

(1986 Prairie Series) 6 - Asa Was a Good Man, but a Fool

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas explores the life of Asa, highlighting his faithfulness to God and the lessons learned from his eventual folly.

Duration: 40:19

Scripture: James 1:23

Topics: "Prairie Series"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging that he initially wanted to make the audience miserable, but he has good news to share. He references the book of James, stating that the Bible is like a mirror, reflecting who we are. He emphasizes the importance of not forgetting the truths revealed to us through God's Word. The speaker encourages humility and the willingness to be reminded of these truths, as God is always there to guide and remind us. He concludes by urging the audience to trust in God and commit their ways to Him, without preconceived notions of how He will work in their lives.

Transcript

I need hardly tell you that it's a tremendous joy for me and I consider that the privilege is entirely on my side to be allowed to come back here to Prairie. I cherish many, many very delightful memories of those earlier occasions in which it's been my joy to share Christ, as together we recognize that he's the one of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. What a delightful thing it is to enjoy that peculiar privilege which is the birthright of all redeemed sinners whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

So it's going to be a real joy for me to meet you in these morning sessions as also in all the other occasions throughout the day in which we will be meeting together in his DNA. Asa was a good man. Maybe you'd like to, if you've got your Bibles, and it's just a chance that you have here at Prairie, turn to the second book of Chronicles and the fourteenth chapter.

Second Chronicles, chapter fourteen, and the first verse, Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa, his son, reigned in his stead. And we're told in verse two that Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.

In other words, in brief, Asa was a good man. It tells us a little bit about him in these early verses of that chapter. He took away the altars of the strange gods in the high places, and he break down the images, and he cut down the groves.

In other words, he was eagerly involved in seeking to abolish all forms of idolatry. He was a good man. He offered leadership to his people, and commanded them, we're told in verse four, to seek the Lord God of their fathers.

Not some newfangled idea, not jumping on every new bandwagon, but to seek the Lord God of their fathers. He knew that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That he never changes.

His theology never changes. Man's does about every seven days. But this is timeless, eternal, and as immutable as God himself, truth.

A God in whom there's no shadow of turning, neither any variableness. So he commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers. And not just to read the law or hear the law, but he said, do it.

To do the law and the commandment. In other words, to see, he said he, to them, let truth behave. And when truth behaves, God behaves.

And when God behaves, that's righteousness. There's no other source of righteousness but God himself. And it's only when you and I, understanding from the amazing revelation that he's given to us in his word of himself, we allow him to be who he is, in a creature whom he so engineered that the presence of the creator within the creature is indispensable to his humanity.

So what he was saying to them is, give God time enough to talk to you long enough and then you'll know enough and if you're smart enough, you'll do what you've come to know and believe. And when you do that, God will behave. And he'll give you the incredible privilege of being that humanity in which he displays his righteousness.

He commanded them to do the law and to do everything that God told them. He took away out of the cities of Judah the high places and the images, and the kingdom was quiet before him. Asa was a good man.

Furthermore, he had learned that God is big enough, no matter what the situation, it may be that arises. He had learned from where to draw his resources in a crisis, in an emergency. He was a good man.

We're told in verse 8 that Asa had an army of men that bared targets and spears out of Judah three hundred thousand. Out of Benjamin that bared shields and drew bows, two hundred and four score thousand, a little over half a million, men under arms. And all of these were mighty men of valor.

But then came the crisis, the sudden emergency. For there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots, and came to Marashah. In other words, Asa, this good man, suddenly found him confronted with a mighty enemy who outnumbered him two to one.

But it didn't faze him. No panic. Because you see, Asa was a good man.

Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in a ray in the valley of Zephathah at Marashah, because he knew that that was his obligation. But what really mattered was not that he mustered his resources, mobilized his army, marched against the foe. What mattered, as of course it matters supremely today in

your life and mine, what mattered was not the material resources that he could muster to meet the emergency, but his state of heart.

The disposition that he was prepared to adopt towards his maker. And you see, Asa was a good man. So he cried unto the Lord his God.

It was not in a sense of bravado that he marched against the enemy. He wasn't sort of laughing it off and congratulating himself, outnumbered two to one, so what? We've got it made. That wasn't Asa.

