going to a physician for healing. *However, only God provides the healing, and only God gives the gifts of wisdom, discernment, and other abilities to those physicians to provide the hope of healing.*

A good question to ask is what happened to Asa that caused him to lose his faith and seek others to do what truly only God can do? Well the Bible doesn’t say,

so we can only speculate. One good bet is in his later years, he failed to adhere to the commandment to love the Lord his God with all of his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Remember, Jesus' first commandment was merely the echoing of *Deuteronomy 6:5, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" Asa had this verse available to him, but it would appear in his later years his zeal for the Lord would wane, and it would cost him. We should take this lesson to heart. The Christian faith is not a sprint – it is a marathon. We all will have seasons of weakness – times where our devotion to God is disrupted by either the craziness of life or, oddly, when life is going so well that we feel we don't need God because things are good. For those of you who are horseracing fans, you've probably seen a horse break out of the gate and take a commanding lead. The problem is the horse spent too much energy to get into the lead - it didn't have anything in the tank to finish strong and ends up losing. Many in here have been Christians most of your lives. I applaud you more "seasoned" followers of Christ for faithfully coming to People of the Word and filling your hearts and minds of the truth of God's Word. Our daily prayers should be to ask God to help us to remain faithful and finish our walks in strength and victory.

Before I get to my third way of demonstrating how to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, let's take a quick review of the seven kings of Israel. Going back to what Jesus said in Luke 11:28, "*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*", we can conclude that those who hear the word of God and don't obey it, they will not be blessed. As we read about these guys and how short their reigns were in comparison to Asa, you can clearly see the absence of the Lord's blessing on them. Many of them lost their reigns to their successors because their successors assassinated them. Little did they know they were executing God's judgment on them for their sins, and, yet they would also be judged for fulfilling the prophecy. That seems kind of odd, but

who are we to challenge God's ways? Don't you think just one of these guys would have looked at how good Asa has it compared to the revolving door of kings in Israel and consider maybe Asa is on to something with this faith in God? The hardened heart is incapable of this type of rational thinking. What does Scripture say causes wisdom? – The fear of God. (*Proverbs 9:10: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*)

The third component of demonstrating our adherence to Jesus' first commandment is really an extension of the second component. Out of a devoted faith we prove that faith in *courageous obedience*. 2 Chronicles 15:7 is another quote from Azariah the son of Oded, “*But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.*” Asa received this message, and in verse 8, he responded, “*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.*” Verse 9 continues, *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.* Despite what the naysayers say, people are attracted to people who have a zeal for God – largely because God blesses those who do have a zeal for Him.

Today's memory verse says that God is looking for such people. Do you believe that God will strengthen you if you are committed to Him? Do you believe that with God all things are possible? Do you really believe that you can't get that job? Do you really believe that relationship is beyond repair? Do you really believe that your kids or grandkids are beyond help? Do you really believe you

can't....whatever? If, with God, all things are possible, and He dwells in every believer, what is preventing Him from overcoming whatever stumbles you? Today's reading puts the kibosh on the excuse that you've done too many things wrong that you're not worthy of God's blessing or He's mad at you. How is Asa described in Scripture? *—He did what is right in the sight of the Lord* (1 Kings 15:11) But he didn't do right all the time, though, did he? How about the Hebrews Chapter 11 hall of fame of faith? Noah was a drunk, Abraham placed his safety over his wife's, Jacob was a deceiver, and Moses was a murderer! People, none of you is perfect, so get over yourselves. Don't let the enemy whisper in your ear you're not worthy of God's blessing. You're not, but Jesus is. *It is your faith in Him and His purifying blood that gives you the righteousness that is worthy of relentless blessing from the Father.*

Let's move to Jesus second commandment. '*Love your neighbor as yourself.*' What does this mean? The Greek word for "love" in this verse is agape. So what Jesus is telling us is to love our neighbors as God loves us. What does that mean? Time for another list! How does God love us?

