

“For a Long Time the Nation was Without the True God” (2 Chronicles 15:1–15)(7.5.20)

2 Chronicles 15:1–15 (ESV)

15 The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, ²and 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. ³For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, ⁴but when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. ⁵In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. ⁶They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress. ⁷But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”

⁸As 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. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. ¹¹They sacrificed to the Lord on that day from the spoil that they had brought 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep. ¹²And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul, ¹³but that whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. ¹⁴They swore an oath to the Lord with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and with horns. ¹⁵And 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 word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“For a Long Time the Nation was Without the True God”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Our God created in us a desire for more; more of God. Unfortunately, most people’s search for more is for anything but God. The more they get, the emptier they feel. Worse off than them are those that end up in a place of contentment with something less than God. At least those that feel empty may still be moved to seek God. The oblivious are doomed to destruction.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV84) [The Lord] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Hear the words of A. W. Tozer: “The only reason that men and women can be saved is the fact that God has put eternity in our hearts!

Man is fallen—yes! Man is lost, a sinner and needs to be born again—yes!

But God made man in His own image and He keeps the longing after eternity and a desire after everlasting life there within the hearts of men.

What, then, is the matter with man? Like the lion in the cage, he paces back and forth and roars to the heavens before he dies.

I think this is the truth—we are disturbed because God has put **everlastingness** in our hearts. He has put a longing for immortality in our beings, something that demands God and heaven. Yet, we are too blind and sinful to find Him or even to look for Him!

As Christian witnesses, we must be faithful and timely in our preaching and teaching. There is a note of warning in this—telling men and women why they are lost and that if they will not repent they will certainly perish!”

BODY:

In today's text, King Asa leads a great awakening. King Asa was Solomon's great grandson. After King Solomon died there was conflict and chaos as various family members and groups vied for power and control. The kingdom was split with the ten Northern tribes making up Israel, and the two southern tribes making up Judah.

For generations there were border battles for cities and territory between them. Not only that, but in their weakened state, neighbor nations also made war against them both. Adding to the mix was the fact that at that time there was no superior empire to create a general order in the region.

That is what is documented in verses 5 and 6. It was an era of distress. Traveling was dangerous. Imagine a time when there is no peace, in your life, and in your culture. Does that sound familiar? Great disturbances afflicted. Who was afflicted? ALL the people in all the surrounding lands were afflicted by these great disturbances.

You see my friends, we have here a description of the natural state of humankind when a nation is without the True God. It was true in ancient Israel and it is true today. Our God troubled them with EVERY SORT of distress. There was trouble in the cities and between the cities. There was trouble in the nations and between the nations. This is called human history and it still applies today, in our nation and around the world.

Why? When you forsake God, you will be forsaken by God. Aren't we a little too casual about such a huge statement? To forsake is to abandon. To forsake is to renounce or give up. Some have defined evil as the absence of the Lord God. When the presence of the Almighty has departed, a vast void is created. How is that void filled? It is filled by the Devil and his demons.

In what ways do we forsake God? Certainly, we can forsake the Lord on a personal level. We fail to acknowledge God in all our ways. That can mean we never inquire of God or consider God's will. It can also mean that there are segments of our lives that we partition off from the Lord.

Maybe in our private lives we follow the Lord, but in our business practices we use different standards. We don't follow Paul's advice, Colossians 3:23–24 (NIV84) ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

When we are not grateful to God; when we fail to give cheerfully to support the kingdom of God; when we do not spend time with the Lord in prayer and worship; when we do not spend time in God's word; when we fail to take care of the widow and the orphan; when we fail to gather as an assembly of believers; these are all ways of abandoning God, renouncing God, forsaking God.

Clearly, participating in sin, transgression, and iniquity is forsaking God. Instead of pursuing holiness and sacredness, we pursue hedonism and sacrilege. Making anything more important than the Lord, worshiping anything besides the Lord, it is idolatry. Failing to do what we should do, sins of omission, denies our love for our neighbor and our God.

1 John 3:17–18 (NIV84)

¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

As a culture, as a government, as a nation, we can forsake God in many of the same ways as we do personally. Those who are in positions of power and influence are held to higher standards. To whom much is given much is expected. Leaders should not abuse their power, or accept bribes, or commit injustices.

Then we have the very deliberate putting away the things of God from public prominence. When the Lord our God is used as a prop instead of the Perfect, Holy, Almighty Creator, we are forsaking God. When we legalize sin and even promote sin as a nation, we are renouncing the Lord. When the Lord is banished from schools, from the courts, from the public forum, so as to NOT offend non-believers, then we as a nation are forsaking God.

Where are our “teaching priests” for our day? Where are the prophets who proclaim the word of the Lord? We need a bold word from our pulpits, on our airways, and on the Internet. We do not need ear ticklers. We do not need seminar and webinar talks. We do not need pop psychology preached. WE need a passionate and pleading preacher to call out our shortcomings and our need for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only way to the Father. As C. S. Lewis said, “One road leads home and a thousand roads lead into the wilderness.”

