

“When God Initiates a Reset” 2 Chronicles 15:1-15 Sunday 9AM

You might be surprised to learn just how willing God is to release breakthrough and revival to individuals, churches and regions. Nobody desires authentic spiritual awakening to occur more than the One who is the central focus of all awakenings. God is not reluctant to pour out His goodness upon us. What, then, delays these outpourings and breakthroughs? It is most often an issue of our lack of alignment with the heart of God or our lack of confidence about what it is that He is offering us. Asa was an ancient king in Judah who was doing his best to realign the people with the ways of God. His efforts did not go unnoticed in Heaven. God observed Asa’s commitments and sent a prophetic word to him through Azariah, telling Asa to press in further and to expect great reward for his efforts to cooperate with God’s offer for a spiritual reset. Based on what we see in this passage of scripture, can we be confident that God is offering us a reset in our own generation?

I. God Releases A Word (1-7)

A. The prophetic headline is published (1-2) - “The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, 2 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.””

There were very few ancient kings of Israel who ever attempted to live wholeheartedly for their God. Asa began his reign doing exactly that. Asa’s father and grandfather were kings of Judah before him, and neither were consecrated to the Lord. Sin, defeat and corruption characterized Judah for many years before Asa came to power. He immediately began to enact reformation in Judah that dealt decisively with the idolatry and sexual immorality in the land. So thorough was Asa’s commitment to righteousness that he stripped his mother of her title as queen, due to her worship of foreign gods. The bible declares that Asa’s heart was “wholly true to the Lord”. It was during these early years that God gave Asa military victory against more powerful armies. Here, God sends a prophet to tell Asa that his ways were pleasing to the Lord, and that Asa could expect God to continue to bless him and Judah as long as Asa remained faithful to seek God.

B. The times and seasons were discerned (3-6) - “For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. 5 In 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. 6 They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress."

During the years of the Judges in Israel, chaos reigned across the nation. Everyone was living according to their own views of right and wrong. Repeated patterns of rebellion, chastisement from God, repentance and deliverance continued for many years. When Israel was humble and repentant toward the Lord, God would give them grace and victory. When they rebelled, God would ensure that they were troubled by surrounding enemies. Azariah included this historical context when he delivered the prophetic word to King Asa. It was as if he was releasing both an encouraging word about the future of Judah under Asa and, also, a gentle warning to remind Asa what happens when God's people rebel against Him. We do well to remember that God is gracious, kind and generous. He is good and longs to shower goodness on His children. Having said that, God is not an enabling pushover who ignores it when His children rebel. So much of what we experience from God depends on our heart posture toward Him.

C. The call to believe was released (7) - "But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded."

What an encouraging way for Azariah to end his prophetic release to the king! He tells Asa not to relax his hand concerning all the changes he was bringing to God's people. Don't let your hand, slacken, O King! Take courage that the Lord is with you and be confident that He will greatly reward you for diligently seeking Him. God was offering a reset to His people. If they would continue to press in with consecrated hearts and hands, God will once again establish them in power and national glory. God loves to reward faithfulness and those who live for His glory are sure to experience the breakthroughs that accompany a season of reset from heaven.

II. God Moves A Heart (8-9)

A. Asa was stirred by the word (8a) - "As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage..."

The Apostle Paul tells us in 1st Thessalonians 5:20 that we must not despise prophetic words. Just because Asa heard the prophecy from Azariah did not guarantee it would come to pass. If a prophetic declaration is met with an unbelieving heart, the promise within the prophecy is not likely to manifest. A prophecy is not a promise

unless it is believed, received and obeyed. When Asa heard the word of the Lord through Azariah, he was strengthened in his spirit to know that his God was for him. We must weigh prophetic words, ensure that they are consistent with God's written word, and then believe them as we submit to the Lord's desires. Asa did that, and he found himself encouraged.

B. Asa pressed in with renewed intimacy (8b) - "...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."

God is sovereign, but that does not mean that His desire to release outpouring, awakening and revival will occur independently of His people. God initiates a reset, but it is only according to the response of His people that the possibility of awakening occurs. Asa had been encouraged by the word from the Lord and he immediately began to act in ways consistent with the nature of his God. He scoured the land and got rid of all the traces of pagan worship that his father and grandfather allowed to be established. Additionally, he prioritized the worship of the one true God by repairing the neglected and broken-down altar of the Lord within the temple. God's people had moved so far away from them that they had worked overtime at advancing pagan worship practices while becoming completely indifferent to their departure from their covenant God. Asa took upon the mantle of a radical reformer and led the nation in visible repentance.

