2 Chronicles 14 - 16 If you seek him, he will be found by you (5.12.10pm)

We're going to be looking at a character from the Old Testament this evening, to which some of you will ask, "Why?" Well, the Old Testament gives the history of God's people from the beginning when God created everything that is. And we can see and learn a lot about God through all he's done and all his dealings with men and women down through thousands of years. The Old Testament has been preserved for our teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, like every other part of the Bible.

We're going to be looking at a king, King Asa in fact. To which you all may ask, "Who?" Well, Asa is mentioned in the first chapter of Matthew's gospel in the New Testament, which gives us the genealogy of Jesus, his family tree. Asa was the great (x20) grandfather of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Asa was also the great, great grandson of David, king of Israel. So he was related to both David - Israel's greatest king – and to Jesus – the King of kings and Lord of lords.

If you're still asking "Why are we looking at this tonight?" you'll just have to wait and see!

Let's read then from the 2nd book of Chronicles, and from chapter 14 [page …..].

Sometimes when we parents look at our children, we see things they do, and we see their characteristics, and we watch how they get on in the world, don't we, and we think sometimes "Why did they do **that**? Why did they react like **that**? What made them do that?" And most of the time we have to be honest and say, "Oh yes, that's the kind of thing **I** would do." We look back to when **we** were their age, and say, "Yes, I was just like that." Or if not like me, then like our wife or husband – it's easier to blame **them** than ourselves.

But at other times, our children do things that we just **wouldn't** do. They show some characteristic that we don't see in either of us parents. "Where did **that** come from?" And when this happens, we cast our minds back to **our** parents to see if there is an explanation there. Sometimes there **is** an answer, sometimes there isn't. Sometimes it's just the work of God in **creating** us like that.

Verse 2 here tells us that *'Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.'* And this may have come as a **surprise** to his father, because we read **this** about Asa's father Abijah in 1 Kings 15:3,

'Abijah committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God.' So this tells us that neither Asa's father nor his grandfather had expressed any desire to obey God. So Asa didn't use them as role models.

So something we need to see very clearly from the start is that our faith and response to God is an individual matter. It's between us – each one of us – and God. We can't rely on the faith of our parents to get us right with God; but on the other hand, just because they may have rejected God, that doesn't automatically cut us **off** from God either. It's **my** responsibility, it's **your** responsibility. We stand before God as **individuals**.

Asa wasn't like his father or grandfather, but later in that chapter of 1 Kings we read an extension to our verse 2 here: **there** it reads, *'Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done.'* (Father here of course meaning his ancestor, his forefather). He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Like David, he wasn't perfect, he did have failings and weaknesses. But he was like David in seeking and following the will of God. And **that** is the main point of Asa's reign as recorded here, seeking, finding and following God.

So this is what I want us to look at this evening; seeking God, finding God, and the blessing of following God.

Seeking God.

The whole of this story of Asa and his people is the outworking of what God tells Solomon, his great grandfather, one night in 2 Chronicles 7:13,14. God says, *'.. if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.'* God promises to hear his people's prayer and forgive their sin and heal their land, if only they will turn from their old ways of **rejecting** him and will seek him humbly.

I don't know whether Asa would have had opportunity to listen to the psalms of his forefather David being read, I guess he probably would. And so he would have heard verses like those in Psalm 63:1, where David tells of his faith: *'O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water.'*
He will have heard David's words like those in Psalm 105 speaking down through a hundred years to him, encouraging him to *'Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.'*

Asa wanted to do this. This was his desire. To **seek** God and find the life that can only be gained through **finding** God. His heart was good, he wanted to do what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord. He wanted to seek God, and he wanted his **people** to seek God as well.

So what was the first thing he needed to do?

You'll remember that God said they needed to turn from their wicked ways. Vse 3 of our passage reads, *'He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles.'* And in chapter 15 verse 8 we read, *'He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah.'*

The practices that God detested in his people were that they had turned to other 'gods' – gods of other peoples had contaminated their faith in the **true** God. Vrse 3 of chapter 15 says, *'For a long time Israel was without the true God.'* They'd turned from their **own** God, and turned to other popular religions of the peoples around them. Asa removed the symbols and places for the practice of those religions that were offensive to God.

Whether we're seeking God for the first time as a non-believer, or as we seek him continually in our lives as Christians, we – like Asa, like his people, like people throughout history - have to turn from our wicked ways. We have to have all the things which God finds offensive removed from us. We can't seek God **properly**, and still want to hold on to things which God detests. We can't say we're seeking God, if we continue to hold on to our sins – things which the prophet Isaiah says separate us from God. Seeking God means turning **from** going our own way, turning **to** the way which pleases God.

