

Seek My Face

by Richard Owen Roberts

God wants a people who love Him unceasingly with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and who seek His face through brokenness and contrition.

Duration: 1:51:40

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 14:7-15

Topics: "Seeking God", "Repentance"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking and surrendering to the Lord, highlighting the need for continuous seeking of God's face, repentance, and faith. It warns against complacency and compromise, urging believers to enter into a covenant to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul. The story of King Asa serves as a cautionary tale of starting well but failing to continue seeking God, leading to consequences and missed opportunities for restoration.

Transcript

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation. O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy help and salvation. All ye who come to His temple draw near.

Join me in gratitude. Thank you, Pastor Mark and all the other pastors and saints of God from all the different churches. I believe that we are being changed from glory to glory.

How many of you believe that? One of the things, again, I just want to mention to you, and first of all, let me just say, all the work that all of you are putting into this is what's going to make a difference in our region. So thank all of you. Please let us assist you with any books, tapes, videos, materials that we have in the back for you.

As I was sharing with one of the sisters earlier, once you begin to hear your heart's challenge, you just have a hunger and an appetite for more. So please ask any questions of the books or the tapes and let us help you with those. Load up on them.

Give them away. Buy them for Christmas presents. Make sure that people that you love get them so that they can be challenged.

I have been challenged every time I hear Brother Roberts and men and women like him who have a heart for revival, a God kind of revival. I am challenged. When I was growing up, I was challenged by those in

authority.

They put a fear into my heart. One of the things that I have learned through this man and through his ministry and through my walk with the Lord is this, is that if I allow God to challenge me and if I let God correct me, if I give God permission to chastise me, now you might say, does God need my permission? Absolutely not. But if I work with that chastisement, I have learned in my life, now this may not be true for you, but I have learned in my life that if I work with God in all of those areas when he is challenging me, then I can trust God to defend me when I need to be defended.

And so that has been a great lesson for me is that I can trust God with my life if I allow him to work in my life. Now, I say that if, and you understand what I mean by that. And so tonight as I blow the shofar and then we'll introduce our speaker and let him get right into the meat of the message and to touch us again.

Please, let's believe God to change our area. And as I blow the shofar, I'm blowing, you might say, why do you keep doing that? Well, I do it because I need to keep humbling myself. I need to keep reminding my spirit and my soul that if I don't humble myself before God, I just may absolve myself before man.

It's very important that as Paul said, if you judge yourself, you have no need of any man to judge you. And so as you just close your eyes with me, as I blow the shofar once, let's just ask the Lord to help us understand what that means as he challenges us again tonight through the word, through the obedience of his servant. Would you close your eyes with me? I'm just going to go at once and ask the Lord to bring a humbleness to our region.

Father, may the sound of repentance reach far and wide to the corners of our hearts and our spirit. May we be willing, Lord, to allow you to purge us and to cleanse us and to send the fire that will purify our spirits, our souls, our minds, our speech, our actions, our eyes, Lord, our deeds. We ask tonight that we become, Lord, the examples, the first fruits of those that would say, Lord, here I am.

Clean me, Lord. Purge me. Father, thank you for this body of believers and that the meeting does not end tonight, but the spirit of solemn assembly and repentance will carry forth in the days ahead.

And we will truly be a forgiven church, which will exemplify a powerful church to the world. Thank you for your goodness to us. We ask in Jesus name and all of God's people said, could you give the Lord a hand? Again, I am not going to take a long time to introduce Brother Richard Roberts.

His ministry and the spirit of God will introduce him to those of you that have not heard him as of yet. And those of you that have. May you just join with the rest of us as we give him a warm, pulseful welcome.

Brother Roberts, would you come? Well, some of you have a lot of endurance. You've been here for hours today. And you've listened attentively.

And you've been very kind in your expressions of gratitude. And I thank you. People say to me, it must be terribly difficult to speak six, eight, ten, twelve hours a day.

Well, it is. But it's not near as difficult as listening for that length of time. So I always know that I've got the easier lot.

And I know that my eyesight is not perfect, but I haven't noticed anybody sleeping today. And I'm grateful that you've listened. Now, there are things that I feel that I really can't do anything about.

For instance, I opened up the book of Hebrews this morning for just a few minutes. And then I felt, I wished I had a week every day to finish what I started. But of course, that's not in the providence of God.

Leastwise, not now. In the gathering of leaders following the afternoon session, I acknowledge that I know that more questions are raised than are answered. There was a time when I was apprehensive about that.

But as I was studying my Bible, I realized that Jesus made it a practice of not answering questions. Have you ever noticed that? People would ask him a question, and he would turn it around and ask a question of them. And never, in many instances, never answer their question at all.

But provoke them to a consideration of some great issue. I think that we have found too many easy answers, and have contended ourselves with surface information. And we would do well to work our way biblically through the great issues, spend days, even weeks, contemplating them, and then come to solid, meaningful answers.

In speaking of Hebrews this morning, many of you could not be here, but I took, as I said, a few moments to introduce Hebrews because I wanted to state something very important out of Hebrews chapter 6, that when the writer of Hebrews was dealing with foundation doctrines, he named the doctrine of repentance from dead works, but made no mention of repentance from sin. Now, some very careless people have said that the author was a little confused, and he meant to say sins, but said dead works, and after all, they are pretty much the same nonsense. They most certainly are not the same.

But a question was given to me before the service in a very lovely way. It was first in writing, and secondly, the statement was made, if it is inappropriate to respond to the question now, would you be kind enough to respond later? But the question does bear upon the theme of the evening. It may not appear that way on the surface, but you will soon see that it does.

