

"THE MAN WHO BEGAN WELL, BUT ..."

"And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah and the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (II Chronicles 15:1-2).

You can't read the story of Asa's early life without the realization that he was a man who began well. Although he began well, Asa did not continue as he began, and therein is a warning for every one of us, and an admonition to each of us as God's children not only to begin well, but to continue well in the service of the Lord.

I. Asa Began Well.

Let us notice some of the things that Asa did when he began well.

1. Asa was opposed to immorality.

"And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made" (I Kings 15:12). Asa was opposed to immorality and he did something about it. "He took away the sodomites out of the land."

2. Asa destroyed the idols.

Asa also destroyed every vestige of idolatry that he could find, to the best of his ability. The Bible tells us that he "removed all idols that his fathers had made" (I Kings 15:12). He even destroyed his mother's idol. "And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook of Kidron" (I Kings 15:13). Not many people will stand up in opposition to their mother, but Asa found the idol which belonged to his mother in a grove where she had placed it, and took that idol down to the brook of Kidron and destroyed it.

3. Asa dedicated what he had to God.

"And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the Lord, silver, and gold, and vessels" (I Kings 15:15).

4. Asa repaired the altar of the Lord.

When Asa saw that the altar of the Lord, whereon they offered their sacrifices to God, was in a state of disrepair, he immediately set about to repair the altar. "And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the Lord, that was before the porch of the Lord" (II Chronicles 15:8).

5. Asa brought an offering unto the Lord.

"And they offered unto the Lord the same time, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep" (II Chronicles 15:11).

Asa was not a piker. He certainly did not stop with the idea of a tithe. He brought a real offering to the Lord — seven hundred cattle and seven thousand sheep.

6. Asa made a covenant with God.

"And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul" (II Chronicles 15:12). Among the things that Asa promised God was that he was going to seek the Lord with all his heart.

Don't you like to read about the person who is trying his best to live for and serve the Lord? When Asa started out as king he tried to the best of his ability to be the man that God wanted him to be. As soon as he ascended the throne he began a vigorous reformation of abuses. He overthrew the altars erected for the worship of idols, restored in every place of his dominions the worship of Jehovah, and repaired the fenced cities.

Where young Asa got his good principles, it is difficult to say. He was brought up in an ungodly family. The moral atmosphere he breathed was poisonous. The court was corrupt. Society was decaying from within. The nation was fast going over to the abominations of the heathen. It was in spite of parental example that Asa tried to live a godly life.

II. Asa Was Blessed Of God.

If a man started out like Asa did, you would expect God to bless him greatly. Well, God did exactly what you would expect Him to do. As a consequence of Asa's pious and prudent conduct, God blessed the land with a time of peace. "And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the Lord had given him rest" (II Chronicles 14:6).

How was it that God gave Asa peace and rest? God blessed him with peace and prosperity because of the fact that he had begun well in the service of the Lord.

What proof do we have of Asa's piety? One evidence was his fervent prayerfulness. The name of Asa will always be associated with one remarkable prayer that he offered. "And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee" (II Chronicles 14:11). If ever prayer came from a devout and humble heart, that prayer did. And, as "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," it availed much. Prayerfulness was a habit of Asa. To his people he said, "We have sought the Lord our God, we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side." Asa took all his troubles straight to his Father in heaven. When a man does that, you may be assured that there is grace in his heart. This is a safe test of one's spiritual condition. Many a young person's downward career has dated from the day when he ceased to pray. One of Satan's first endeavors, when he wants to drag you down to ruin, is to get you to quit praying.

Another proof of Asa's piety was his uncompromising opposition to everything

that was sinful. Asa was not satisfied with mere acts of devotion. With him prayer and practice were combined. He set his face against all that was wrong. He purged his courts of the vices which had prevailed there. He destroyed the altars, and shrines, and images of idolatry; and both by precept and example did everything within his power to win his people to the worship and service of the true God. He honestly sought to do his duty in that sphere of life to which it had pleased God to call him.

Today we want and need men of faith and prayer, men who look through these outward shadows into the mind of God, and who bring their Christian faith to bear upon the details of daily life. That is why each of us should resolve to find the rule of life in the Bible, and the strength of life in prayer, and then go out into the world to show how pure, how noble, how useful, and how happy a Christian's life can be.

The all-wise, all-loving heavenly Father has given us a plan or pattern for life. Each life is different, but the life of every child of God can be used for His glory. If we are going to follow God's pattern for our lives, then we must work by faith in Him day by day. There is a way of life that is victorious over the world, over self, and over Satan. This is the way that Christ would have us to live.

