

Follow the Money

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[0 : 00] Now, the 1976 docudrama, All the President's Men, it was about the American Watergate scandal. This docudrama made famous the phrase, follow the money.

But 1,700 years before Watergate made that phrase famous, a Jewish rabbi said something really similar. You may have heard it. He said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Let's get unfamiliar with that phrase for just a minute. Let's unhear it if we can so that we can hear it with fresh ears. Jesus says that our treasure and our hearts are located in the same place. So if we want to know where our heart is, follow the money, as it were. Now, 2 Chronicles 16 is a story which invites us to follow the money.

And God is inviting us today to see where our hearts are and to see where his heart is, too. First, a history lesson. So reading the Old Testament, I think one of the most important things we can do, we can educate ourselves in, is the history of the kingdoms of Israel.

[1 : 19] The way that the, you know, the kingdoms rose and fell. A broad understanding of that will go so far in helping us understand the big, big portion of our Bibles that can seem very opaque to us.

So a little background information on this passage then. You know, David was the first kind of successful king of Israel. Saul was the first king, but David supplanted him. The Lord gave the kingdom to David and he prospered.

And it was a marvelous kingdom that he united, that he unified. And he passed the throne to his son Solomon and Solomon to his son Rehoboam. But in the time of Rehoboam, the kingdom was ripped in two, as it were.

It was split in half, 10 tribes in the north and two tribes in the south. We call them the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom went by the title, the kingdom of Israel. And the southern kingdom went by the title, the kingdom of Judah. So especially in the history books like 1st, 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, and a lot of the prophets, you'll see God addressing Israel or Judah.

[2 : 29] And generally, he's talking about the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. So that's a really helpful term. Now, the northern and southern kingdoms, Israel and Judah, had constant tension after the kingdom split.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam, who reigned in the northern kingdom, they didn't get along, despite their similarities in their name. And so they were constantly at war. Now, Asa, who's the main character sort of in our story tonight in 2nd Chronicles 16, Asa is the fifth king since King David.

But he's the third king in the kingdom of Judah, in that southern kingdom. Now, he inherited the throne from Abijah, his father, and Abijah and Asa together defeated the northern kingdom of Israel. Not a final blow, but a decisive victory for their time. And they plundered them. They plundered Israel, and they filled the storehouses of the people with treasure. And then, I think the first verse that we read tonight, 2nd Chronicles 15, we see that Asa took all that treasure, and he put it in the house of the Lord.

Asa took all the treasure, the plunder, and they put the treasure in the house of the Lord. I think that's really important, and we'll come back to that. Asa reigned for 41 years.

[3 : 51] It's a nice, long reign for a king of Judah. The first 10 years was war. The Lord tested him with war. And Zerah the Ethiopian came with 1 million troops or so.

A massive, imposing army. And we read just a chapter back or so that Asa, in the face of that overwhelming battle, Asa relied on God.

He relied on the Lord. And because of that, because Asa committed himself to the Lord and relied on the Lord, God gave him 25 years of peace.

So the first 10 years of Asa's reign are war. The next 25 years are peace. And during that time, Asa's heart, it seemed, was lit on fire for the Lord.

And he rooted out all the idolatry of the land, and he tore down altars, and he burned idols. And he, I mean, he made it law that you have to worship God in kind of a new and serious way.

[4 : 54] He took it to the next level. Asa, it says in 2 Chronicles 15, 17, his heart was fully committed to the Lord. But the last six years of his reign was war again.

So we went from war to a long period of peace, but now back to war. And here we see that Bashar, the king of Israel at this time, is building a city in a spot that Asa doesn't want him to build.

It's an important fortification. So Asa makes a treaty with the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad. So at that point, Hanani, the seer, or that's what they called prophets at that time, Hanani confronts Asa.

And he says, you relied on Ben-Hadad, but you should have relied on God. So Asa started out as a great king.

He had all this peace as a reward for the Lord, for his reliance on God. Things were going so well. What happened? Let's follow the money.

[6 : 06] So he defeated Zerah the Ethiopian by relying on God, and he put all that treasure into the house of the Lord. Then, when he was threatened by King Bashar, he took the money out of the house of the Lord, and he used it to negotiate a treaty with a foreign king.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Now, before we get ahead of ourselves, this is not a tithing sermon. I always feel that guest preachers have this great opportunity to preach a tithing sermon.

And that's not what we're doing. We're not talking about the treasure so much as we're talking about the heart today. So let's think about this then. What happened? Then what happened next?