I have been hoping for an opportunity to ask you about the portion in Hebrews 6, 4 to 6, that says it's impossible for those to be brought back to repentance. Would that fit into the evening's message? Well, as I've already acknowledged, yes, it does, and while I'm not going to answer adequately that important question, because the question was raised almost as a side issue, I've pointed out the real reason for consulting Hebrews 6 this morning was to pinpoint repentance from dead works. But for any who might not be familiar with the Hebrews 6 passage, let me take a moment to read it, and to make a brief comment upon it, and then to help you to see the relevancy to what we're dealing with this evening.

Now, for those who were not here this morning, it will be necessary for me to say to you that Hebrews consists of two separate streams of truth. I'm repeating what some of you heard, but you'll forgive me for the sake of others. The great theme of Hebrews is lifting up and exalting the Lord Jesus Christ above all else.

That is a theme I would love to preach day after day here in the Northwest sometime. But running along with this theme of the exalting of Christ is a series of warning passages, and the two are intermingled. There's no clear delineation even when the exaltation of Christ ends and the warning begins.

But the passage out of Hebrews 6 that we're now going to read is in the middle of the third of these warning passages. Verse 4 of Hebrews 6, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away. It is impossible to renew

them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame.

Now, it is not really a difficult question at all, though many have been perplexed over it. But that's because of a failure to realize, as I've stated to you already this evening, that there is this series of warning passages. Now, here is a helpful suggestion for all of you.

Take time to mark out in some fashion the warning passages. I don't suppose that you can see what I have done. Some of you may have real sharp eyesight, and you will see that I have surrounded certain verses with a dark line.

I have done that throughout the book of Hebrews. What I have put within these dark lines are the warning passages. Now, in some fashion, during a period of serious Bible study, read Hebrews carefully and mark out in some way the warning passages.

By my method, by any other method that works, it makes no difference. And then, do as I urge. Read all of the doctrinal passages consecutively, all the way through, leaving out the warning passages.

Then come back and read the warning passages, leaving out the doctrinal passages. If we have a lot of time tonight, if you folk were as used to listening as I am to preaching, I'd go ahead and show you exactly what I mean, but I'm not going to do that this evening. But if you do that, you will discover that Hebrews 6 is in no way a difficult passage.

Because all of the warnings are saying essentially the same thing. I said it this morning, but it bears repeating. It does not matter how you start.

What matters is how you finish. True Christianity is not a good beginning, but a glorious ending. And what it says in the three verses I just read is, if you make a good beginning and abandon that good beginning, if you move from that which is nothing to that which is everything, and then leave that which is everything and go back to nothing, there is nowhere for you to go.

There's nothing left. There is salvation in none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are not saved because we take one step backward, or forward rather, and then later three steps backward.

We are in the process of being saved as day in, day out, we repent and believe. You see, many have clung to one-time repentance and one-time faith, but that's utter nonsense. We are of Christ's household.

If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. Now, the tie between this warning and the evening message is a very simple one. I'll tell you in advance what I hope to bring to your attention tonight.

There are certain things that God wants. The first meeting of this series was over in Kingston, where I asked the question, What does God want? And we read from Mark chapter 12, where the scribe said to Jesus, What is the first and greatest commandment? And Jesus said, To love the Lord thy God with all of thy heart, with all of thy soul, with all of thy mind, and with all of thy strength. That's what God wants.

He wants a people who are in love with him. Now, would he be pleased if I loved him today and loved myself tomorrow? Is this love that is demanded something once rendered and therefore forever complete? Why, no. I must love him as he commanded all of my days.

Some of you began loving God when you were but young children. Some of you began much later in life. But the commandment is that whenever we begin, we must persevere clear to the end.

Now listen. Some of us, if we were more honest than we are, would avoid singing certain hymns. For instance, the hymn, My Jesus, I love thee.

If ever I love thee, my Jesus tis now. Why, sheer honesty would force some people to clamp their mouths shut because they know there was a time when their love for Jesus Christ was greater than it is now. But the commandment is that I love him always.

I have mentioned today already that the faith that saves is not one-time faith. And the repentance that is demanded is not one-time repentance. It is ongoing repentance.

Some testimony meetings are frightening to me because people stand and say, 37 years ago, I was convicted of my sin and I repented and I'm on my way to glory ever since. I don't care if you repented 37 years ago. I'm wondering about right now.

It's never enough to say I repented. It's mandatory that I live a repentant lifestyle. Day in, day out, month after month, I live as a repentant person.

There are multitudes clinging to some event in the past, which is of no value. In all of the Christian life, the focus is not upon something that happened in the past, no matter how consequential it seemed to be. The focus is upon that which is continuous, that which is ongoing, that which does not cease.

Now, the theme this evening is along the very same line. I said on Sunday morning, I asked the question, what does God want? And the answer given at that time, a perfectly biblical answer, God wants us to love him unceasingly with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. Is that all God wants? Well, obviously not.

Those who love their Bibles find numerous things that God wants. And included in these many things that God wants is this, God wants a people who seek his face. That's our theme this evening, seeking the face of God.

I've been places and talked about seeking God, and some smart aleck has come up to me and said, well, I didn't know God was lost. Why should I have to seek him? Well, I pity such reprobate hearts as that. I hope you understand there is sound reason why God must be perpetually sought.

He doesn't live here. God has two places of habitation. Listen carefully.

Two places of habitation. God dwells in the high and the lofty place. For instance, Isaiah 57, 15.

Thus saith the high and the lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and lofty place. You don't dwell in a high and lofty place.