He was a good man. He said, Lord, and there's a sort of hilarious piece about this, it is nothing with thee. To help whether with many or with them that have no power.

Help us, O Lord our God. And of course, here's his disposition. It isn't that he's not facing a very serious situation.

He was. But he said, we rest. We rest on thee.

So how did you meet the last emergency that arose in your life personally or maybe in your family or your business or maybe in your ministry or your field where God has been pleased to put you? Panic? Sleepless nights? Bottles of Alka-Seltzer? And loads of tongues? How did you meet the crisis? Did it send you spinning? Or not minimizing the emergency, not minimizing the seriousness of the situation, you simply pause long enough to know who was big enough. On the lips of his servant, the psalmist, God says, be still, stop the panic, just pause, just a moment, just a moment, I want you to know something. What does he want you to know? Be still, said he, I want you to know something, I am God.

Now so long as you're prepared to pause long enough to know that he's God, to recognize that as God he's big enough for the job, and that by virtue of your disposition toward him you're prepared to let him be God in action, behaving. What else do you need to know? What else do you need to know? Well, nothing. There's the whole of man's relationship wrapped up in a nutshell.

Just pause long enough in each situation in which every new step takes you to recognize who he is, that he's big enough for the job, that you're prepared to let him demonstrate the fact, and then you can do exactly what Asa then did. With your eyes on him, you rest. You rest.

The psalmist puts it another way in the 37th Psalm that'll be very familiar to you. He says this, commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him. Then in the King James it says, he will bring it to pass.

He will bring it to pass. It there in his italic, and of course it shouldn't be there, somebody popped it in because they thought it would help. Doesn't help a bit, because the moment you put the it in, you begin to have a preconceived notion as to what it is.

And you see when God's going to take over, you mustn't have any preconceived notions as to how he's going to do it, or not. Remember when the children of Israel finally came into the land, amongst those whom they had to drive out were the Itites. So make quite sure that you don't put an it into your theology which is simply what you think God ought to do, because the chances are you won't.

And you see, prayer, intercession, isn't a gun at God's head. It's your need at his feet. Then you can rest.

Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him. In the King James he'll bring it to pass, forget the it, but also better translated, he is in action. I use a German Bible, a whole bunch in Germany and Switzerland,

Austria, as I know many of you do in this particular area.

And I like the way it's put there in the Luther Bible. It says, er handelt. He's handling it.

Isn't that great? He's handling it. Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him, he's handling it. Anything else you need to know so long as you're convinced that he's got what it takes to handle it? It might be a situation that would, you know, panic somebody else or blow their top.

And they see you in a deep seated calm resting, they say, aren't you frightened? Well you say, no. Why not? And you say, well he is handling it. He's handling it.

That's why two verses later in that 37th Psalm it says, rest in the Lord. And do the thing that is hardest of all to do, wait patiently for him. Give him time and give him space.

Well, you know, Asa was a good man. He had learned some of these principles. And so, not minimizing the threat, he said, Lord, it's nothing with you.

It's a piece of cake, so far as you're concerned. Because you're the God who created the universes and threw them into space. You're the God who put the stars into the far corners of the night.

You're the one who at this very moment upholds all things by the word of your power. Nothing to you. To help, whether with many or with few.

We rest on thee. And it is in thy name, invoking all that you are, in thy name we go against this multitude. Oh Lord, thou art our God.

We are humbly prepared to identify ourselves as your people with who you are. Let not man prevail against thee. In other words, said Asa, we're not in business to fight your battles.

We're here to be those who involved in the fight will be spectators in your victory. Let not man prevail against thee. How did God react? As he always does in his utter faithfulness to those who've learned the simple childlike secret of faith that invokes all that he is.

That's what it means when you speak in his name. Expose any situation to his name. You're invoking all that he is, releasing all the divine energy, allowing God to get going.

And he's on tiptoe, of course, to step into every situation if only we'll bow ourselves out and bow him in and let him be God. Well, the Lord immediately responded in his faithfulness, verse 12, so the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa. It wasn't his army that defeated them, they had to march.