Hanani confronted Asa, and the king got so furious that he had this seer locked up in prison. So what was it about Hanani's message to Asa that made him so angry?

Look again at chapter 16, verse 9. This is the focus of our sermon tonight. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

[7 : 24] You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war. Asa was angry because Hanani and I called him a fool.

Hanani said, only a fool would not rely on the God that he knows to be so reliable. He says, God saved you in the past.

You've relied on him, and he's come through for you. Why would you not rely on him again? You're a fool, Asa. Now, if we were to write chapter 16, verse 9, we might write something like this.

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth, looking to strengthen the morally perfect. Or, the eyes of the Lord are closed, waiting for someone to climb his way to the top and prove that he's got what it takes because God backs winners.

We, I mean, we wouldn't actually say that, but that's kind of how we function. We actually think God is waiting for us to prove ourselves in some way.

[8 : 28] Or waiting for us to purify ourselves in some way before he gets behind us. He wants to know that he's backing the winning horse, so to speak. But that's not what God says about himself.

God says, I'm actively looking for someone who I can strengthen. Do you believe that about God? He's eager to strengthen you.

He longs to have your back, to lift you up. Now, what kind of a person, then, are the eyes of the Lord looking for to give that kind of support to?

To give with that sort of eagerness and warmth? What sort of person is this? Who can God get behind? Well, it's not the strong. Because it says that he's looking to strengthen.

The strong don't need extra strength, do they? And it's not the morally perfect. Excuse me. It's not the morally perfect.

[9 : 28] In chapter 15, remember, it said that Asa did not tear down all the high places. He wasn't perfect at all morally. But nevertheless, his heart was fully committed to the Lord.

How can those two things exist together? How can our hearts be fully committed to the Lord? Other translations use phrases like pure in heart. How can our hearts be fully committed to the Lord and us not be perfect?

Or us not be strong? Doesn't it take tremendous willpower and moral purity? Well, I'm going to teach you two simple Hebrew words tonight to help address this.

I love this stuff. So the first word, it's lavav. Lavav. It's the Hebrew word for heart. Now, the ancient Hebrew idea of the heart, they understood the heart to be an organ in the body.

They knew that much. Now, they didn't really have a concept of what the brain was for. So, but the heart, they knew, when this organ stops beating, I stop living, right?

[10:30] So they knew the heart. They knew lavav was the center of physical life. But they also believed that lavav was the center of your inner life.

The heart is the seat of our thoughts, desires, emotions, affections, will, and wisdom. Let me say that again.

That's the inner life. I'll say that list again. Our thoughts, our desires, our emotions, our affections, our will, and our wisdom.

That is the heart. That's what God wants fully committed to him. Now, let's talk about that second word.

Fully, it's the word we translate to fully committed. And the Hebrew word is shalem. Shalem.

Shalem. That's fully committed. Now, the word shalem sounds a lot like a word you might know from Hebrew, shalom.

[11:33] We say that it means peace. And they're related. Shalom comes from shalem. Because shalem is to be whole. It's to be complete.

It's to be unified. So here's an example, a couple examples of how the Old Testament uses shalem to color in this picture for us. In Joshua chapter 8, it says that altars to the Lord should be made of uncut stones or shalem stones.

So God wanted stones for his altar to be untouched by human tools. He didn't want us chipping away and shaping them to what we thought they should look like.

He wanted them shalem. Earlier in 2 Chronicles in chapter 8, verse 16, it says the house of the Lord was complete. Or the house of the Lord was shalem.

All the various parts that would come together to make the whole of this completed temple, when they were unified as a final thing, he says that's shalem.

[12:39] All these different parts unified into one whole. Now the chronicler, and that's what nerds call the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles, the chronicler gives a really simple definition.

He basically just says that to have a heart fully committed to God is to rely on God. So the key then is this.

We will never have hearts fully committed to the Lord until we see that he is actively and eagerly looking to give us strength. We must believe that God really is that good.

That he really desires to do us good. And only if we see that can we really fully commit our hearts to him in any way. And that's faith, isn't it?

Faith, it's believing that God is who he says he is. We have to take him at his word. The theologian A.W. Tozer has a tremendous couple sentences about this concept that never don't stir me.

[13:50] I love this. Let me read them for you. He says, pseudo-faith or fake faith always arranges a way to, sorry, pseudo-faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it.

Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes. For true faith, it is either God or total collapse.

And not since Adam first stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who trusted him. Isn't that wonderful?