You dwell in a miserable hovel. I don't mean the physical house where your furniture sits. I mean this being in which we walk around.

It is a low place indeed. No, a grievous mistake is made. Many who think they've come to Christ have been falsely induced and totally misled.

They think that Christ inhabits this earth. They stumble over him as they're walking on the broad road that leads to destruction, and they tip their hat and say, and some idiot pronounces them as having been saved because they salute the Lord. But this is not his dwelling place.

This sanctuary is not his dwelling place. This world is not his dwelling place. He inhabits eternity.

He dwells in the high and in the lofty place. But, and this is a very important but, he makes one single exception. Again, Isaiah 57, 15.

Let me start from the beginning. Thus saith the high and the lofty one, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and lofty place with him also who is broken and contrite, to revive the heart of the broken one, to revive the spirit of the contrite. God has two places of habitation, the high and the lofty place, and the heart and the spirit of the broken and contrite.

You love lost souls, you pray for the lost, you seek to witness to the lost, and you understand what a grievous disservice you do to people when you induce them to pray some prayer they're not able to really pray, and when you give them some proof text assurance that they've been saved because they have gone through some motion that you yourself ordered, God limits his dwelling place to the high and the lofty and the heart and the spirit of the broken and the contrite. Oh, you say that's Old Testament. Sure, it's Old Testament.

And it's identical with the New Testament when Christ says, Blessed are the poor in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are they that more they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek. They shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness.

They shall be filled. Nowhere does it say some sin-loving, careless, slothful, indifferent person to whom you witness and induce to say a prayer is inhabited by the living Christ. No, Christ refuses to inhabit any proud in heart person.

We need to take warning to heart that God holds the proud in heart at arm's length. And brothers and sisters, have you ever sought to perceive the length of God's arm? When God holds the arrogant at arm's length, he holds them infinitely far from himself. Do you understand the principle of which I speak? God never ever dwells anywhere other than the high and the lofty place and the heart and the spirit of the broken and contrite.

Now some of you who think you've made a lot of converts need to repent because they've been your converts, not Christ's. You've led many people who are full of themselves, whose elegance oozes out of every opening in their lives, and you've led them to think they've been saved. What a pathetic, tragic, wicked thing to do.

If you love souls, you'll so elevate the Lord God omnipotent that people learn to fear God and humble themselves before him. Now you get the drift of what I'm saying. Christianity doesn't consist of paltry decisions we make along the line.

Christianity consists of a great remaking of our hearts and lives, where instead of being proud and full of ourselves and loving our sin, we are reduced to brokenness and contrition. We weep and we grieve and we mourn and we learn to despise ourselves and what we've been and what we are and what we've done

and what we do, and we embrace the Holy One as Lord, as Savior, as Master, as King. If you've never personally come to great brokenness, the word contrition from Isaiah 57 means ground to powder, ground to nothingness.

If you've never been reduced to nothingness, if you've never felt the horror of your sin and your shame and your selfishness, you know nothing of saving grace. And again, what is called for is not some great experience where you wallow in the dust and then later lift your head again and walk into arrogance. What is required is a perpetual, a continuous state of brokenness and contrition.

And as we walk brokenly and in contrition before our God, he then deems it desirable to make that exception concerning his dwelling place, and he chooses to inhabit mere creatures like us who live in brokenness and contrition. Now, if you understand what I'm laying in front of you, then you will understand as we draw to the subject of the evening why I make the same basic emphasis. Let's look first at a very well-known passage in 2 Chronicles, chapter 7. Some of you can recite this as well as I can, and you hardly need to look at the passage.

Verse 26 of 2 Chronicles 7. When the heavens-- Have I given you time to find your place? Take a moment and turn to this passage. 2 Chronicles 7 at verse 26. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee, and they pray toward this place and confess thy name and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them-- I'm in chapter 6. I'm sorry I directed you to chapter 7, but I meant to say initially chapter 6. You wondered why you couldn't find what I was reading.

Forgive me. When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee, and they pray toward this place and confess thy name and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them, then hear thou in heaven and forgive the sin of thy servants and thy people Israel. Indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk and send rain on thy land which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.

Now that's just bursting into the middle of the marvelous prayer that Solomon prayed at the time of the dedication of the temple. But you get the essential elements of the two verses that we've read. When heavens are shut and there is no rain.

Now the withholding of rain is but one of the many diverse judgments of God that he brings upon his people when they have sinned and erred in their ways. But keep that particular one in mind and now turn to chapter 7. And notice these words in verse 12. Chapter 7 at verse 12.

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night, and he said to him, I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice if I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain or if I command the locusts to devour the land or if I send pestilence among my people and my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then will I hear from heaven will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes shall be open and my ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. I will not read the rest of this wonderful passage.

But you know the passage and the words are familiar to most of us, if not all. I said in the smaller gathering this afternoon that we must never mix up the order in which the words appear in verse 14. We must first humble ourselves.

During the day I stressed the road to humility. I will say to you tonight that pride is always in relationship. If I'm proud, it's proud in relationship to somebody or something.

What the proud in heart do is they select someone who looks worse than they do in a given area. For instance, a woman. It's a strange thing, but you observe, especially among younger women, you observe two pals in a wholesome sense.

I'm not speaking of lesbianism or some grievous evil. You just find two young girls and one of them will be beautiful and the other quite ordinary. You rarely see two beautiful girls together because the beautiful one appears more beautiful in the light of her homely friend.

It's just one of those things. Pride stems from comparison. I've got a big voice.

I could out-shout most of you. I could out-talk most of you. I don't.