But God took care of the consequences and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Geron. The Ethiopians were overthrown that they could not recover themselves, for they were destroyed before the Lord and before his host.

And they carried away very much spoil. Now, Asa was a good man. He had learned to look to God in the moment of crisis.

In other words, he had learned a principle to which he could return again and again and again and again and always find it true. Now, where did he learn the principle? From his dad. From his dad.

It's a lovely thing when a boy grows up having learned the truth about man's relationship to God and God's relationship to man and he learned it from his dad. How is it you mums and dads with your kids? Have they learned from you the principle to which they can return again and again and always timelessly find it true? Are they going to live in profound gratitude for the truth that they saw incarnate in terms of your obedience to a risen living and indwelling Christ? Have they learned the source from which all their resources may be drawn? Let's just glance at that 13th chapter. In the 18th year of King Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah.

And it was then that Jeroboam, king of Israel, marched against Abijah. So Abijah, verse 3, set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war. He just had 400,000 chosen men.

But Jeroboam also set the battle in array against Abijah with 800,000 chosen men, being mighty men of valor. In other words, here Abijah, Asa's dad, found himself outnumbered 2 to 1. But Abijah, very wisely, before he went to battle, tried diplomacy. Sounds familiar.

So he stood up upon Mount Zimraim and he addressed himself to Jeroboam and all Israel. And he said, Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom of Israel to David forever? Forever. That this is part of the timeless purpose of a living God who made his covenant with Abraham, that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed.

The seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, of the tribe of Judah, and of the house of David. So that in David's greater son, a greater prophet than Moses, a greater priest than Aaron, and a greater king than David, all the families of the earth might be blessed. Reminds Abijah, Jeroboam, you know this.

That God gave the kingdom of Israel to David forever. Even to him and to his sons by what's here beautifully described and elsewhere in the Bible, a covenant of salt. And you'll discover in the Bible that a covenant of salt is a covenant forever.

Because salt in the Bible always speaks of God the Holy Spirit. The one by whom, no matter who it may be out of any nation, kindred, tribe, or tongue, or race, or creed, or class, or color, self, confessed as a guilty sinner in true repentance toward God, the moment you put your trust in David's greater son, the Lord Jesus, and claim cleansing through the precious blood he shed, and that transaction redemptively is sealed by the gift you of God the Holy Spirit regeneratively, immediately by the presence of the Holy Spirit who bears witness with your spirit, you're God's child, you're sealed forever with a covenant of salt. Sealed by the presence of God the Holy Spirit through whom you share the life of your risen Lord, and by which you are thereby added as an individual member in particular to the new body corporate the Father gave the Son on the day of Pentecost when the church was born.

But Jeroboam, verse 6, the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon, the son of David, is risen up, said Abijah, and hath rebelled against his Lord. Said he to him, kindly, now you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David. Have you not cast out the priests of the Lord, verse 9? The sons of Aaron and the Levites, and so you and your people remain abysmally ignorant now of what God had to say.

You've made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands, you've allowed liberalism to invade the truth and negate it. As for us, verse 10, the Lord is our God, and we haven't forsaken him. End of verse 11, we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you forsaken him, and so verse 12, behold God himself is with us for our captain.

Oh, children of Israel. And there's almost sorrow in his heart, isn't there? Oh, children of Israel, he says, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers. You cannot, you will not prosper.

But Jeroboam took no heed to that solemn and kindly warning. He caused an ambushment to come about behind him. So they were before Judah and the ambushment was behind them, and when Judah looked back, behold the battle was before and the battle was behind, not only outnumbered two to one, surrounded by the enemy.

But then they cried unto the Lord. The priests sounded with the trumpets, and the men of Judah gave a shout, and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. The children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand.

And you see, there was somebody watching all this, hearing what was going on. His name was Asa. And he learned the principle from his dad.

He said, Dad didn't panic. He simply looked to God. And they shouted in celebration of a victory already won, instead of trying to fight a battle already lost.

And so you see, when he was faced with a similar crisis, outnumbered two to one, he remembered the principle he had learned from his dad. All I've got to do is look in the same direction, and know that God is big enough for this, as he was big enough for that. Now turn to chapter 15.

