

Worship: Putting God's Prophetic Word into Action

Kenwood Baptist Church

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TEXT: 2 Chronicles 15:1-15



Good morning, beloved. It is good to be in God's house together this morning. We are in a series in 1 & 2 Chronicles, a series on worship. As we've been looking at this series and seeing that 1 & 2 Chronicles really is a summons for us to worship, to have God at the center of our lives, the theological vision of Chronicles tells us that with God at the center, that is the determinative factor in success or failure in our lives. We have looked at the series to see that the sanctuary, this single place where God's real presence dwells among us, is the orienting center of our lives. We looked last week to see that the second half of Chronicles gives us the theological vision out of which we live. It confronts the modern, practical atheism that many of us practice. Many of us say we are a Christian, but we really don't live like we are Christian. We really don't live with the sense that God is actively involved. We don't live like disobeying God is dangerous. It really is. We don't live like turning to God in distress will change the situation. We don't live in such a way that says that God's promises are yes and amen in Christ. As Paul says, we make it our aim to please Him, not to earn our salvation, but to remain in that place of blessing that He has brought us to in Christ. We mentioned last week the book by Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. I'll just mention it again briefly, because he is the one that describes this circle of blessing, this place in which we stand, where we are in God's favor and blessing. We have been brought into that sphere in Christ through faith in Him. God is a loving Father, and when we disobey Him, or we move away from having Him at the center, God

disciplines us. He corrects us with an aim to bring us back, and God honors and hears the repentant heart. We live in covenant with the living God, and worshiping Him is the center of our lives. That is the first main verb of our vision as a church, and we want to be community that is centered on worship, not centered on what songs I like or what songs you like, but centered on worshiping God, in placing Him at the center and living, then, in that covenant relationship with Him. It is the narrative of Chronicles that teaches is why this is so important. If we wonder sometimes if the Old Testament narratives can be instructive for us as Christians, we need only to glance briefly again at Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10. He was speaking to a church congregation, to a community of new Christians, some who had grown up with the knowledge of the Scriptures. Paul reflects on the Old Testament narrative, and he says in 1 Corinthians 10:11:

“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

The ESV says these things happened to them as an example. The Greek word is that they happened *typikos*, from which we get our English word typical. It means that these events are illustrative. It means they are analogous. It means that for you and for me, if we want to understand what it's like, what it's really like in concrete terms to be in relationship with God, then we look at the diary, if you will, of people in relationship with God. One of the things I love about being a pastor, not only exploring the Scriptures week after week together, but I get the real-time experience of seeing how being in relationship with Jesus Christ plays out for 700 people. I would tell you, on my own experience, that Jesus Christ can be trusted. I would tell you, on your experience—of the degree that you shared it with me—that Jesus Christ can be trusted and that being in relationship with Him and worshiping Him is the determinative center of our lives.

We saw this last week with Rehoboam, and so we move forward this morning and we look at another reign in Scripture. We are going to pass over Abijah's short three-year reign, and we turn our attention to the reign of Asa, the grandson of Rehoboam, the great-grandson of Solomon. When we look at the reign of Asa, his reign is one of the long reigns. He reigned for 41 years, and it is said of Asa in 2 Chronicles 14:2:

“And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.”

It should make your heart just thrill to hear this: “This king did what was good and right in the eyes of God!” When I see that, it makes me think: “Well, what did he do?” Oftentimes in Scripture we read that devastating refrain, “He did evil in the eyes of God,” and it grieves us, it pains us. The evil that is in the world is something that we are exposed to on a daily basis, but this message is rare and to be savored and explored. So keep your text open to 2 Chronicles 14 and 15.

Asa did what was right and good, and what we are told initially is that he took away the foreign altars and high places. He broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim, the fertility figurines, and he sought the Lord God. He resolved to keep God's Word. He even took out of the cities of Judah the high places and incense altars. So, Asa's reign is described first and foremost as a reign that clears out idolatry and establishes a resolve to seek God. This is very instructive for us. We have the same temptations. The Bible says that no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. We have the same temptations: to construct our rival places of worship; to give our heart affection, to put our trust in other things than the Lord. Asa places God at the center. He builds cities around him, and the Scripture says that he prospers. He has a large army in 2 Chronicles 14:8:

“And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valor.”