Not since Adam first stood up on the earth. Those words are precious to me because I believe they're true. Many of you will be familiar with the 19th century kind of philanthropist, orphanage owner, preacher, pastor named George Mueller.

At one point in his life, George Mueller had 300 orphans in his care in this one large house. And times were hard. And one morning that, you know, he woke up and the children, the 300 kids woke up and they're hungry.

[15:01] Their tummies are rumbling and they're ready for breakfast. And the housekeeper comes up to him and says, Mr. Mueller, we're completely out of food. We had 300 hungry children to feed.

What did he do? Well, Mueller was a man of great faith. Mueller's life was a tremendous example of God's eagerness to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

So what did he do? Well, he said, all right, kids, come sit down at the breakfast table, as we always do. And they sat down at the table and he raised his hands in prayer and gave thanks to God for this food, which they are about to eat.

Amen. And they looked around and there's no food. And then there was a knock at the door. And the town baker was at the door and he said, I couldn't sleep last night, Mr. Mueller. And I think the Lord wanted me to bake twice as much bread as normal and bring you the extra. And God gave them bread for 300 hungry children. And as they're beginning to eat their bread, there's a second knock at the door and it's the town milkman. And he said, Mr. Mueller, I'm sorry to bother you at breakfast, but my milk truck broke down right outside your door. [16:12] And it's going to be stuck for a while. And all this milk is going to go to spoil. Why don't you just have it? Bread and milk for 300 hungry bellies. Not since Adam first stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who trusted him.

Now, I think it's important to ask, you know, we've talked about who God is. We've talked about God's eagerness to strengthen us, that he's actually looking to get behind us. So let's think about who we are in this story then. It's always the question of reading the Old Testament, isn't it? Is how do I apply this to my life? How do I see myself in this story? Well, the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles are actually focused pretty much completely on the kings. The kings of the line of Judah, the line of David, from which this line is the line from which the Messiah or God's promised king would ultimately come. Now, the temptation, the easy way here is to read this like a fairy tale, you know, where there's always a moral to the story. And the moral is like, be like this guy or don't be like this guy. But the reality is, we are meant not to see ourselves as the king, but as the king's people. [17:29] And as the king goes, so the people go. Now, Asa didn't end well. His heart was not fully committed to God in the end. He did not rely on God to the end.

But this story is not meant to stir up in us a sense of danger, lest we end up like Asa. It's meant to stir up in us a sense of longing, longing for a king whose heart is fully committed to God. A king who does completely rely on God. At the cross where Jesus died, we see two things. One, we see the king whose heart is fully committed to God. Jesus, from the line of David, he completely relied on God from start to finish. He completely put his life in God's capable hands. And God raised him up again and glorified him. And secondly, we see God, who is so eager to strengthen us, so eager to support us, that he sent his son to die for us. [18:34] So we can't look at the cross and say, God is the holdout. We can't accuse God of not eagerly going to any lengths necessary to give us strength and to save us.

No one had to twist his arm. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. And now we have this great hope that as the king, so do people. And if we trust in the king with a heart fully committed to God, this king will give us a new heart, which will also rely on him. And there is no sin and no sadness and danger and fear in your life that God is not eager to save you from. And if you barely believe that, like me, just look to Jesus on the cross, the king who died for you and who lives for you. When King Asa took the throne, he had 10 years of war, 25 years of peace, and then more war, and he died at war. When King Jesus takes the throne, when his reign is consummated, when he returns and judges everyone, the living and the dead, and he completes his rule and reign, there will be unending peace. [19:58] Let's throw our chips in with that king. Let's trust in that king for that peace that we so deeply long for. Now, we're being sternly and graciously invited to unite our whole selves in reliance on God.

To put our treasure in the house of the Lord and rely on him alone. But that's not all. We need to see one more thing, one beautiful truth that I believe can transform our hearts. Why is God so eager to strengthen and support us? Why did God send his son to die for us? Follow the money. Because even when your treasure and your heart is far from God, we find in the gospel of Jesus Christ in absolute certainty that God's heart is near to you. That God's heart is for you. Why? Because God took heaven's greatest treasure, his precious son, and he moved him into our house. To prove once and for all that his heart is for us. Jesus became human. Jesus died for us. [21:16] Jesus was raised. Jesus now reigns and rules in heaven. And so we know for sure that we have the heart of God. And that one day, not too long now, Lord willing, we'll have unending

peace.
Amen. Amen.