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Strengthened by God

2 Chronicles 16.7-10

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“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”

In the last few weeks, I've been with people and in communication with people in all kinds of circumstances and situations. I've been with people who have lost a family member or a close friend. I've been with people facing the biggest challenge of their life. I've listened and tried to support people and to offer something that would be of value to them. One of things that comes up repeatedly is a question of trust. It isn't too hard to trust God when everything is going wonderfully well in our life. It is precisely when life is not wonderful, when we're hurting, scared, angry, frightened, or fearful that trusting God can be more challenging, and yet be even more important.

As we journey through the books of the Bible, we meet people in challenging or difficult circumstances who must decide if they're going to trust God or someone or something else. The Bible reminds us over and over again that **you are invited to trust in and rely on the Lord in every season and situation in life**. You are invited to commit your heart, your future, and your hopes to God. The scriptures urge **you to trust God for strength no matter the situation**. Every day and week, you face situations where you have to decide if you're going to trust God or not, will your heart be fully committed to the Lord first or not, do you believe the eyes of the Lord are upon you or not, do you think God can give you the strength to overcome your fear, to get through a trial, a test, or a temptation or not. Every day you face the decision, **“Will I trust God for strength?”**

Today's scripture is about King Asa (ay'suh) of Judah. After the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. There was almost constant conflict between Judah and Israel. At the time of today's scripture, Asa (ay'suh), the fifth king of the Davidic dynasty is ruling Judah, the southern kingdom. He ruled for a long time, about 40 years, from 913-873 BC and for most of his reign was a faithful and good leader. His main adversary was Baasha (bah'eh-sheh) the king of Israel, (ruled 909-886), who moved against the south and

began fortifying the city of Ramah just five miles north of Jerusalem, trying to impose a blockade on Judah's capital.

So, in the 36th year of his reign Asa had a decision to make, would he trust God for strength and rely on the Lord or give in to fear and seek another solution to this threat. Unfortunately, Asa gave in to fear and chose a political scheme. He offered silver, gold, and treasures *from the house of the Lord* as well as from his own house to king Ben-hadad of Aram to break his alliance with Israel and invade it to relieve the pressure on Judah. The king of Aram took the bribe and attacked which drew Baasha away and allowed Asa to reinforce two other nearby towns. Asa was pleased with himself and thought he had been successful in achieving his political goal. While fearfully buying and bribing allies to help one's own political ends is an ancient strategy, God didn't look on it favorably which brings us to the scripture. **2 Chronicles 16:7-10.**

"7 At that time Hanani (hah-nay'nee) 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.** 8 Were 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.** 9 **For 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."*

10 Asa 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."

According to the prophet or seer, Hanani (hah-nay'nee), God's intent had been to give Asa victory over Israel and Aram, but because Asa acted out of fear and a lack of faith and trust, relying on a foreign king for a political/military solution rather than relying on God, the prophet said he was going to be at war and in conflict from now on. Asa didn't trust the Lord for strength and so missed the opportunity for victory. **Even worse, instead of confessing he was wrong and that he had demonstrated poor judgment and a lack of wisdom and strength in the crisis, Asa compounded his mistake when he responded angrily against the prophet who had told him the truth and Asa threw the prophet in prison.** The king's anger and lack of faith also caused him to lose his sense of right and wrong & of being accountable to God. After

jailing God's prophet, the king "*brutally oppressed some of the people.*" These are not the actions of a godly leader, but we understand how it happens & it still happens today.

It is a very human reaction to respond angrily when someone tells us something that is true that we don't want to hear. So, we blame the messenger and lash out rather than accepting responsibility for our failure. This is something that can happen to anyone among us from the least to the greatest. Asa lived & ruled well for 35 years and then made a serious error in judgment with costly consequences that cast a shadow over the final six years of his life. He missed the true treasure in the house of the Lord, not the silver and the gold **but God's strength** and he failed to tap into it in his time of need. He saw the material wealth, but he missed the Lord's presence. When he lost his faith, he also lost his ability to be self-critical and his sense of human decency throwing people into prison without cause or justification. Asa's story is a warning for us all against spiritual complacency. Asa suffered what the apostle Paul describes in 1 Timothy 1:18-19 as "*a shipwreck of faith*" because he lost faith and rejected conscience.

You want to have a steady walk with God in the ordinary days of life so that when you're coping with an emergency, you will naturally look to find strength in God. If sin or poor judgment intrudes, you seek to repair the damage by humbly seeking God's forgiveness as well as the forgiveness of others. Asa failed to do so.

Hanani, like the prophet Isaiah, contrasts seeking military aid from another country with relying on God. In a crisis, Asa looked around for help rather than up, **forgetting to trust God for strength**. If Asa is an example of how not to respond in a crisis, Paul is a positive example. Listen to how Paul responded in a crisis that threatened his life (**2 Corinthians 1:8-10**), "*We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.*"

As followers of Christ, we know there will be difficult days of affliction in all of our lives. We don't know when, but we know they are part of life, and they will certainly come. Every week there are those in this room and watching this service who are

coping with physical problems, grief, financial challenges, marriage and family issues, addictions, situations at school or work, the list is as long and as unique as each of you. Like Asa, Paul, and every other believer, **you have to decide if you will rely on God for strength in every season and situation in life.**

Although the book of Chronicles reflects the belief that faithfulness leads to blessing and unfaithfulness to being cursed, that is only true to an extent. Hanani is totally faithful in proclaiming God's truth to the king and his reward is not blessing but being thrown in prison. In that way, Hanani is like the prophet Jeremiah in suffering persecution for being a faithful witness for the Lord.