I'm a very quiet person. People who are around me are amazed that I can be in the midst of a crowd all day long and not say a single word. But I could glory in the fact that I have a big voice.

It's not as big as it used to be. But still, there's something there. But does it make sense for a man with a big voice to compare himself with a man with a feeble voice and then to take pride in his voice? I'm saying to you that pride develops out of comparison of ourselves with others.

The cure to pride is in the same realm. When I quit comparing myself with other men and I began comparing myself with God, my pride takes wings. Who could possibly stand next to the Lord Jesus Christ and feel proud? In fact, who could stand next to the Lord Jesus Christ? If Christ came into the room and stepped on the platform, you wouldn't see me standing next to him.

You'd see me on my face before him. If there is any remnant of pride in you at all, it is because you have not had yet an adequate view of God. If you really want to see pride dealt with in your own life, follow the suggestion of the afternoon in using the Bible aright to discover God.

But I'm only saying at this juncture that in this 14th verse of 2 Chronicles 7, there is proper order if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves. Now I want to give you a warning. Don't you dare be so foolish as to ask God to humble you.

That is both wicked and foolish. It is wicked because God says humble yourself. And it is always wicked to ask God to do what he commands us to do.

But it is also very foolish because if you leave it to God, he'll bring you a whole lot lower than you ever wish to go. You'll have to look up to find the bottom, and then you'll not be sure it's there. Humble yourself.

Prayer. Now if I were here for two or three days in this particular church, I would delight to devote one day to the subject of prayer. But I haven't felt any special leading in that direction.

It seemed to me appropriate to pick up the third of these matters tonight and to open it up somewhat so that all of us could move more significantly into the realm of seeking God's face. If my people, called by my name, they shall, one, humble themselves, two, pray, three, seek my face, four, turn from their wicked ways. Some of the tapes I know that Reuben has been promoting deal with the subject of turning from our wicked ways.

But let's focus on these simple words. Seek my face. Why are we commanded to seek God's face? And why, as I have suggested already, is it mandatory that we seek God's face perpetually? Or to repeat something I said a few moments ago, why do people come up to me and in a smart, aleckly way say to me, I didn't know God was lost.

Why should I seek him? I know where he is. Do you? Do you really know where he is? Do you really know who he is? Do you know about the limitation of his habitation to the high and lofty place and the heart and the spirit of the broken and contrite? Now turn over in this same book of 2 Chronicles, please, to chapter 12. And I want to read just a few words here that in my mind are deeply troubling words.

Chapter 12 and verse 14. Now this passage, in fact chapters 10, 11, and 12, are dealing with King Rehoboam, under whom the kingdom was divided into Israel and Judah. But listen to these words now concerning this king.

Verse 14. And he did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord. Now that provokes me to put a question to you personally.

Did you ever set your heart to seek the Lord? I didn't ask, did you seek the Lord at one time? I ask, did you ever set your heart to seek the Lord? King Rehoboam did not. It would be quite unwise to conclude that what is said in those words is that he never sought God. For if you read chapters 10, 11, and 12, you will see that there were points in his life when he did seek God.

But his failure was in the fact that he didn't set his heart to seek God. And because he did not set his heart to seek God, he did evil. Now that must be understood in at least two ways.

Because he didn't set his heart to seek God, he fell into all kinds of evil. You read those three chapters and you'll see some of the grievous evil into which he fell. But there's another meaning there.

Because he did not set his heart to seek God, his whole life was evil. He was evil. He did evil.

He thought evil. He breathed evil. He lived evil.

Everyone by their nature who does not set their heart to seek God does evil. And here is a tragic illustration of a king who fails to set his heart to seek God. Now as I pointed out from Isaiah 57, 15, the very nature of God demands that we set our heart to seek him because this is not his dwelling place.

He is not drifting about on earth where we stumble over him and salute him and please him by our good morning. He dwells in the high and lofty places, I said. We dwell in miserable habitations.

We never meet in the natural course of things. The high and the lofty never crosses the path of the low and the miserable. If ever we're going to meet God, we've got to set our hearts to seek him.

Those of you who preach and those of you who witness, may I ask you very, very directly, have you been calling people to set their hearts to seek God? Or have you just been inviting them to accept Christ? It's a huge difference. The very nature of God, I repeat, demands that we set our hearts to seek God. He himself commands it.

I cannot take the time this evening to read to you the abundance of scriptures that absolutely demand that we seek God, but they are there in great plenty. It might benefit you to take some kind of a colored pencil or a marking pen and simply to mark in scripture the number of times, dozens and hundreds of times,

when men are called upon to seek God. But I need to tell you that our nature necessitates our setting our hearts to seek God.

Will you hold your place in 2 Chronicles, but turn for a moment to Matthew, where I want to read a few words from the 6th chapter. The Gospel of Matthew, please, at chapter 6. Notice these words beginning in verse 31, Matthew 6, verse 31. Do not be anxious then, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or with what shall we clothe ourselves? You ever take those words to heart? I mean, those are pretty direct words, aren't they? Don't be anxious about what you eat, about what you wear.

And notice now the reason why our Lord makes that plain statement. Verse 32. For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek.

That's talking about us. By our natures, we eagerly seek what we shall eat, what we shall drink, with what we shall clothe ourselves, on what we will sit, upon what we will lie, what we will have around us in our surroundings. Our natures are such that we seek, without even trying, creature comforts and the necessities of life.

Now follow carefully our Lord here. Let me read again, starting at the beginning of the passage. Do not be anxious then, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or with what shall we clothe ourselves? For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek.

