**Azariah: Turning Hearts to God**

2 Chronicles 15:1-4 NKJV

*Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Obed. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time, Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them.”*

Like our Earth, which brings forth both the colorful flowers of spring and the barren trees of winter, all of us go through seasons. There are seasons of joy and of disappointment. There are seasons of plenty and of lack. There are seasons of devotion and of inconsistency. It was those kings who rid the nation of idolatry and false teaching and became examples of repentance and rededication. King Asa, who reigned around the ninth century B.C., was one of those kings. After the reign of two unfaithful and disobedient kings, Judah was in dire need of direction. Asa started necessary reforms. An early test for him was an invasion by a million-man army from Ethiopia. Asa goes to battle with this prayer: *Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You* (2 Chron 14:11)

By God’s power, Asa wins and his prayer set the stage for God to help more.

On his return, directed by the Holy Spirit of God, Azariah the prophet meets King Asa with a special message. His message is not a political one. Nor is it a social one. It is a personal, spiritual message sent by God Himself: *Seek Me, and I will find you.* Notice that the Holy Spirit gives Azariah the message that Asa *needs* to hear, not necessarily the one he wants to hear. (Think about the times when the Holy Spirit has done the same to us – when He has convicted us with the truth even when it may not have been what we had hoped for.) But for far too long, Judah had turned its back on the LORD. Its priests were corrupt, and the nation had been without consistent, truthful teaching for quite some time. It had forsaken God’s commandments, and in response to this disobedience, God removed His hand of protection from them.

During that time, *“There was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So, nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God had troubled them with adversity”* (vss. 5,6). Unfortunately, we all have made that same mistake. We abandon God’s will for our own selfish pleasures, which is why chaos and strife usually ensue and take over our lives. This disconnect often leads to all kinds of turmoil. However, God pleads for us to seek Him: *“The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you”* (vs 2). Jeremiah echoes the same thing: *“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart”* (29:13). James reinforces the same idea: *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you* (4:8a). It is important to understand that God’s blessings and provision are dependent on whether we seek Him. But Azariah’s words are not meant to discourage us but to *encourage* us.

Knowing that King Asa is at a crossroads where he can choose to be like the disobedient kings of the past or write his place as a repentant reformer in the history of Judah, Azariah speaks a blessing: *“But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded”* (vs 7). There are times when we are at the same place as Asa. We may not know which way to turn and may become discouraged because God’s blessings do not feel like blessings at all. Sometimes we must persevere through setbacks and trials with long suffering and patience. But we must never give up! Paul encourages us: *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart* (Galatians 6:9). When we choose to continue in faithfulness and worship, God WILL reward us!

Asa hears Azariah’s words and takes courage. He removes all the abominable idols throughout the land and restores the places of true worship. He rids Judah of all the unclean things which brought shame to a nation that once served God so faithfully, including his own mother. All of this causes a massive restoration movement in the nation. The people gather together and renew their covenant with God. They return to Him by sacrificing 700 bulls and 7,000 sheep. Revival started in the heart of one man, Asa, and spread from person-to-person life wildfire. Where in our lives do we need to rid ourselves of the unclean things which separate us from God? What can we purge to bring Him honor and glory once again? In John chapter two, Jesus cleanses the temple the first time because His Father’s house had become a “house of merchandise” (vs 16). (The second time this happens is after His triumphal entry [Matthew 21:12,13].) The temple was no longer being used for its purpose. We, too, have a purpose: *that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory* (Ephesians 1:12). What must we cleanse from our hearts to ensure we continue being used according to our purpose?

What was the result of King Asa heeding Azariah’s prophetic warning? *And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa* (vs 19). In a single word: peace! Because Asa faithfully and obediently sought God, God protected Him with peace. Paul reminds us to *be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6,7). Imagine *God’s* peace guarding your heart and mind though every trial, though every victory. Whatever the season, whether up or down, we could be at peace with God if we do what Jesus says: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33). Therefore, seek after Him, and He will seek after you.