- Unconditionally
- Forgivingly
- Mercifully
- Gracefully
- Unselfishly
- Protectively
- Faithfully

Let's get back to our reading and see if we can see any of these traits in our characters. Well....we really don't find any of the Northern Kingdom's kings with

any of these aspects of love, do we? They are selfish, they are power-hungry, they show no mercy, and they led people into battles for their own agenda – not God’s. Asa’s actions, though, demonstrate a love for the people via his love and regard for God. By taking away the idols of his grandmother and removing the high places of pagan worship, he was protecting his people from the evil and eventual condemnation of worshipping anyone/anything else but God. He also demonstrated his protective love for them by building/re-building and fortifying the cities of Judah in times of peace. He unselfishly and faithfully led the people into a deeper commitment to serve and worship the Lord.

This list is one I would like to give to every politician in the United States today. These are our leaders. We wonder what has happened to this country, and all you have to do is see the breakdown in the quality of leadership. I would argue these leaders, though many may have started out with good intentions, have fallen to the idols of public opinion and power. The only “love” they have for their constituents is tied to whether or not they like him/her enough to get re-elected.

I began this lecture with talking about the benefits of lists and that God likes lists. Jesus, knowing how simple and forgetful we are, narrowed down the list of the Ten Commandment to the Two Commandments. This list consisted of:

1. “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*”
 - a. We partially defined this commandment with:
 - i. *Worship*
 - ii. *Acts of Faith*
 - iii. *Courageous Obedience*
2. The second component of Jesus’ list was ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’

- a. We came up with another list that helped us understand what loving others looks like – we’re to love:
 - i. Unconditionally
 - ii. Forgivingly
 - iii. Mercifully
 - iv. Gracefully
 - v. Unselfishly
 - vi. Protectively
 - vii. Faithfully

From our homework, the New Testament application was taken from Romans 2:4-11, which, interestingly enough, gives us – guess what? - Another list! Carol provided us these Scriptures to help us identify how God is showing His patience with an evil world today. The list in these Scriptures provides us a cause and effect promise from the Lord.

- From verse 7, we find, “*To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*” We saw that in today’s reading – because of Asa’s persistence in doing good seeking to give glory and honor to God in his actions, even though he was not perfect, he was deemed as doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.
- The second assurance on this list is found in verse 8, “*But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*” Did we not see this on the seven kings of Israel?

Before I conclude, I have a message for those of you who are struggling with your faith. Perhaps your circumstances are just too painful – you don’t feel well, you’ve lost your job, a relationship is not going well, the kids/grandkids are out of control, or maybe you’re just tired of it all. I’ve said it before – sometimes I think

being a Christian makes suffering harder. You know God has the power to resolve your issue with just a Word, but for some reason you can't figure out, He is not responding. The writer of Hebrews suggested that we do the following in Hebrews 13:15, "*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.*" We saw that Asa was facing a large army, and the flesh would naturally tell us to complain or run. What did he do? – He prayed and praised God for who He was. This is a sacrifice of praise – it is going beyond your fleshly understanding of your circumstances, or sacrificing your fears and anxieties for what you're feeling, and placing your faith in God to resolve whatever you are experiencing. God will respond, but He may not respond in either the way or the timeframe your flesh is expecting. This is where we must wait upon the Lord for Him to do what will be the perfect solution. This is why Isaiah 40:31 is such a great life verse, "*But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*" Today's reading shows you that you really only have two choices – choose to turn to God, or choose to turn away from God. We saw what happened to Asa, and we saw what happened to the kings of Israel. Which way do you think is better?

Many commentators on this reading noted that Asa's reign was the first of several revivals during the life of the Southern Kingdom. J. Vernon McGee said it well, "*If you want revival, the place to begin is with yourself.*" We look at the actions of King Asa – he was the great-great grandson of King David – someone that Scripture calls "A man after God's own heart". We all know David was far less than perfect, but he had a passionate belief in and zeal for God. Somehow, Asa drew on his great-great grandfather's legacy and beliefs and, as a result of his faith and zeal, God honored that with great blessings. Conversely, we saw the destruction and carnage to those who chose to not believe and worship other things

and other people. Today's reading makes it pretty clear what the consequences are of our choices. May it be our prayer today that we ask God to start a revival in each of us. Remember, God will do business with those who mean business with Him. The Holy Spirit will rise up in you as you commit to Jesus' list. Let's pray and come into agreement with this blessed assurance.