C. Asa opened a door for others (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."

Let's pause and learn something from what this verse communicates. As Asa took courageous steps to lead the southern tribes in Judah to repent, great numbers from the northern tribes defected to him. These two groups had been divided for many, many years. They were, in essence, enemies even though they were all the descendants of Abraham. When Judah began to repent, many in Israel began to return to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We should always remember that, when God stirs our hearts for awakening and revival, He is also stirring others. Repentance is contagious when God initiates it and we respond. When God ordains a reset among His people, He begins by stirring

a few who will respond to His offer. As those people respond, Holy spirit awakens the sacred desires that have been dormant in others. When people begin to see the hand of the Lord upon us, they will find themselves craving that same touch on their own lives. So much rides upon our willingness to obey God and press in for intimacy and repentance when He begins to stir us. We do well to wonder how many will follow if we will be the first to respond to His reset.

III. God Awakens His People (10-15)

A. An expression of submission and sacrifice (10-11) - “They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 11 They sacrificed to the LORD on that day from the spoil that they had brought 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep.”

After God granted great military victory, the people responded with a commitment to worship and sacrifice. As much as we might wish to avoid it, the reality is that when a reset is fully embraced by God’s people, they will inevitably enter into the transformational process of growing in generosity, lavish worship and unquestioning sacrifice. Jesus taught that our treasure will follow our hearts. Authenticating their verbal commitments was this singular day of massive worship and sacrifice unto the God who had reset His people’s faith. We are wise to wait for a similar generosity to be evidenced in our own lives before we declare that God has done a great, lasting work in us.

B. A devotion in humility and hunger (12) - “And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul.”

It’s not popular in our day to enter into a vow or covenant with God. While the Bible says that is better to never make a vow than to make one that you break, we have somehow inferred that it is never appropriate to make a vow. Vows are made with an understanding that it is possible not to fulfil our end of the commitment. That is the whole reason we make a vow – to intensify the need for us to remain faithful to the agreement we enter to with the Lord. As the people entered into a covenant with God, they were expressing their hunger to never depart from Him again as a people. They intentionally humbled themselves and made a do-or-die commitment to God to follow Him with all of their faculties. Rests from Heaven usually will not fully manifest until the people whom God has targeted posture themselves in a whatever-it-takes

commitment. When we lay it all on the line with the Lord, His hand begins to move in strong, unprecedented ways.

C. A dedication to purity and protection (13) - "...whoever would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman."

To our modern ears, this sounds drastic, even savage. We must recall that the historical departure from God resulted in far more deaths than any punishment inflicted upon rebellious idolaters who refused the ways of God. The people were actually protecting themselves by dealing intentionally with those in their ranks who were choosing to live in disobedience to God. We should treat sin in our own hearts in the same fashion. The flesh cannot be sanctified – it is only fit to be crucified. It is meant to be put to death. Jesus illustrates this reality when he tells us to pluck out the sinful eye or cut off the transgressing hand. Israel entered into covenant to radically pursue the Lord. Anyone who would not do so was a threat to infect all the people. It was better for some to die for their disobedience rather than to let them live and pull others out of covenant with the Lord. God did not trifle with sin. Neither does He trifle with it now.

D. A celebration of revival and rest (14-15) - "They swore an oath to the LORD with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and with horns. 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 faith of the people is placed on full display at the ratification of their renewed covenant with God. They celebrated their reset. Their joy was not muted as they felt the glorious refreshing of being in a renewed place with the God that their forefathers had shunned. Fully devoted lives unto God are not sad, joyless or boring. That is the lie of the enemy. There is no greater joy than to walk in sacred love with Jesus. The things which once drew us away are now properly seen as pathetic substitutes which never satisfy and cannot impart lasting joy and peace. When God initiates a reset among His people, many things will necessarily change. At the end of all those changes, something else will change: a restored sense of the abiding presence and pleasure of King Jesus.