No one can be in the center of God's will and live according to the divine pattern without purity. Purity is still God's way. Don't allow the world to mold your life, but live by the Word of God. God's Word teaches that we are to deal firmly with temptation. It may be costly to do so, but it pays. In writing about the temptation of Joseph, Matthew Henry said, "It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience." When tempted by Potiphar's wife, Joseph fled from her presence and left his garment in her hand. Write a record of your life with purity in the center of it. Respect the Word of God. Believe what it says. Obey its teachings. Abstain from every appearance of evil. Live righteously.

III. Asa Was Warned By The Prophet.

One is repeatedly tempted to get away from God. He is tempted to depend upon himself, become self-confident and proud. As soon as Asa came home victorious over Zerah and the Ethiopians, which victory God had gloriously given to him, the prophet Azariah came out and warned him, saying: "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." What a warning! So many times God warns His children. In that great sermon Azariah said: "Asa, God has been with you because you have been with God. If you stand by God, He will stand by you. If you forsake God, God will forsake you." God has made us for Himself, and He delights to commune with His children. "The Lord is with you." His presence with us is the indispensable prerequisite of both blessedness and usefulness.

"The Lord is with you, while ye be with him." That appended qualification indicates the duration of God's presence with the believer. Even though the believer has been chosen and called, unless he abides faithful he cannot expect to retain God's approval. The protection of and provision for the believer, on the part of God, are indeed ample and able, but the believer must consciously and willingly avail himself of them. "And if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." That reciprocal statement lays down the conditions of God's presence with the believer. The divine favor does not rest indiscriminately upon God's people. He cannot be

pleased with sin. He cannot be gratified by disloyalty. "If ye forsake him, he will forsake you." That is an aspect of the matter we all forget too easily. If we withdraw ourselves from His presence by deliberate and unconfessed sin, He will withdraw His presence from us in blessing. We cannot enjoy His presence unless we respect the conditions which govern it.

IV. Asa Sinned Against God.

That warning to Asa went unheeded, and it was not long until he sinned against God. When Asa found that his neighbor, Baasha, the king of Israel, was threatening him with trouble, what did he do? Instead of laying the matter before the Lord, as he had been accustomed to do in earlier days, he applied to a heathen monarch to help him in his difficulties. He hired the powerful king of Syria with the treasures of the house of the Lord, taken from the temple and diverted from their sacred purpose to this worldly use of defending himself. He hired that heathen king to break a treaty which he had made with Baasha, the enemy of Asa. How sinful he was in depending on money, and on a heathen, rather than depending on God! It may have been political wisdom, but it was certainly spiritual folly. Through this alliance he triumphed in war, but it was a costly triumph. It is quite possible that Asa's distrust of God, and his overtrust in human power, was the last sin that he ever expected to beset him.

V. Asa Paid For His Sins.

God sent His faithful prophet, Hanani, to rebuke Asa and to remonstrate with him, and to show him the error of his way. Hanani said: "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" (II Chronicles 16:7). "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: and therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars" (II Chronicles 16:9). Thus God rebuked Asa through His prophet.

Instead of humbly receiving the rebuke from God, and turning back to him in repentance and saying, "Oh, God, I have done wrong; forgive me wherein I have wronged Thee," as he should have done, Asa rebelled against God, fell into a rage and imprisoned God's prophet. Because the preacher had stepped on his toes, Asa didn't like him and cast him into prison and fastened his feet in the stocks. He also oppressed some of the people who stood with Hanani, by giving them the same kind of treatment.

In the latter years of his life Asa was a victim of gout of a most agonizing description. His way of living caught up with him, and he was diseased in his feet for the rest of his life.

In his suffering he did not turn to God, but only to earthly physicians. If a man's relations with God are not right, acute pain may have the effect of souring his spirit. Let's think for a moment. When Hanani rebuked him, Asa put the prophet in prison, and apparently placed his feet in stocks. Doesn't the Bible say something about sowing and reaping. Listen: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Asa reaped as he had sowed.

The career of Asa is one of the most disappointing in the Bible. His morning was so fair and full of promise that we expected a glorious sunset. But his sun went down to a cloud. Start where Asa started, but do not end as he did. Whether your life be a short or a long one, spend it in the service of the Lord and for the benefit of your fellow men. The Lord will be with you and bless you if you will stay close to Him.