And none of us is exempt from this requirement, no matter how long we may have been a Christian. We may not think we **have** idols – true, we don't worship idols. But anything we place ahead of our commitment to **God** can become an idol. As someone said, "An idol is making our religion fit our lifestyle, rather than changing our lifestyle to fit our religion." Even despite coming to church and doing good deeds, we can still be separated from God, if we've failed to have our wrong practices dealt with.

Are there any wrong, even sinful practices in your life? I have to continually ask myself, are there any sinful practices in my life? We need to turn from our old ways and seek God's new way.

Who is it that Asa is seeking here?

God is referred to back in chapter 14 in three slightly but significantly different ways:

- Firstly in verses 2 and 11, he is referred to as 'the Lord his God'. This tells us that Asa had a one-to-one relationship with God. God was **his** God, he experienced God in his own individual life; which is what we were seeing earlier, that God has dealings with us as individuals. Remember doubting Thomas when he believed that Jesus has risen from the dead, he said, *'My Lord and **my** God!'*
- Secondly and in verse 4, God is referred to as 'the Lord, the God of their fathers', and this reminds us that God has had relationships with people right down through history; we're just the latest in a long line of people who have sought God. **We** seek the same God that Asa sought.
- And thirdly in verse 7 he is referred to as 'the Lord **our** God.' God is a God of his people, we seek him together as we desire to serve him as a group of believers. He's **our** God.

And **how** do we seek God?

The beginning of chapter 15 verse 4 tells us that the people, *'in their distress … turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, …'* and verse 15 tells us, *'They sought God eagerly.'* They sought God eagerly, energetically, with zeal. There was no half-heartedness here.

God says in the book of Jeremiah, *'You will seek me and find me when you seek me **with all your heart**.'* Seek me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:11-13). There's no point thinking that you can find God by seeking without really wanting to find him. You won't find him if you don't really want to. You need to seek him with all your heart, the Bible says. And you need to **continue** seeking him with all your heart from then on. You need to continue that level of commitment to God if you are to continue a closeness in your relationship with him. *'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'*

Do we **really** mean business with God? Do we **really** want to find him? Or is it just a game, we're not really serious about it at all?

Are we seeking? Who are we seeking? How are we seeking?

Finding God.

We'll come back to the rest of chapter 14 in a few moments, as they speak of the results of seeking and finding God. But the second half of chapter 15 verse 2 encapsulates the early part of Asa's life, where we read, *'The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you.' 'If you seek him, he* ***will*** *be found by you.'*

I like the way that this verse appears here: '*If you seek him, he will be found by you.'* The way it's written indicates to **me** that it's God who is instrumental in him being found. It's not primarily because we're seeking that he's found, although that seeking is very important – as I've said so far this evening. But he **will** be found, God **wants** to be found.

God says in Jeremiah 29:13, *'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,'* God doesn't say 'seek me and you **may** find me'; he doesn't say 'seek me, but you might **not** find me, it all depends ….' He says seek me with all your heart, and I **will** be found by you.

When I was little we lived at a railway house on the edge of farmland, and we used to play hide and seek, and of course there were lots of places to hide: barns, sheds, haystacks, trees, ditches as well as railway trucks full of sugar beet and lots more. And of course the aim was not to be found. Used to last ages, those games.

But God **will** be found. He's not hiding away not wanting to be found. If you seek him, he will be found. God is love and he will **express** that love in a relationship with those who seek him. He will be found.

Two of David's psalms, Psalms 14 and 53, beginning with the same opening four verses include as their second verse, '*God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.'* What an amazing thought – God is actively **looking** for those who're seeking him! He's looking for those who're **seeking** him so that he can make himself known, so that he can be found. He will be **found** by you.

And of course the ultimate expression of God actively looking for those who're seeking him is in Jesus. In Luke's gospel 19:10 we read Jesus saying, *'the Son of man came to seek and save what was lost.'* Jesus came seeking us, before we ever started looking for him. Isn't that wonderful? Jesus sought us who were lost, going our own way, going the opposite way to what was right and good in the eyes of the Lord. He sought **us** first.

God **wants** to be found. He's not hiding. He doesn't run away from us when we get close. *'If you seek him, he will be found by you.'* Jesus is recorded in the gospels as saying, *'seek and you will find'* and this is true all through the Christian life, if you seek God with all your heart, you will find that he's right there, close to you, wanting to be found by you.

There's a verse in Isaiah chapter 55 which says *'Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.'* God is near. We need to seek him, we need to call to him, how we need to find him.

