

Session 5

August 18, 2019

REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

2 Chronicles 16:1-13

One of the great stories of the Bible is that of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:28ff). Jesus was already out there in the midst of the storm when Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on the water toward Him. Things were going well until Peter took his eyes off the Lord. When that happened, he began to sink. That, of course, is the great lesson we all take from the story: keep your eyes on the Lord, or you are sure to sink.

King Asa's mistake came in his 36th year of reigning over Judah. He had worked diligently and wholeheartedly his entire life to eradicate idolatry from his kingdom (15:17). But he too, took his eyes off the Lord. In his case the problem was not idolatry, but pride. He still worshipped God; but he quit trusting him. The story plays out in four scenes.

The Request (vv. 1-3). For years, the peace and prosperity of Judah had drawn defectors from the north (15:9). Finally, Israel's King Baasha attempted to stem the flow. The city of Ramah, just north of Jerusalem, was fortified and fitted with soldiers to effectively close the road heading in and out of the holy city. Alarmed at the new threat, Asa opened the treasuries and went to neighboring Syria, essentially bribing the king into breaking their own treaty with Israel in favor of Judah. This was very effective diplomacy, but not very effective dependence on God. There was no prayer, no seeking of God, no consultation with the prophets. There was none of the confidence in the Lord that Asa displayed earlier in his reign.

The Result (vv.4-6). Syria's King Ben-hadad knew of Israel's corruption as well as Judah's prosperity. He accepted the proposition, took the pay-off, and sent his armies into the cities of northern Israel. Israel's King Baasha had no choice but to reposition his armies and defend himself, thus abandoning the campaign he had started against Judah. With peace once again secured, Asa de-fortified the city of Ramah and used the building materials the invading army had left behind to improve two of his own cities.

The Rebuke (vv. 7-10). With things going so well, the last person King Asa wanted to see was Hanani, the "seer" at his front door. He was not a mystic or clairvoyant, but rather a prophet sent by God as His spokesman. The rebuke he brought was double-edged. First, Hanani pointed out the sin of calling on the pagan nation of Syria for help rather than trusting the Lord for Judah's deliverance. Second, he pointed out the long-term consequences of his friendship with king Ben-hadad. Had Asa trusted the Lord, eventually both Israel and Syria would have been delivered to his hand! (v. 7) The seer buttressed his argument by reminding Asa of God's faithfulness in the past against more powerful forces (v. 8). Notice how the punishment fit the sin: because Asa was quick to jump into battle, he would face wars until the end of his reign (v. 9). Like King David before him, Asa was confronted with his sin. But unlike King David, Asa raised his fist in anger, rather than bending his knee in repentance. Not only did he imprison the messenger, but he took his anger out on his people (v. 10).

The Record (vv. 11-13). I guess that some people sweeten with age...and others sour. Unfortunately, King Asa allowed his bitterness to sully the last five years of an otherwise stellar

forty-one-year reign. Whether God struck him with the foot disease that he ultimately died with, or simply allowed it to happen, the incident is mentioned to highlight the sad and sudden lack of faith that characterized Asa's later life. Consulting the doctors was no sin; but ignoring God was. In the end, he failed to trust God in making national decisions as well as personal decisions.