For it says in verse 1, the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded. Of course, as God, by his gracious Holy Spirit, speaks to you and to me now from within and through his words, so then outwardly God spoke in particular upon the lips of his servants, the prophets. And God had something to say to Asa.

And again, it was a kindly word of warning, that we need as much now and as urgently as he did then. He went out to meet Asa and said, Hear ye me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin, the Lord is with you. But he said, I want you to remember that your relationship to God isn't just some climactic emotional experience in the past.

It isn't just a crisis. It isn't a theological school to which you have yielded your allegiance. It isn't a format.

It isn't a procedure. It isn't a formula. It's a relationship.

One moment at a time, one day at a time, one breath at a time, one situation at a time. You must be aware, Asa, of looking back to some past experience and imagining that that will be adequate for the present or the future. The Lord is with you.

While one step at a time, ye be with him. If you seek him, he'll be found of you. He's always there.

But if you forsake him, you're on your own. Because you see, man's relationship to God, Asa, and God's relationship to man is dependent upon the moral option that he built into man, which alone lifts man out of the animal kingdom and makes man, man. Because God gave to man the most incredible liberty, a privilege that wasn't given to any other creature on this planet.

The right to exercise the disposition of his choice towards his maker. He can say yes or no. And you see, on the lips of his servant Azariah, God is telling Asa that's a moment-by-moment option.

In the New Testament, we put it this way. You walk by faith. You walk in the Spirit and not after the flesh.

For a long season, he reminded Asa, Israel hath been without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. In other words, they've developed a pagan-like form of religion that is destitute of spiritual and scriptural content. And we are plagued with that today in our evangelical constituencies.

And that's why there's so little true consistency and stability on the part of countless who would call themselves evangelical believers. There are very few teaching priests. Even then, said Azariah to Asa, when they in their trouble did turn to the Lord God of Israel, when they re-found the principle and sought him, he was found of them.

Be strong therefore, verse 7, and let not your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded. Maintain your relationship above everything else. Allow nothing to disturb it.

Allow there to be no possible substitute. For a walk with God, one step at a time. When Asa heard these words, verse 8, the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah, Benjamin, out of the cities which he had taken from Mount Ephraim.

He renewed the altar of the Lord that was before the porch of the Lord, and it tells us of his people, under his leadership, verse 12, they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul. And verse 5, all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart. And they sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them.

And the Lord gave them rest round about. We're told in verse 18 that Asa brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated of silver and gold and vessels, and there was no more war under the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa. Asa was a good man, but Asa was a fool.

Chapter 16. In the sixth and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, built Ramah to the intent that he might let none go out or come into Asa king of Judah. In other words, Baasha king of Israel also waged war now again with Asa, and he built a seed city that he might prevent any departing or entering the city.

And you'll hardly believe this. Knowing as he did the principle that he had learned from his dad, that he himself had practiced and seen God vindicate the truth, Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the Lord. He robbed God's house and the king's house, and he sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, a man whom God had sentenced to death, who always in the word of God is a picture of the flesh, that carnal mind that is hostile to God, not subject to his law, isn't going to be bossed around by a God in heaven.

He makes an unholy pact with that man under sentence of death, who dwelt at Damascus, saying, said he to him, Asa to Ben-Hadad, there's a league between me and thee as there was between my father and thy father, behold I've sent thee silver gold, go break thy league with the Asha king of Israel that he may depart from me. Enter into an alliance, let's deal with this situation, give me a help, I need you. Ben-Hadad, as the flesh always will if you seek its help, hearkened unto King Asa.

He sent the captains in his armies against the city of Israel, the strategy was outstandingly successful. Basha king of Israel panicked, left behind all the materials that he'd accumulated to build the siege city, and out of that Asa was able, we're told at the end of verse 6, to build therewith Geba and Mizpah. He was two cities in hand.

As a result of this masterstroke of human genius, that he should enter into this unholy alliance with Ben-Hadad, God's enemy, sentenced to death. And everybody immediately swarmed around Asa, thumped him on the back and said, man, if ever there was anybody who's got what it takes, you're that man. Congratulations, out of this world.