Of course some may say, "I don't **need** God. I'm doing all right without him. I'm fine the way I'm going. **I** don't need God." David says in those two Psalms I quoted from earlier (14 and 53), *'The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."'* The Bible says it's foolish to try and deny that there's a God and that we don't need him. Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord, and he experienced the benefits of doing so. And what's good enough for Asa is surely good enough for us!

So thirdly, what are the rewards of seeking and finding God?

Psalm 34:10 tells us that *'those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.'* And in the letter to the Hebrews we read this, *'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he* ***rewards*** *those who earnestly seek him.'* Hebrews 11:6. So what should those who seek and find God expect?

After Asa had removed all the wicked practices from the country in chapter 14 verses 3 – 5, we read in verse 6, *'He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No-one was at war with him during those years, for the Lord gave him rest.'* God gave Asa and his people peace and rest. Asa sought God with all his heart, he got rid of everything that displeased God, and God gave him peace and rest.

Chapter 15, verse 12 says, *'They [the people of God] entered into a covenant to seek the Lord the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul.'* And the result? Second half of verse 15, *'They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the Lord gave them rest on every side.'* God gave them rest.

But before you all start reaching for the armchair and TV remote control and settle yourself in for a life of lazing around doing **nothing**, that's not what peace and rest is talking about.

When God had created everything in six days, Genesis tells us that on the seventh day he rested. That doesn't mean he did **nothing** that day – as well as creating he **sustains** everything, and that's what he was doing; he rested from his work of creation, but God is never idle. He didn't rest from being God.

Entering God's rest in the Bible rather speaks of a perfect relationship with God. Peace rather speaks of peace with God, a perfect harmonious relationship with God. And Hebrews chapter 4 speaks of being able to enter this rest, by approaching God through Jesus, who came looking for us and on the cross paid with his life so that we might find God. Peace and rest with God.

Asa didn't stop being king, he didn't stop ruling his people. He enjoyed peace and rest because he enjoyed a harmonious relationship with his God. Behind his actions lay his faith in God and he wanted to return the people to spiritual security, so he got rid of foreign gods. But he **also** wanted to return his people to **physical** security, and that's why he built up the towns and cities, verse 7, *' "Let us build up these towns," he said to Judah, "and put walls round them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered.'*

Likewise we too seek God, we find God, and he gives us peace and rest – peace and rest in our relationship with him. We **know** we are right with God. True peace and rest comes when we find God. Do **you** know anything of this perfect, harmonious relationship with your God?

But we don't sit and do nothing. Asa and his people didn't sit and do nothing. They built and strengthened their towns. Why? In Acts 9:31 we read of the early church, *'Then the church enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers.'* Asa's people and the people of the first century church had a time of peace and rest so they could be strengthened and prepared. But what for?

God also gave Asa battles to face. As well as peace and rest, God gives his people battles. Surprised? Even shocked, perhaps.? You can cope with God giving you peace, but God giving you battles? Does that put you off? It **shouldn't** do if you seek God with all your heart and you find him. Let's see why from this story.

Asa faces a vast army in verses 8 – 10 of our passage. Outnumbered and facing a seemingly unwinnable battle, Asa calls to God in verse 11; *'Lord there is no-one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on **you**, and in **your name** we have come against this vast army.'*

Being in a right and good relationship with God didn't stop Asa having to face battles. But in faith he cries out to God, recognising that to face these battles in his **own** strength would be useless. He relies upon the power of **God,** and that's why God has given him this battle. His faith is vindicated when God gives him victory.

Christians are people who've come into a relationship with God through Jesus. But that doesn't mean we're exempt from difficulties. We each have to face battles. But we have faith in **God**, we pray to him for **help**, and we see his power at work. And this strengthens our faith.

If you seek him, he will be found by you. He will bring you peace with God. But he will also allow us to face battles. And when you go through difficult times, he will be there with you, and he will give you victory.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, *'For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.'* What a great encouragement. Before we seek him, he sought us. Before we come to him praying for strength, he searches for those he needs to strengthen. So we needn't be afraid, we're encouraged along with Asa in chapter 15:7, *'Be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.'*

So where along this process are you standing this evening? Are you seeking God? Are you seeking God with all your heart? Keep going, don't give up, because God's promise here is that he'll be found by you. Have you found God? Have you entered into his rest – a wonderful relationship that will last forever? Are you facing battles? Call out to God, because he is looking to strengthen those who are committed to him.

If you seek him, he will be found by you, and you will enjoy peace and rest with God forever.