**2 Chronicles 16:7-14** June 20, 2021

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 *2 Chronicles 16:7At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: “Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. 8Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. 9For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.” 10Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people.*

 *11The events of Asa’s reign, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians. 13Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his fathers. 14They buried him in the tomb that he had cut out for himself in the City of David.*

**When Independence Is a Bad Thing**

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Ever been in a tickertape parade? Believe it or not, some of our members here have not only been to a New York City tickertape parade, but have actually been the ones getting tickertaped—which, I have to admit, is really really cool. They tell me it happened back in 1991, after the First Gulf War, when victorious soldiers returned from the Middle East. Thousands of them were feted in a huge tickertape parade. Supposedly over 6,000 *tons* of ticker tape were dropped on them, that’s 12,000,000 pounds! What a way to be welcomed home!

 Well, in 930BC they hadn’t invented ticker tape; they hadn’t even invented paper yet. But the people of Judah were wanting to throw Asa, king of Judah, the tenth century BC equivalent of a tickertape parade. Why? We will get to that in a few minutes. Just at this moment of celebrating—though I don’t think it was actually in a parade—this moment in the life of Asa, king of Judah is a teachable moment for us. It is the first royal event that we will look at in this four-week series called *Four Kings You’ve Never Heard Of; Four Moments You Should Have.*

 For this series, let’s get the big picture first. Over these four weeks we are going to do a deep dive into the Old Testament. About ½ of the Old Testament is history; hundreds of chapters of history. Now, if back in your school days you weren’t a big fan of history, if memorizing names and dates wasn’t your thing, don’t worry. We are going to boil it down to four kings and basically only four events over four weeks. You can handle that. However, you do have to have a thumbnail knowledge of Israelite history.

 So, let’s start from what you know. Name one king of Israel? Maybe you can’t name all twenty kings (me neither), or even five, but if I gave you a minute, all of you would get at least one: David. That Goliath conqueror is Israel’s most famous king, among Jews and Christians, for a variety of reasons. David ruled the twelve tribes of Israel. So did his son, another king you may have heard of, Solomon. After Solomon, disaster struck. The next king was a king you maybe have *not* heard of, Rehoboam. In his time Israel was permanently split into two kingdoms. The half to the north was called the Kingdom of Israel, the half to the south the kingdom of Judah. North, Israel; south, Judah. Remember that. The four kings we are going to look at in the next four weeks were all kings of the southern kingdom, Judah. They were all descendants of David, rightful kings of Judah. Over the centuries this southern kingdom of Judah remained somewhat more faithful to the Lord God than the northern kingdom.

 The man we look at today was a king of the southern kingdom. He was the great-great grandson of David. This king’s name is Asa.

 One other thing to keep in mind in this series is that the events we consider aren’t from history books, but from the Bible. Now I’m not denying the absolute reliability of the Bible at all. But what I am saying is this: King Asa ruled for forty-one years. That’s longer than ten presidential terms! A lot of things happened. In the Bible we only have three pages about those forty years. We know a lot more happened than is recorded in the Bible. The Bible admits it too. One of the mysterious phrases you come upon from time to time in the Bible—and one that pops up in our reading—is verse 11, ***“The events of Asa’s reign, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.”*** So, what the Holy Spirit is saying is, “If you want to know everything about King Asa, go consult the history books. But if you want to learn what God wants you to learn from this king, read right here.” In Second Chronicles, the Holy Spirit has carefully curated for the good of the Church the kep spiritual events from the lives of the kings of God’s people.

 Okay, so it is time to move on and look at Asa, king of Judah.

 It’s likely that Asa had become king as a teenager. In his early years he had been a good king. Under him Judah had its first and much-needed religious reformation. And it wasn’t just the king who saw the light. The entire populace joined in. As a nation they bound themselves by oath to the Lord, the God of Israel (15:8ff).

 In military matters, King Asa had been equally devout. You might wonder how someone can be devout in military matters. Here’s how it happened: Early in his reign, a large army of Cushites invaded Judah from the south. Not so long before that, Judah had been completely overrun by an invasion from the same direction (12:1-12). This time Judah’s new king, Asa, publicly cried out to the Lord, *“Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army.”* You can hear his dependence on God! Asa may have been king, but he knew he was not the king of the mountain. In the ensuing battle, the Lord handed him a resounding victory. It was followed by peace for several years.

 But the years wear on a person. By the time of our reading Asa was now in his fifties, when the idealism and energy of youth fades. It’s easy to lose one’s way through the trackless middle decades. Concerns of family, career and finances compete hard with God for attention. Often faith is a casualty. First, it’s no prayers at bedtime, then at the meals. Then it’s skipping a Sunday here or there, and then most Sundays.