For your Father, you can say that, can't you? For my Father knows that I have need of all these things. Why should I waste my time, my energy, my opportunity in seeking things my Father already knows I have need of? Let the pagans do that. They don't know they have a Father who cares for them even more than he cares for a bird in the bush.

Let the Gentiles devote their energy and strength and opportunity, as I said, to seeking all these things. Your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. But, get these important words, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

And all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow. For tomorrow will care for itself.

Each day has trouble enough for its own. Have you ever caught the message here? Don't be like the Gentiles. Don't be like the unbelieving pagans.

Don't devote your life to the pursuit of these things that your Father is already aware that you need. Rather, set your heart to seek first his kingdom, his righteousness, knowing that these necessities will be added to you by your understanding Father. Now, friends, I said to you that the very nature of God demands that we seek him because he is high and lofty and far removed from us and totally unlike us.

And if ever we are to know and love and serve him, we must set our hearts to seek him. And even if our minds did not provide us that excellent reason for seeking him, he has commanded us to do so and we ought to do so whether we understand why or not. But here is this attitude.

If we don't set our hearts to seek God, his kingdom, his righteousness, then what we're going to do is to descend to the level of the pagan. Our very nature is such that we are certain to seek something or someone. There isn't anybody who doesn't seek something.

And if we follow our nature, we will seek the inconsequential. We've got to set our hearts to seek the Lord. Now, if you're one of those people whom I mentioned last night who keeps a time watch in their pocket and you'd like to see how long the preacher takes, I have just offered you the introduction to the subject of the evening and now we're going to turn to the text.

Thank you for your encouraging words and I'm going to take you seriously. Turn to the 14th chapter of 2 Chronicles. Here is the story of a king and this story focuses upon the great issue of 2 Chronicles 7.14 of seeking God.

I'm going to read a lengthy account. I'm going to read it in the old-fashioned method of what was called a Bible reading. That is to say, I'm going to keep interrupting myself and offer comment as we read.

But let's begin at verse 1 of 2 Chronicles 14. So, Abijah slept with his fathers and they buried him in the city of David and his son Asa became king in his place. The land was undisturbed for ten years during his days.

Now I'm going to do something else. I'm going to interrupt myself while I'm interrupting myself. I just read these words.

Abijah slept with his fathers and that put me in mind of a glorious truth that is in one sense unrelated to what I'm preaching about tonight, but I don't want to miss the opportunity to present the truth to you. Do you know that in the New Testament believers are said to sleep? Like Lazarus. Lazarus slept.

But when our Lord Jesus Christ is described in his crucifixion, in his agony, and in his death, it does not say that Christ slept, because he did not. He was dead. Believers do not die.

They sleep. What a beautiful truth there is there. I'm not going to preach upon it tonight, but I didn't want to pass up the opportunity of mentioning that glorious truth to you.

But come along now. Let me try to stick with my text. And Asa did good and right in the sight of the Lord his God.

For he removed the fallen altars and the high places. He tore down the sacred pillars and he cut down the Asherim and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandments. Now, many of you may be aware of the significance of the words that I just read.

He removed the fallen altars. He removed the high places. He tore down the sacred pillars.

Let me explain the matter to a handful of you who haven't come to an understanding of it before. In the early days of the Old Testament, men like Abraham, who wished to worship God, were at liberty to erect altars in high places. It was just a natural tendency to find a high place that brought you closer to heaven and to worship and sacrifice there.

But the time came when God forbid the erection of altars in high places. For he ordered the place where worship was to occur. And from then on, men were not at liberty to worship God where they chose, but were required to worship God where he chose.

And if you follow this concept throughout the Old Testament, what you'll discover is, every time Israel and or Judah backslid, they returned to sacrifices and offerings and worship in the high places. And every time they came to genuine repentance, among the first things that were destroyed were these altars or temples

or whatever they had built in the high places. High places have come to symbolize, even in our day, will worship.

Worshipping when, where, and how you please. For instance, people in our day, and I suppose it would be particularly true in this beautiful area of the country, people say, well, I'm going to worship God today out on the Sound, or I'm going to worship God on the ski slope, or I'm going to worship God from my fishing boat. Always a mark of a backslidden condition.

Only backsliders in heart think it is their right to determine where, when, how God should be worshipped. So in this passage, which is speaking to us about a glorious Reformation revival, these foreign altars, these high places, these sacred pillars are torn down. Now, let me ask you if all the high places of your life have been eliminated.

Pretty sober question. Do you realize that if God is big enough to be worshipped, he's big enough to be worshipped when, where, how, and by whom he commands worship? Nobody has the right to worship God as they please. We must worship God as he pleases.

One of the brethren reminded me yesterday of having heard me preach from 2 Samuel 6 upon the moving of the Ark of the Covenant from that place where it had rested in Philistine territory back to Jerusalem, and how they moved it on a new cart in violation of God's will, which said the Ark must only be carried on the shoulders of the Kohai, a grievous wickedness to seek to serve God by Philistine methods. And much of what the Church is doing in our day is looking at the world and asking, how does the world go about doing this successfully? And then the Church apes the world. Any church that becomes serious about serving God has got to destroy all of its high places.

It's got to eliminate everything they're doing that God himself has not ordained. And some of you would have a 90 sparse-looking calendar if you got serious about doing things God's way. But come along in this text.

I read already verse 4, He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment. Now get those words. He commanded Judah.

What pastor here is able to command his congregation? Well, pastors make timid little suggestions, and they give wee encouragement. But how many of them say, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command. It's a pitiful day when men have such low view of God that they treat their pastors like themselves.