Azariah declared that Israel and Judah were without the law. Yes, we are under grace not under the law. Nevertheless, the law has not been done away with. In Jesus’ own words: Matthew 5:17–19 (NIV84)
¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

In King Solomon’s proverbs, we read:

My son, keep my words

And store up my commands within you.

Keep my commands and live,

And my law as the apple of your eye.

Bind them on your fingers;

Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,”

And call understanding your kinsman. ([Proverbs 7:1–4](#))

Without proper priests to teach, without the law of God in the culture and people’s hearts, we should not be surprised when the “true God” is displaced by detestable idols. Modern idols may be more sophisticated but that makes them all the more insidious. We are either blind to the idols we have constructed in our lives or we rationalize that they are reasonable and permissible.

King Asa had to repair the altar of the Lord at the entrance to God’s Temple. We should not be surprised when the churches of our day are falling into disuse and they are teaching the doctrines of men instead of the doctrines of the Almighty. How sad that the altar of the Lord is treated with irreverence and disrespect.

The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, came upon the prophet of God, Azariah. He prophesied to King Asa and all the people. Hearts were moved and the King responded. Do not miss the fact that this response took courage. The prophet told him take courage and he did. This is an act of the will. This is an act of determination. Reforming the nation may take time. Your strength may wain but maintain and persevere. Your work will be rewarded. Your work will be rewarded. There is hope and promise. When this national reformation, this revival, was transforming King Asa’s country, the change was obvious. Great numbers from the northern Kingdom of Israel came to the Southern Kingdom. The people saw that the Lord his God was with King Asa because the place of the True God was given prominence.

This, my friends, is the desire of my heart. I pray that we would be **“one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”** Yes, unity, freedom, and equality are only possible for a nation that rightly worships the True God of the universe.

During The Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine wrote in The Crisis:

“THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem

too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated”

My friends, like Israel, we too have lost our way as a nation. For a long time we have been a nation without the True God. It started to happen inch by inch; then foot by foot. Now, the Christian faith seems to be in full retreat and the nation is being routed by the tyranny of the Devil and his demons. Do not accuse me of fusing my faith in God and patriotism. The Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent in ALL things, but when the people of God worship in spirit and truth, our work shall be rewarded. It takes courage. It takes strength. It takes perseverance. If we would be a nation following after the True God, why shouldn't we rejoice in that blessing?

President George Washington prayed: “Almighty God: We make our earnest prayer that You will keep the United States in your holy protection; that You will incline the heads of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government, and entertain a brotherly-affection and love for one another and for their fellow-citizens of the United States at large.

And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to submit ourselves in that charity, humility, and peaceful temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion and with a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can ever hope to be a happy nation.” I pray this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

In this day and age, the Name of Jesus needs to be heard from the rooftops. From the rooftops of our churches, from the rooftops of our homes, from the rooftops of our schools, and from the rooftops of our government buildings, there needs to be a choir of confession, “Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord.”

CONCLUSION:

Maybe my favorite old time preacher, Alexander Maclaren preached, “The highest bliss is to find God, the next highest is to seek Him.” Yes, there is joy in the journey with Jesus.

The people gathered in Jerusalem for a great celebration of their newfound freedom. It is a freedom from the tyranny of idolatry, a freedom from the tyranny of sin, a freedom from the wayward wind of a debauched culture. It is a freedom that brings peace. It is a freedom found in the courage and strength of seeking God.

Those gathered people in Jerusalem were offered two choices. “And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul, but that whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman.”

How do I preach those two verses faithfully but delicately? Certainly, we can embrace and celebrate the level of devotion and dedication to make such a covenant; especially a covenant to seek the LORD with all of our heart and with all of our soul. But to put to death those without the same level of faithful enthusiasm is quite disturbing. There are two other passages that express the same thought, so this isn't an anomaly.

While there is no evidence that this death sentence was ever carried out, I don't want to minimize the zeal or the call to seek God with our whole being. This oath may have been an emphatic proclamation to signify the seriousness and the necessity to diligently follow the True God of The Chosen People. In any case, we know that NOT having faith in Jesus leads to death. Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3:18 (NIV84) ¹⁸ “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”

We have in the words of the prophet Azariah, one of the great promises of scripture. In verse 2, “if you seek him, he will be found by you.” Again in verse 4, “in their distress, they sought him and found him.” Then in verse 15 it is repeated for the third time, “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.”

This promise is also for us today. Our heavenly Father wants each of us to find Him. Through prevenient grace, God the Holy Spirit has already drawn you towards your Creator. Because we are made in the Lord's image, because eternity has been placed in our hearts, we cannot be satisfied in our spirit until we are reconciled to God.

I call on you today to seek God, to seek Jesus, whole heartedly. The Lord will give rest to you personally. Maybe you could use godly rest, I know that I need it. Make sure you understand that this seeking is continually; it is an advancement in our journey. There is no standing still. If you are not seeking God whole heartedly, you are actually in retreat. Preacher Corky Calhoun warns, "Neutral is not a direction in the Kingdom of God."

Let **this** generation be the last to say, "For a long time, the nation was without the True God."

Now, let us seek God through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.