 In his years as king, Asa had learned how to wield political power, but he had forgotten something. The event leading up to our reading was a case in point. Judah was again experiencing a military crisis. Judah’s rival to the north, the northern kingdom of Israel, was fortifying and manning the border. Asa was worried. Israel had always gotten the best of Judah militarily. So King Asa did a little bit of triangulation. He sent a massive shipment of silver and gold to Israel’s northern neighbor, the kingdom of Aram, and persuaded Aram to make war on Israel from the opposite direction. Israel’s soldiers abandoned their southern border with Judah to protect their northern lands from Aram. Asa had won a victory by cunning political tactics; hardly a shot had been fired, so to speak. Then, King Asa marched in person to the border, army in tow, and dismantled Israel’s border fortifications. Not a life had been lost! Oh, how happy the mothers of Judah! Their sons had been spared from warfare. All the street talk of war with Israel was silenced. Times were good. This is where the tickertape parade comes in, even though we don’t know if there was an actual parade. King Asa was riding high in polls.

 And at just this moment, King Asa, at the pinnacle of achievement and happiness, feeling the euphoria of millions chanting his name, that’s when God’s prophet showed up and splashed some cold water in his face. God’s prophets have a way of doing that. Hanani the prophet said, ***“Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand.”*** And then the prophet brought up the past, ***“Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army?... Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand.”*** And then the prophet reminded King Asa of God’s goodness: ***“The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”***

 “What’s wrong with you, O king? You trusted God once, why not now? God has been faithful, why are you faithless?” In his political calculations, Asa’s heart had been far from the Lord. Never had he consulted God. And by the way—you remember that shipment of gold and silver to bribe the king of Aram, do you know where that came from? Asa had emptied the temple treasury to make it happen. You know the motto on all our coins? “In God we trust” – well, adding one letter would have described King Asa at this point in life: Not “In God we trust,” but “In gold we trust.”

 King Asa’s dependence on the Lord had dried up, and now he had independence, freedom from God, autonomy.

 Do you know what God was looking for in Asa? In us? God desires our dependence—on him. It’s not the sort that folds the hands in prayer and does nothing but worry and stress.

 Think about what our Savior did. He spent long hours of early mornings, sometimes entire nights, in prayer. Come morning, he spent his days instructing and healing. In Gethsemane, with the impending doom of the cross only hours away, Jesus did not sleep, nor run around fuming and fretting, but spent the night wrestling in prayer, and then when betrayed by the betrayer, went and did his last and greatest work on our behalf. Work, sanctified in prayer.

 Nor was King Asa’s dependency on the Lord supposed to be an excuse for laziness. The Lord did not expect him to sit in his palace in Jerusalem, praying and doing little else. No. In fact, the prophet Hanani reminded him of what was God-pleasing. He reminded him of the early days of his rule when the Cushite invasion alarmed every single person. Yes, King Asa had prayed, earnestly and publicly he had prayed, and then he marched out to battle and the Lord gave him victory. It was not an either/or of praying and doing, but a both/and.

 Hanani compared *that* with what older King Asa had done when the kingdom of Israel threatened. Sure, Asa did the work, he plotted out the politics carefully, shrewdly, effectively, but he didn’t commit his acts to the Lord. He was acting independently of God.

 That was a sign of a spiritual cancer spreading through his life. Hearing the prophet’s words of disapproval among all the approval, Asa imprisoned God’s messenger. Later we hear a Bible verse that sounds amazingly current, almost as if it were happening in our own times, verse twelve, ***“In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians.”*** Whether God would have healed Asa or not wasn’t the point. And the point wasn’t that Asa should have avoided the doctors. The point is that late in life no longer did King Asa *depend* on God. Asa would no longer have sung the words you just sang, words he would have sung in his younger years: *“I need thee every hour, in joy or pain; come quickly and abide, or life is vain.”*

 We, whether we know it or not, depend on the Lord. At certain bumpy, rocky times in life, we sometimes become aware of that. But when the sailing is smooth, when we cleverly maneuver through the pitfalls of life, when we have more than enough money, good health and enjoy the favor of people around us, we forget. We forget that we depend on God, for life, for breath, for success, for wisdom, for forgiveness, for peace of mind.

 “God, forgive us for the times when we have relished independence from you!” And God does forgive us, you, me, for the sake of Jesus who lived and died for us.

 And now, let us live lives acknowledging our dependence on God. Let us give him credit. Let us ask his blessing. Let us hear and study his Word. Let us tell others of the one on whom we depend, our Lord and God. Amen.