I would never say this in order for a pastor to take advantage of his situation, but I don't hesitate to say to you, when the people fear God, they'll be grateful to have a pastor standing between themselves and God. But as long as they do not fear the Lord, they will treat contemptuously their pastor. And one of the tremendous reasons why revival is so critically needed is because pastors have been treated contemptuously and they think contemptuously about themselves.

I don't think that way about pastors. I don't believe it is possible to put a pastor alongside a layman and to say they are one and the same. I believe that God himself calls men into ministry, and their positions in the church of Christ are positions of honor and prominence and consequence, and they have a right to speak the word of God with authority and to command the congregation to obedience to the Lord God.

And woe unto the pastor who has such a low view of himself and of his ministry that he allows the congregation to frighten him. Verse 6, He built fortified cities in Judah, since the land was undisturbed, and there was no one at war with him during those years, because the Lord had given him rest. For he said to Judah, Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars.

Now listen to these words. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God. We have sought him, and he has given us rest on every side.

So they built and prospered. Now let me bring that passage into our day. We have lost the land.

It is no longer ours, because we have not set our hearts to seek the Lord. This was once a Christian nation. Oh, I've heard all the balerne that says to the contrary.

But there are more stupid men that speak than wise men. Did you ever take the time to read what men like Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams and Benjamin Rush and dozens of others of the founding fathers of the nation said? They declared, This nation is God's nation, and the land belonged to the believers, and God kept it in the believers' hand until this century, when we abandoned seeking God, and we lost the land. But Asa lived at a time when although they had fallen frequently into deep and grievous sin, time after time after time, they came back to seeking God's face.

And he declares, The land is still ours, because we have sought him, and he has given us rest on every side. Dear friends, if you can't think of any reason to seek the face of God, there's a profoundly important one. Seek the Lord so that this land might be his land.

I've mentioned twice today my concern for the little one, the children that'll be hanging on my knee when I get home on Saturday. For the sake of the little ones, I've set my heart to seek God so that they can grow up in a land that God has given rest. But come along and read verse 8. Now Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah bearing large shields and spears, and 280,000 from Benjamin bearing shields and wielding bows.

All of them valiant warriors. Now it doesn't take a mathematician to put those two figures together. 300,000, 280,000.

Even a poor fellow like me can figure out that that's a total of 580,000. Now Zerah, the Ethiopian, came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots. And he came to Merashah.

Pretty plain, isn't it? With an army of 580,000 facing an army of a million plus. Our Lord told a special little parable. It refreshes my heart every time I think of it.

He told about two kings going to war. Do you remember the parable? And one king looked over the army of his opponent and he said, Quick, send up the white flag of surrender. For he could see that he had no hope of winning a battle against an army of such magnitude and strength.

Now I love that parable because it speaks to me of what happens when a person under the guidance of the Holy Spirit comes face to face with the fact that their opponent all through life has been the Lord God Almighty. And they come to realize this is perfectly ridiculous. Here I am in opposition to the Almighty.

So quick, he sends up the white flag of surrender. Now when someone sends up the white flag of surrender, who dictates the terms of peace? Quite obvious, isn't it? The victor. And isn't it pathetic that we

have so many millions who think they've surrendered to God who are still dictating the terms of surrender.

Well in this passage, Asa is aware of the magnitude of the Ethiopian army that he's come up against. And notice now in this wonderful passage what is said. Pastor dear, did you ever fall into this hole? Pretty close, yeah.

That's quite dangerous. I reckon if I were pastor here, I'd kind of move things over to a little more secure place. Well, forgive that interruption.

But I just realized how close I came to caving in here. Verse 10, Asa went out to meet him. And they drew up in battle formation in the valley of Zephthah at Marishah.

Then Asa called to the Lord his God and he said, Lord, there is no one besides thee to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength. So help us, O Lord our God. For we trust in thee and in thy name we have come against this multitude, O Lord.

Thou art our God. Let not man prevail against us. So the Lord routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah and the Ethiopians fled.

And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Jerar. And so many Ethiopians fell that they could not recover for they were shattered before the Lord and before his army. And they carried away very much splendor.

And they destroyed all the cities around Jerar for the dread of the Lord had fallen on them. And they despoiled all the cities for there was much plunder in them. They struck down those who owned livestock.

They carried away large numbers of sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem. Well, I don't need to overly spiritualize this passage, but dear friends, we are faced with an opposition that is so vastly greater than ourselves that we don't have any hope of victory.

There is no way the little army of righteous ones is going to prevail against the great host of wickedness that occupy all the territory of our land. And our only hope is to seek the face of God. But we haven't done this with any degree of seriousness yet.

And I wonder what it will take to provoke us to begin to pray with a sense of urgency and with the spirit of Asa on this occasion when he besought the Lord to help those who are without strength. But let us read on, chapter 15. Now, the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa.

And he said to him, Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah, and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will let you find him.

But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. Do you see why I answered the question concerning Hebrews 6? It's the same principle. You can say, Well, I once sought the Lord.

Well, so what? If we go on seeking him, he will go on letting us find him. But if we cease to seek him, we will discover that he is not with us. Or you say, I don't really believe that.

If you love to believe a lie, that's your choice. But the God of the Bible demands that his people go on seeking his face. Now look what's happened to the American church.

There was a time in America when the prayer meeting was called the Hour of Power. It was the great meeting of the church. It was the urgent hour in the life of the church.

Now, many of our large churches have discontinued the prayer meeting altogether. And thousands of other churches treat the prayer meeting with contempt. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I wonder how many of you lovely-looking people are always in the prayer meeting of your church.

I dare to guess that many of you don't go to prayer meetings. And frankly, if I were a member of your church, maybe I wouldn't go either. Because some of you are members of churches that just toy around on prayer meeting night.