He has a large standing army, and things seem to be going well. This is the season of life where he is honoring God. He is taking down idolatry, he is worshiping the Lord, he is building, his army is standing, and all the sudden, a crisis comes in 2 Chronicles 14:9:

“Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah.”

They are not coming over for dinner party. They come up, pouring out of North Africa with a million men and 300 chariots. Asa goes out to meet him. They have already reached into the hill country at Mareshah. So, here's this man that the first thing you learn about him is that he is someone who takes down idolatry and seeks God, and now you get a window into what you do when there is a crisis. What do you do when one of your children has no interest in following the Lord? What do you do when your marriage hits a dry stretch? What you do when your boss all the sudden has impossible demands on you and you're not sure how you are going to meet it. It may not look like a million Ethiopians pouring in the backyard, but it might. What do you do, and what does Asa do? In 2 Chronicles 14, Asa cries to the Lord. He is facing twice as many soldiers with chariots than he has, and he cries to the Lord, and he says in 2 Chronicles 14:11:

“O LORD, there is none like You to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on You, and in Your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.”

Is that what you do when you're in a crisis, when you're in a situation, when you're overmatched? He looks out, sees a million men coming at him, and he says: “Lord, I'm looking to You. Help us, O Lord, our God, for we rely on You and in Your name we come against this multitude.” God rescues, and God gives him success on the battlefield, but his success in the battlefield is not attributed to his strategy. It is not attributed to his superior weaponry. It is not attributed to the clarity of his chain of communication and command. No, his success is

attributed to the fact that he called out to God for help when he needed it, and so the people took great plunder. Now, Asa is that this high moment. They had just achieved this great victory by God's power. His territory is extended and expanded. His southern border is secure, and we saw last week that this is a dangerous position. When you and I are in a situation where we are right on the edge of our resources, it actually inclines us to trust God, because we find we are at the edge of ourselves.

Last week we saw that Rehoboam, when everything was going well, forgot about God, and so we see with Asa that all the sudden everything is going well. He has a great victory, and at this point we see in the text we just heard that the Spirit of God comes upon Azariah, the son of Obed. The Holy Spirit comes upon this man. Azariah is a fantastic name. It means that *Yahweh is my help*. Azariah comes and, with the Spirit of the Lord, he goes out to meet Asa, probably returning from the battle, and says in 2 Chronicles 15:2:

“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.”

That is dangerous language. How precious is the promise: “The Lord is with us while we are with Him.” How precious is the promise: “If you seek Him, He will be found by you.” But also how precious is the warning: “If we turn away from Him, He is going to turn away from us.” I need that. I need the promise. I need the encouragement, but I also need the warning: “If we turn away from God, He turns away from us.” Azariah tells the king that for a long time Israel was without the true God, without a teaching priest. They didn’t have someone communicating the Scriptures. They were without God's Word. He reminds him that in their distress, they turned to the Lord and sought Him, and He was found by them. Azariah rehearses for Asa the experience of the people, illustrating precisely this reality, that if we turn away from God, He turns away from us and we end up in distress.

We saw that last week, and yet, in our distress, if we turn again, God honors and hears that. Azariah gives this warning. Azariah is looking back. He is illustrating for us how we learn of God's dealings and ways with us, but then he speaks to the king in this moment of success, in 2 Chronicles 15:7:

“But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”

Be strong; be encouraged. Asa had claimed God at the center at the beginning of his reign, and now all his responsibilities have increased. This great victory is kind of like a promotion of sorts. Asa, all of a sudden, has defeated his enemy to the south and his territory has expanded, and so he has additional responsibilities, he has additional revenue, he has a larger realm over which he is responsible, and the prophet says: “Take courage, do not let your hands be weak.” In other words, don't be negligent in your duty. You started well, and now God has put more into

your hands, so be courageous and be diligent with this larger scope of responsibility. Then there is the promise that there is a great reward for your work. God's Word comes to him through this prophet. Just as last week it was the prophet Shemaiah who spoke to the king, here it is Azariah who speaks into the king's life.

