

ASA: A God-Centered Or Self-Centered Life?

(1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14–16)

A group of fishermen stood on the shore, washing their nets after a long day of fishing with little result. To the fishermen, it seemed an ordinary day; they did not know their lives were about to change forever because of an encounter with the Son of God. The story is told in Luke 5. As Jesus was preaching, a crowd “was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God” (v. 1). Jesus summoned the attention of the pre-occupied fishermen. He stepped into a boat and asked them to put out to sea (vv. 3, 4). They did not object. As instructed, Simon Peter, one of the fishermen, moved the boat away from the shore.

When Jesus asked the fishermen to let down their nets to try to catch something, however, He had gone too far. Peter said, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing” (v. 5); yet, for some reason, he did as Jesus said. The fishermen let down their nets. To their surprise, the nets suddenly held so many fish that they began to break. The boats were filled to the point of sinking because of the fish being gathered.

As Peter realized what had happened, he began to comprehend his sinfulness and Jesus’ righteousness. He asked Jesus to leave (v. 8); but instead, He calmly told Peter of His plans for him to become a fisher of men (v. 10). Verse 11 gives Peter’s answer as he accepted the challenge, gave up everything, and began to walk with Jesus. Peter had no idea what he would encounter while walking with Jesus. He was unaware that he would witness the Transfiguration, the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, and the death of Jesus on the cross. He certainly did not expect to be preaching a ser-

mon to thousands of people on the Day of Pentecost. All he knew was that he needed Jesus to be the center of his life. From that moment, his decisions, his direction in life, his actions, and his beliefs would revolve around Jesus Christ. That is what being a Christian is all about! It is recasting the center of our lives to be nothing but God. Paul said, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2, 3).

ASA: A GOD-CENTERED LIFE

The Old Testament tells of a king who illustrates the God-centered life: Asa, a king of Judah. Being the grandson of Rehoboam, he was the third king to rule the southern kingdom. He was a rare king; he ruled with stability for forty-one years. The Scriptures simply comment on his reign, “Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God” (2 Chronicles 14:2). In other words, his life revolved around God. His thoughts, his decisions, and everything of significance within his life were born of his faith in God. Three characteristics stand out about his life and point to his God-centeredness.

He Removed Idols and High Places From the Land

Asa’s first significant action as king was to remove the foreign altars and high places. He tore down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherim (2 Chronicles 14:3). He also got rid of the male prostitutes that served at the shrines (1 Kings 15:12). He even demoted his own grand-

mother from her position of queen mother because she had an Asherah pole (1 Kings 15:9–13; see 2 Chronicles 11:20–22). Such images were representative of lifeless gods, and Asa claimed that the only true God is the Lord God and that He alone should be worshiped. In fact, he commanded the people to obey the Lord in 2 Chronicles 14:4. This appears to have been a good, godly start to his reign over Judah.

He Gave God the Glory

Second, King Asa gave all the glory to God. Because of the return to worshiping God, the land was peaceful. Asa was able to build cities with great walls that would be useful for protection; therefore, there was “rest” in all the land (2 Chronicles 14:5, 6). Instead of relegating this success to his masterful strategies and quick-thinking tactics, the king acknowledged that it was “the LORD our God” who had given the nation rest, peace, and success.

He Depended on God

Third, he depended on God for his well-being. Zerah the Ethiopian came out to fight Asa with an army of one million men and three hundred chariots, a massive army even by today’s standards (2 Chronicles 14:9). Asa prepared to fight him in order to protect his country. Again, Asa showed that his life revolved around God as he prayed for help (2 Chronicles 14:11). He declared that God alone could help them, that they could trust only in Him. Because of that trust and dependence, the Lord delivered Judah by routing the Ethiopians (2 Chronicles 14:12).

Here is a picture of a person whose life was centered on God. His ruler and king was Almighty God. When anything good came about by following Him, Asa did not revel in his own intellect and skill, but reflected all praise and glory to God. Furthermore, when trouble came, he ran to God. He was totally dependent on Him for help, putting his full trust in Him. What was the result of his living this way? God blessed him abundantly, the land was peaceful, and the army was victorious. Life was good for Asa because the king’s heart was God-centered.