You say it's a prayer meeting, but you have a Bible study, and you have a song service, and you take in a lot of requests, and you devote a moment or two to prayer, and the moment or two of prayer is devoted to the most paltry and silly things you can imagine. Oh, please pray for Aunt Tilly. She fell down and injured her little finger.

And all around us are multitudes who are lost and dying and rushing pell-mell to hell, and here is the church withering and dying. Or if it's strong numerically, it is ridiculously weak spiritually, and we waste the precious moments of a prayer meeting asking for silly little things that are of no great eternal consequence. Now, I'm not in opposition to praying for the sick, but if all that concerns you is to pray for the sick, there's something mighty wrong with your heart.

We had a disturbing situation in our own church recently. I was away at the time that it happened, but the pastor reported it to me with tears. We had a family in the church whose son, a young teenager, ran away from home, and the father had to pursue him all the way to Southern California to find him and bring him back.

But on the weekend, the father was out searching for the lost child. Now, I have to explain something to make it meaningful. Our church has discontinued all adult and older children's Sunday school classes, and we have an all-church prayer meeting in that hour.

I'm not urging you to do it, I'm just explaining our situation. There were so many of our people who could not get to a midweek meeting because they work in the city of Chicago, and for many of them, they don't get home until 8.30 or 9 at night. And so our leadership said, we've got to have an urgent time of prayer every week.

Let's turn the Sunday school hour into the prayer meeting. Now friends, listen to me when I tell you what happened. On the Sunday this dear father was out searching for the lost son, there was the greatest outpouring of prayer in the life of our church in modern times.

But the next Sunday, the prayer meeting was nearly dead. Now the problems were still the same. The father brought the son home, but the son was still unrepentant.

The tens of thousands all around the neighborhoods of our church were still rushing to hell. All the churches of our region were still shriveling and dying. But the urgent prayer meeting had to do with the physical well-being of a boy.

I'm glad our church had an outpouring of compassion on that occasion, but I grieve that something physical can provoke prayer, and the great eternal issues don't seem to touch us. There is something

grievously wrong with a church that can be stirred about physical things and is indifferent to the Spirit. So now let me read again.

This prophet, Oded, confronted Asa, and he said to me, Listen, Asa, all Judah, Benjamin, the Lord is with you when you are with him, and if you seek him, he will let you find him, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. Then he introduces a specific incident, verse 3. For many days Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But in their distress, they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and they sought him, and he let them find him.

Dear friends, people have said to me, since being in this very church, I don't know that there is any hope. Don't talk that way to me. I worship and serve a God who, when his people seek him, he lets them find him.

The thing that concerns me is not will God let us find him, but will we seek him. The failure is not on God's part, obviously. It's on our part.

We can live in the hour of greatest emergency of our entire lives, and we can act as casually and indifferently as if we were living in the day of glorious spiritual victory and harvest. If we will seek him, he will let us find him. In those times, verse 5, there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the land, and nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress.

But you, says the prophet to the king, be strong and do not lose courage. May I speak those words to every Christian here. You, be strong.

Do not lose courage. There is reward for your work. Isn't that beautiful? There is reward for your work.

It's cost you something to be here tonight. There is reward for your work. It's cost me something too.

But there's reward for our work. If you will set your heart to seek the Lord, he will let you find him. And it won't be purely personal.

If this church, if all the churches represented here tonight, will set their hearts to seek God, God will let all of us find him. Verse 8, when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy which Azariah, the son of Oded, the prophet, spoke, he took courage. Will you? Will you take courage tonight? He took courage and he removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin, from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim.

He then restored the altar of the Lord, which was in front of the porch of the Lord. And what did he do? Where's your horn? Go ahead and blow it, brother. And when they heard the sound of the trumpet, they gathered, all Judah, all Benjamin, those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, who resided with them.

For many had defected from Israel when they saw the Lord as God was with him. So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign, and they sacrificed to the Lord that day seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep from the spoil that they had brought. And, now get this, and they entered into a covenant.

They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all of their heart and with all of their soul. Every church here should enter into a covenant to seek the Lord God of our fathers with all of our

heart and with all of our soul. And whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel, now be a little cautious here, Pastor, whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death.

I wouldn't go quite that far. Whether small or great, man or woman, but believe me, if I were in the pastor's shoes today, I would call the church to enter into a covenant, and I would make it clear anyone who would not enter into that covenant with all their heart and with all their soul would have no voice in the affairs of the church and would be treated as a leper. We're talking about serious business.

We're talking about a God who inhabits eternity, whose dwelling place is high and lofty, who never violates that dwelling place with any exception other than the exception of coming among the broken and the contrite. And anyone who will not enter into a covenant to seek the face of God in an emergency hour like this is declaring himself as knowing nothing of brokenness and contrition and therefore ought to be barred from all voice and activity in the church. And if that seems extreme to you, shame on you for your shallow view of the seriousness of Christianity.

Moreover, verse 14, they made an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horn, and all Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought him earnestly and he let them find him. So the Lord gave them rest on every side. Oh, I wonder if those words stir you as they ought.

We don't have rest on any side. We have enemies without and enemies within. The church is troubled and in turmoil and under attack.

There are men and women right here in America who are being arrested for their faith. I was in Washington D.C. recently and one brother with tears in his eyes told me how he had prayed in front of an abortion clinic and was promptly arrested and put in jail. And then when he was released from jail, he received notice from the IRS that he had to submit all the records of his ministry from its founding days and he had to submit the names of every single donor and the amounts that they gave and the dates in which they made their contributions.