The great thing about being in relationship among the people of God is that this gift of prophecy still functions. The gift of prophecy is when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and we speak God's will into the lives of one another. We have it in our minds that prophecy is mainly predicting the future, but in reality only 30% of the prophets are concerned with the future. Seventy percent of the prophetic messages in Scripture and in the ministry or gift of prophecy in the congregation are words that speak to the contemporary moment. They are words that speak into our moment right now, and God can speak to us. God can speak through us, not only through His written, prophetic Word, but also through the prophetic word that comes to us through a brother or sister. Do you believe that? When a non-Christian comes to visit the church, the New Testament doesn't say: "Hopefully he really likes the music." It doesn't say: "Hopefully he gets a warm greeting. Hopefully there is this really inspiring sermon." No, the New Testament says when an unbeliever comes to church, a prophetic word is given and spoken, and the thoughts of their hearts are laid bare and they conclude God is among you. Wouldn't that be great? Wouldn't that be great to say: "I came to Kenwood, I'm trying to live my life, and I'm not sure which way I'm going, but I came to this church and God spoke to me. My thoughts were revealed; God directed my life; He confronted my sin; He encouraged me; He laid out promises before me, and all that happened during the exchange with someone next to me." They walked out and said: "God is there. I'll be back next Sunday." That's what we want, isn't it?

Why are the prophets, the gifting of a prophet, so important? R.B.Y. Scott wrote a book called *The Relevance of the Prophets*. He says the prophets and the prophetic word is powerful for a number of reasons. He says:

- The prophetic word is able to penetrate the maze of appearances to identify the human and theological facts of a situation.
- The word given by the Spirit the Lord, spoken, has the ability to define righteousness and clarify confusion.
- The word spoken by the prophets is rooted in an understanding by the Holy Spirit of human nature and the human predicament.
- God's prophetic word to us is tied into the meaning of things and the decisions we need to make and the promise of God's intervention and direction.
- Prophetic words come to us because they understand the reality of God's presence in the world.

- Prophetic words have the ability to communicate concretely, with conviction and divine authority.

I've been blessed in my own life several times at key intersections by having someone speak a word from the Lord, and God has guided me. I know that's true for many of you, but when God speaks, and if He uses one of us or if He uses a sermon or the lyrics of a song, or a passage in His Word, or whatever He uses, the question is. "What are you going to do with that?" That's really the challenge and the ending of the sermon this morning.

I want us to look at this man, this king, who claimed God at the center. He turned to God in distress. In his moment of success, God spoke to him, and what did he do? He did what we need to do. He put God's Word into action. When God speaks to you, you put it into action. You don't overanalyze it. You don't ask God if He could repeat that two or three times just to make sure. When God speaks to you, you put it into action. Can we do that? Look at Asa in 2 Chronicles 15:8:

"As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage and put away the detestable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim, and he repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD."

As soon as he heard the word, he took courage from the Lord. He put God at the center in this expanded sphere. What does this mean in concrete terms? It means that if you just got married, and all of a sudden you have a new level of responsibility, and you're used to cultivating your own soul in following Christ, and all of a sudden there's another person there and you have more responsibility, that means you put Christ at the center there, too. It means that if God just expanded your family, then you claim God at the center. It means that if you're in your job and all of a sudden you're given a new project, or if you're in school and you have a new subject that's beyond you, and your feeling this sense of responsibility is increased, that you claim God at the center. That's what Asa does. He does what he was doing in the smaller scale. Now, after this great victory, he is doing what he was doing, but he is doing it on a larger scale. Do you see that?

One of our dear friends, Annette Rutenmiller, used to say to me all the time: "The best indicator of future performance is past performance." What someone does is the best indicator of what they're going to do. She said that to me many times, and I found that is really profound, and that's what's happening here. Asa claims the center for God, and now he has more territory, more cities, and so he takes down the high places in those new areas. Following the Lord isn't just about taking things down; it's about building up the center. The ESV translates, "*He also repaired the altar.*" The Hebrew says, "*He made the altar new.*" He renewed or refurbished or honored, or maybe he decorated it, but he established, with clear signal to the community, the

altar of the Lord as the center. He takes down and builds up. What does he do after that? He claims God as the center, and then he gathers the people. We read in 2 Chronicles 15:9:

“And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.”

We saw this last week. They are deserting the golden calves and idolatry and are streaming in. He gathers the people in Jerusalem in the third month of the 15th year. He gathers the people in Jerusalem for worship. In 2 Chronicles 15:11, we read:

“They sacrificed to the LORD on that day from the spoil that they had brought 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep.”

They sacrifice to the Lord from the spoil. This is from the plunder of that great victory. They take that great victory, and they offer it to God.