This month as we receive the World Mission Offering, I think about our missionaries and partners in so many nations who are serving the Lord in conditions that are far more difficult than in the United States and how much strength, courage, and trusting faith it takes to witness for God where they are living. (See, Matt 5:11-12, Hebrews 10:32-35, 11:35-37, & 12:3).

The Bible says many times that the eyes of the Lord are upon us.

(See verses at end of sermon). The old gospel song says, *"His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me."* **The eyes of the Lord are on you. An important question is, *are your eyes on the Lord?*** Do we look to God for the strength we need to get through a trial, a test, or a temptation or not? There is a song about faith called *Voice of Truth* by the group Casting Crowns. The lyrics talk about longing for the faith to step *"Out of my comfort zone into the realm of the unknown where Jesus is."*

It talks about the voices *"telling me time and time again, you'll never win,*

But the voice of truth tells me a different story

The Voice of truth says do not be afraid,

And the voice of truth says this is for my glory

Out of all the voices calling to me, I will choose to listen to and believe the voice of truth. Jesus is the voice of truth, and I will listen to you."

Even Jesus himself in his most difficult moments in the Garden of Gethsemane, looked to God for strength to endure those terrible hours. How much better would your life be, how much better off would the world be if we listened to and followed the voice of truth; if we looked to God for strength, in our moments of testing and temptation; if we

could receive the truth with grace, if we humbly admitted our failures rather than lashing out in anger at others.

This week, when you face difficult decisions & moments, don't be like Asa, be like Hanani, Paul, and Jesus who looked to God for strength and who were faithful even when their faithfulness meant greater hardship and not less.

Asa ruled well for 35 years but his lack of faith and poor judgment meant he finished poorly. If we want to finish well, to run strong, we'll look to the Lord for strength to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. When he died in 2006 at his home in Texas at the age of 94, Byron Nelson was known as one of the greatest golfers ever. Rick Atchley, senior minister of the Richland Hills Church of Christ said about Nelson, *"We can debate over which man was the greatest golfer, but we can never debate which golfer was the greatest man."* Nelson touched many lives, as a friend, teacher, and role model. He was deeply religious and showed it mostly through his devotion to his church. His place in golf lore is sealed by his 52 wins, including five majors (he was a runner-up in six others) & a whopping 18 victories in 1945. Anyone who has ever played golf can only marvel at his top feat, an 11-tournament winning streak in 1945.

Nelson was always giving, from notes to advice to things he carved in his beloved woodworking shop on his ranch. In the shop when he died were 14 clocks in various stages of being built; among his final products were a dozen slivers branded with a psalm for each member of the U.S. Ryder Cup team. *"I don't know very much,"* Nelson said in a 1997 interview with The Associated Press. *"I know a little bit about golf. I know how to make a stew. And I know how to be a decent man."* A tribute said of Nelson, *"His legacy of kindness, humility and reaching out to help others in need will long outlive the legacy he left us on the course."* Byron Nelson looked to the Lord for strength, and he finished strong. The last words he spoke to his wife as she left for her Tuesday Bible study at church before he died were, *"I'm so proud of you."*

Christian businessman J.C. Penney once said, *"I am grateful for all of my problems. After each one was overcome, I became stronger and more able to meet those that were still to come. I grew through all my difficulties."* All throughout your life

God is looking at you in your difficulties and in your successes, the question is, will we be fully committed to the Lord and look to God for strength at all times.

“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” If you want the Lord to strengthen you, then be fully committed to the Lord.

I hope you will rely on God for strength this week.

Blessing:

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself & God our Father, who loved us & through grace gave us eternal comfort & good hope, comfort your hearts & strengthen them in every good work & word.”

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

The Eyes of the Lord

Human ways are under the eyes of the Lord, and he examines all their paths.

Proverbs 5:21

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry.

Psalms 34:15

The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. *Psalms 5:5*

And before God no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. *Hebrews 4:13*

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Have you ever done a “trust fall” (standing on a step ladder or table and falling backwards and trusting people to catch you) as part of a team building exercise? If you have, how did you feel about it? If you haven’t, how do you think you’d feel about falling backwards and trusting others to catch you? Or about someone depending on you to help catch them?

2. Do you think it's good to be physically strong? Have you ever lifted weights, done body weight exercises, or engaged in any kind of regular activity to increase your physical strength? If so, what has worked for you? If not, why not?
3. Do you think it's good to be spiritually strong? Just as there are exercises that help us get physically stronger (pushups, pull ups, etc.), there are spiritual exercises that make us spiritually stronger (worship, reading or listening to the Bible daily, praying, taking time in silence, practicing generosity). What do you do to increase your spiritual strength?
4. Many scriptures refer to "*the eyes of the Lord*" and the idea that God is always watching us. How do you feel about the idea that God sees you and the choices you make and how you act every day? If you believe you are being watched by God, how does that influence you?
5. Like King Asa, the Apostle Paul, and every other believer, we must decide if we will rely on God for strength in every season and situation in life. Is there an area of your life in which you're finding it difficult to trust God right now? What's one thing you can do to deepen your trust? How can your group help?
6. "*I am grateful for all of my problems. After each one was overcome, I became stronger and more able to meet those that were still to come. I grew through all my difficulties.*" ~ J.C. Penney. How does being committed to God help us to become stronger when we face problems and to trust God even in our difficulties?