And the IRS made it clear to this dear brother, we're going to wipe you out. And another brother sitting there with the two of us spoke up and said, we had some friends visiting with us from out of the area and we took them to the White House or excuse me, to the Capitol to give them a tour of the Capitol. And while we were there, we decided to bow together, the two families, and pray for our nation and we were immediately arrested and put in jail for praying for our nation in the nation's Capitol.

Now that happened very recently. I am telling you, we need the rest that God can give on every hand when we enter into covenant to seek his face. Verse 16, He removed, may I, the mother of King Asa from the position of queen mother because she'd made a horrid image as an Asherah and Asa cut down her horrid image, crushed it, and burned it in the brook Kidron.

But the high places were not removed from Israel. Now you must understand, he didn't control Israel. He wasn't king over Israel.

Therefore he had no authority to remove the high places. Asa's heart was blameless all his days. You won't think so in a moment.

He brought into the house of God the dedicated things of his father, his own dedicated things, silver and gold and utensils, and there was no more war until the 35th year of Asa's reign. In the 36th year of Asa's

reign, Beash, the king of Israel, came up against Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from coming out or going in to King Asa of Judah. Now listen, friends.

Then Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and the king's house, and he sent them to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, Let there be a treaty between you and me as between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you silver and gold. Go break your treaty with Beash, the king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me.

So Ben-Hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ejom, Dab, Abel-Ma'am, and all the store cities of Naphtali. And it came about when Beasha heard of it that he ceased fortifying Ramah and he stopped his work. Then King Asa brought all Judah and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timbers, which were in Beasha, which had been building, and with them he fortified Geba and Mizpah.

And then Hanani, the seer, came to Asa, king of Judah, and he said to him, Because you have relied on the king of Syria and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped out of your hand. We're not the Ethiopians and the Lumum, an immense army with many chariots and horsemen, yet because you relied on the Lord he delivered them into your hand. You get the picture? With all that glorious record that we read in 14, and in 15, now this same king robs the treasure of God and takes the precious things out of his own house, and instead of seeking God, he enters into a treaty with an alien king.

I have been talking to you today about Christianity not being a good beginning, but a glorious ending. Faith. Repentance.

Seeking God's face. It doesn't matter how you start it, it's how you end that counts. And listen to this tragic tale concerning Asa.

Look at these words in verse 9, And for the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely his. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have war.

And so Asa fell down on his face to the ground, and he wept. And he said, Oh God, forgive me for this great wickedness. I started out well, and then I failed miserably.

Oh God, forgive me. I made that up. That's not what the text says, is it? Many of you have the text open in front of you.

That's what we might hope he would have said. But instead this is what happened. Verse 10, Asa was angry with the seer, and he put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this.

And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time. I suppose that some of the people he oppressed were those who said, Asa, you better listen to this here. Now get the picture.

Here is a man who does beautifully for years, and then he fails miserably. Maybe there are some right here tonight who can recall great days in which you sought the face of God. Some of you leaders even can recall times when you led your people to seek the face of God.

That's been a long time ago. And now you've compromised. Now you've arranged treaties with the world.

And now when an old prophet comes and rebukes you, you're enraged at him. Oh, maybe outwardly you're polite and nice, but inwardly you're indignant. Now the acts of Asa from first to last, behold, they are written in the book of Kings of Judah and Israel.

And in the 39th year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe. Yet even in his disease, he did not seek the Lord but the physician.

So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the 41st year of his reign. And they buried him in his own tomb, which he'd cut out for himself in the city of David. And they laid him in the resting place, which he had filled with spices of various kinds, blended by the perfumer's art.

And they made a very great fire for him. Everywhere I go, I meet people who know they had a good beginning, and they're living in the past. But like Asa, they have failed to go on seeking the Lord.

Some of you, if you described yourself with honesty, would admit that it's been months and months and months since you sought the face of God. You've taken for granted his nearness and his kindness and his manifest presence. But the eyes of the Lord tonight search to and fro throughout the whole earth, seeking those whose hearts are totally his, seeking churches whose hearts are totally his, seeking churches that will enter into covenant to seek the face of God from now on.

And you may say, well, that's all interesting, I never thought of the passage that way. Well, so what whether it's interesting or not? That's not the point. The point is, God limits his dwelling place to the high and the lofty and the hard and the spirit of the broken and contrite.

You can pretend that you know the Lord and that the Lord is with you, but look out that it is nothing other than pretense. He has held the same line from the beginning and he's not going to start wavering now because of you. If you seek him, he will let you find him.

And if you cease to seek him, you will discover maybe when it's too late that he is no longer with you. We're going to... Can you hear me? Good. We're going to respond with a song in just a moment and I think it's one that the Lord has just set aside for us.

I want to quickly say that we're going to have the ushers at the exit doors to take the offerings. We won't begin passing this. Now is not the time to do that.

So the ushers are going to be at the doors. And tonight's offering is a love offering. We've already taken the expense offering this morning, this afternoon.

We took a love offering last night. We took a love offering tonight. Checks are made out to SC, which stands for Sanctuary Church.

They're handling all the money. Let's stand. Shall we? And we have the words to the chorus.

I think you know it. Jack, would you put that up for us, please, in the secret? And we're going to consider this dismissal time. And if you need to go, and we understand that you'll go, if you want to kneel where you are, if you want to come up and you want to kneel before the Lord, if you just want to make where you are, seek his face.

That's what we're doing. If you don't know this chorus, you'll pick it up real soon. It's just a chorus of commitment.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/7/SID7529.mp3>
Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/xkRjLqN4pc.mp4>
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