Sociologists tell us that the average person, millennial and down, will have 10 to 12 jobs in their work life. Someone taught me as a young Christian that whenever you get a new job, a great thing to do is take your first paycheck and just give that whole thing to God. We have had the practice of doing that whenever I get a new job, which, praise God, hasn't happened that often—and I am not looking for new job! I love doing that. It's like saying this new job is from God, and everything that happens in this job from here on is going to be for the Lord. So here is my first fruit of everything. It's a joy to do that. So, they offer from this great victory, and notice that these are not burnt offerings. These are not offerings for sin; these are offerings for the fall festival. This is the offering that is eaten together in the community. That must have been a big party. How many people are coming? Let's see. What are we going to need? We need 700 full-size angus beef, and then we are going to need 7000 sheep. That's a big party. It's a celebration. Then he the gathers the people who worship, but then the most beautiful thing that happens in this passage is what happens next. The party is not without purpose. When the people are gathered for worship, by the king's lead, in 2 Chronicles 15:12:

“And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul.”

They were in the covenant, the covenant that was made on Mount Sinai. It is important for us to recall that scene, because this entering into the covenant is better described as a covenant renewal. It is like renewing your wedding vows. The people enter into covenant. They renew the covenant, and they swear an oath with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets, and with horns. They make a promise like in the original covenant moment on Mount Sinai, when God comes down and speaks His Word to the people and there is an oath and sacrifice, and the people promise at the end: “All that the Lord has commanded, we will do.” Later, when the people, after journeying through the wilderness and they come up to the edge, in Deuteronomy

27 and 28, the people take an oath, the oath of blessing and cursing. The oath says that if we follow God, we are going to be blessed; if we turn our backs on God, our lives are going to be bad. It's this picture of covenant-making that is important for us understand, because then the king leads the people into making a promise. Sometimes our promises need to be renewed, don't they? Sometimes a promise that we make on our wedding day, we need to remake. Sometimes the promise that we make to the Lord when we say, "I believe, and I'm turning to You," needs to be remade. Sometimes the challenges, the difficulties, the responsibilities, the tyranny of the urgent, the stress of life, can cause us to drift away from those primary relationships, and God gives us a way back.

Last week, the way back was repentance, and Rehoboam confessed his need for the Lord and his sin, and God honored that. This morning, the way back to the Lord is just by renewing your promise. They swore an oath, shouting and trumpets and horns, and then we read in 2 Chronicles 15:15:

"And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and had sought Him with their whole desire, and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around."

The king led the people back to covenant renewal and ultimately for joy in the Lord.

I want to challenge you this morning, if the enemy has taken your joy, if circumstances have shifted you off-center, the way back is just renewing your promise that God is at the center. You know what comes with that? Joy. What comes with that renewing, recommitting to the Lord, is joy in His presence. Brothers and sisters, it turns out that the narrative of ancient Israelite kings is indeed powerfully instructive for us. It turns out that it is powerfully instructive for us to persevere in doing what's right, to place God at the center, even as our responsibilities grow, to tear down idols and high places where they are and renew the altar. It also means that if we wandered away or we feel distant from God, that the way back and the way to joy is just renewing our promise to Him. Jesus said to us: *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you."* Let's pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, it is in Your presence that we stand this morning. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You that Your Word is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, capable of doing soul surgery where we need it. Lord, Your Word is so finely-tuned that You alone can discern between the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Lord, I pray this morning that You would stir in us a fresh recommitment to You. Lord, I just want to lift up my brothers, my sisters, my family members, just as Asa, in moments of great success, honored You and led his family into renewing their covenant promise. Father, I pray for us, I pray for myself. Lord, I want You at the center of my life. Lord, I want to pull down things that are distracting me from You.

Lord, I want to renew that wedding vow to follow You, to trust You, and to live for You alone. Lord, whatever we are facing this morning, Your Word has just taught us that there is none like You to help. Lord, where we need Your help and power, we ask You to intervene. Some of us need Your help just to renew our promise. Come Holy Spirit. You are welcome here. Spirit of the living God, we pray that You would speak to us through Your Word, Your inspired Word. We pray that You would speak to us through Your Word given to a brother or sister. Lord, when we hear that Word, help us to put it into practice. We love You and pray these things in Jesus' Name.

Amen.