Another example of a man who lived for God is George S. Benson (1898–1991). He spent many years as a pioneer missionary in China and the Philippines. Then, in 1936, he returned

to America to serve as the second president of a Christian college. His life was absorbed with the desire to please and serve God. When I was in elementary school, I visited brother Benson in a nursing home. He could not walk anymore, and he did not have much longer to live; but I remember his tired eyes perking up when he was taken to meet with others to worship God. He was a man who was centered on God! Even in his aged body, his heart still jumped at the thought of praising his God.

That is the way a Christian should be; his life should be centered upon God. He should be our only Lord. When success comes our way, He should receive the glory. When trouble comes, He should be trusted for help. The hopes, desires, and purposes of a Christian’s life should be determined by one question: What does God want? If a person is truly God-centered, nothing will be more important than serving Him. So, what is the result of this kind of life? It is a life blessed by God.

ASA: A SELF-CENTERED LIFE

Unfortunately, it is sometimes difficult to live a God-centered life. Something pulls at us, keeping us from making God our foundation. A tension wars within our souls between two opposing armies that fight for the right to have first place in our hearts. The opposing army is self-centeredness.

As we read more about the life of Asa, we can see the battle that took place within his heart as the center of his life began to change. Instead of being God-centered, Asa became self-centered.

He Stopped Depending on God

First, Asa stopped depending on God for his well-being. In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign, Baasha, king of Israel, began to fortify the city of Ramah. Instead of relying on God for help concerning the impending battle, Asa went to his neighbor, Ben-hadad of Aram (Syria), for help. He bribed him with silver and gold from the temple to break the treaty with Baasha in order to help him (2 Chronicles 16:2, 3). Ben-hadad did help by sending his armies to conquer some of the northern cities to stop the fortification being done. However, God was displeased because Asa relied on human strength for deliverance instead of relying on Him.

He Stopped Giving Glory to God

Second, Asa failed to give glory to God. Hanani, the prophet of God, approached Asa to point out his wrongdoing after the battle. He also brought to his attention the turning within his heart from God-centeredness to self-centeredness. Instead of confessing his sin and giving glory to God for his success, Asa imprisoned Hanani and oppressed the people of Judah. He had begun to see himself above God's law. Asa thought that he deserved glory that rightfully was God's.

He Set Himself Up as a God

Third, the king made himself into a god. He refused to humble himself before God because he had put his own desires in the place of the Lord's will. His life now revolved around himself, not God. When Asa contracted a severe disease of the feet (16:12a), he tried to get help from physicians and healers instead of praying to God for healing. Even in his illness, Asa was too stubborn to ask for help from the true Lord over all.

What happened to Asa? How could someone so godly and righteous end his life completely alienated from God? The answer is found in the center of his life. When God was the ruler of his life, blessings were abundant and peace was in the land. When "self" was the ruler, death eventually came. That is Satan's scheme (see Ephesians 6:11). To capture the souls of men, he

climbs into their hearts and tries to change their focus from God to something else. He uses our culture as a magnet to pull us away from God and keep our concerns directed toward ourselves. Within the hearts of men, a battle for the heart rages between God and self. The outcome of this battle influences every aspect of our lives.

WHAT IS THE CENTER OF YOUR LIFE?

Someone has said, "In every heart, there is a throne and a cross. If Jesus is on the throne, then I am on the cross; but if I am on the throne, Jesus is on the cross." Who truly reigns in your life—God or self?

When God was on the throne of Asa's heart, Asa relied on His help and gave Him the glory for everything good. When self was on the throne, Asa looked only to himself, which led to defeat.

The apostles did not know their future that day by the Sea of Galilee. They were unsure where following Jesus would lead—and so are we! All they knew, when they dropped their nets, was that Jesus of Nazareth would control their lives from then on. What about our lives? When success comes, who gets the credit? When hardships surround us, to whom do we run? What controls our decisions, thoughts, actions, and direction in life? Is it God or self?

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