He enjoyed the praise of men, that he earned the judgment of God. There's nothing more dangerous than success in the energy of the flesh. When you enter into that unholy alliance with what God has sentenced to death.

And at that time, verse 7, Hanani the seer, another of God's servants, upon whose lips he could articulate his word. At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa, king of Judah, and he said to him, because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. You've entered into an unholy alliance with one who is your enemy and God's enemy, and for that reason he's escaped.

The judgment that he deserves. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubyans a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? You were outnumbered two to one like your dad. Yet because you did then what he did earlier, because thou didst rely on the Lord, he, God, delivered them into your hand.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. That's all God's looking for, any boy, any girl, man or woman, anywhere, out of any nation, kindred, tribe, tongue, race, creed, class or color, any, anybody, anywhere, who'll let God be God. That state of heart in the Bible called a perfect heart, not a perfect individual, for none is such save the one who two thousand years ago walked this earth to his father's total satisfaction, of whom alone God could say of him, of all men born since Adam fell, good, very good, not a sinless man, just a perfect heart.

That state of heart that knows true repentance, that we're going to talk about in these days, that recognizes that you and I do not have what it takes, only God does. We can't, but he can. And if you can't and he can, what's the smartest thing to do? Let him, let him.

Because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. In this situation, Asa, as in the last, God was on tiptoe to move in, at your behest, you looking into his face, invoking his activity in his name.

Herein thou hast done foolishly. Asa, you're a good man. But Asa, you're a fool.

Therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. You're going to fight your own battles. You're on your own.

Then Asa, verse 10, was mad, angry with the seer, put him in a prison house, because he was in a rage with him because of this thing, misguidedly imagining if only he could silence him, he could silence the voice of God. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time. Who would you think the people whom Asa oppressed, when he threw Hanani, God's servant, into jail, to silence him? Well those faithful friends of King Asa, who quietly said, you know, King Asa, Hanani's right.

Don't be too proud to be reminded. You see, there's nothing more wonderful than to learn from your dad or from anybody else a principle that you never knew, but there's nothing, nothing, nothing quite so tragic as

to forget a principle that once you've known. And there's nothing more calculated to cause you to forget the principle that once you've known, than to be successful.

In the energy of the flesh, having adopted some new technique that you've learned from others to put you in business, and puts God out of business. Behold the acts of Asa, verse 11, first and last, so lo they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Asa, in the thirty and ninth year of his reign, four years later, was diseased in his feet.

He became a cripple. His walk was marred. Until his disease was exceeding great.

A man, such a good man, but one of those of whom we read again and again in the Bible, one of those who forgot to remember. Hobbled, disabled, crippled to his death. Until his disease was exceeding great, yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord.

He was too proud to be reminded. But to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign, at the end of those last miserable six years, in which he failed to practice a principle that once he knew.

And they buried him. They buried him. And this is the saddest part of the story.

In his own sepulchre, which he made for himself, they buried him in a grave he dug for himself. Isn't that sad? Well I thought that at the outset of these few meetings that we're going to spend together, it would be nice to make you really miserable. But I've got good news, because you see it doesn't have to end that way.

What does James tell us about the Bible? When you look into it, you're looking into a mirror. And he says, a fool looks into the mirror and immediately forgets what kind of a man he is. So maybe as you've looked into God's word this morning, you have been looking into a mirror.

And it may be that God graciously, through his word, is reminding you of some of those things that once you knew, but alas, and how easy it is, you have forgotten. But you don't have to hobble, crippled to your death, nor be buried in your own tomb. So long as you're not too proud.

To be reminded. And all of us need that reminder again, and again, and again. And in his infinite compassion, God is there to do it.

Now let's pray. Loving Lord, we just want to thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for all the good things you had to say about Asa.

You didn't ignore nor despise them, but thank you too for the warning that you give us, that you gave him, that we trust that we may heed it as he didn't. Grant for us, dear Lord, that this record that you have given may end happily. Good news.

Because you're a God of infinite compassion, amazing mercy, and even when we're hurt, you're there to heal. Thank you, in your own dear and precious name. Amen.

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