11:15AM Notes Below

“The Anatomy of a Calling” Acts 26:9-23 Sunday 11:15AM

The Bible clearly and repeatedly presents a reality about every believer: we are all ministers who have a calling. The word minister is not reserved for vocational pastors, evangelists or missionaries. Each person in the Body of Christ has been assigned a ministry, and each of us has a calling from God upon our lives. So many miss this beautiful truth because they do not feel worthy or skilled enough to allow the possibility that God has a definite and specific call for their lives. This message takes a look at one of the most radical calls that God has ever released on a life. When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus to assign Him a new purpose, everything changed. We should anticipate that, as we approach the end of the age, Jesus will be doing the same thing for many people in our generation. Do you allow for the possibility that God is calling you into something distinct from what you have been giving yourself to? Saul never saw it coming, but when his calling found him, there was no denying that Jesus was unveiling the eternal purpose for which Saul had been born.

I. The Unlikelihood of a Call (9-11)

A. Saul was theologically unfit (9) - "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

Without a doubt, if the beginning of the Church Age had been left for us to plan, we NEVER would have chosen Saul of Tarsus as the primary spokesman. As Saul, now called the Apostle Paul, was testifying many years after his conversion and calling, he confessed that his whole purpose had been to oppose anything and everything attached to the name of Jesus Christ. **If a person gets the identity of Jesus wrong, nothing else they happen to understand can be righteous in the Kingdom, yet this unbeliever is the man Jesus personally commissioned to Gospel ministry.** Saul had been, literally, a terrorist against the early Church. As the most zealous opponent to Christianity, Saul plotted and planned about how to fully eradicate the mission of Jesus from off of the planet. This is the man whom Jesus chose to eventually write 2/3 of the New Testament, serve as an apostolic missionary, move in signs and wonders by the Holy Spirit and advance the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the known world during his lifetime. Saul's theology rejected Jesus, even hating Him, before his conversion and calling. Had we been in charge, we never would have chosen a heretic like Saul for this unique and essential mission.

B. Saul was missionally reprobate (10) - “And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.”

As Paul provides more details about his former mission when he was still known as Saul of Tarsus, we get a glimpse of just how motivated he was to destroy Christianity. He began in Jerusalem, the same place where the Gospel had its beginnings. He incarcerated more Christians than he could count, charging them with blasphemy against the God of the Jews. He was deputized by the priesthood to channel all of his fury against Jesus in a constant stream of persecution. Some of these Christians would be executed under Saul's watchful eye. Do not miss this: Saul was in charge of the executions of those who had done nothing more than commit themselves unto the Messiah. Saul had the authority and temporarily held the keys to whether a person lived or died. He made many women to become widows. He made many children to become orphans. This man was a religiously misguided terrorist who wreaked havoc upon the early Church. His mission seemed noble and right to him at the time. Later he would understand that he was a tool of Satan to bring a halt to the spread of the Gospel of Christ.

C. Saul was the enemy of Jesus (11) – “And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

Read the verse above again...slowly. Saul of Tarsus, in raging fury, chased down the early Christians. When he caught them, his mission was singular: force them to deny Jesus. The religious blindness that owned Saul was so deep that, while he was standing in complete opposition to God, he actually thought he was serving God better than anyone. Saul was the enemy of God and had no clue. Religion can be (and is!) used of Satan in order to accomplish the strategies of Hell. Religious words, religious traditions, external practices and memorized creeds can all become powerful weapons AGAINST the mission of Jesus Christ. Saul was moral. Saul was dedicated. Saul was knowledgeable in all the religion of Judaism. Most frighteningly, Saul was convinced that he was right and that God was with him. Let us never underestimate the destructive power of man's blind religion. Let us examine our own hearts to make sure there is nothing within our own hearts about which we are convinced...even though it may have no true foundation in the Word of God. May our personal convictions, faith-traditions, our pet

doctrines never rise to the level that they actually impede the mission of God in our generation.

II. The Interruption in a Call (12-18)

A. Saul had his own mission (12) - "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests."

As Saul was carrying out his own mission to rid the world of Jesus-followers, he chose to move into Damascus to exterminate the disciples whom he had heard were living there. He had arrest warrants in hand and rose early in the day to make the trip into that city. Saul was doing what he loved, and we can almost see the demonic gleam in his eye as he began moving toward his next appointment to oppose Jesus of Nazareth.

B. Jesus knows how to get through to us (13-14) – "At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" **With the strong, he shows Himself stronger**

This is the moment that everything, and I mean everything, changed for Saul of Tarsus. The proud, driven religious terrorist was encountered by One whose glory filled the sky above Saul. The presence of the resurrected Son of God came with an impossibly bright light that outshined the noonday sun. Saul was toppled from off the horse or donkey that he had mounted. While still laying in the dusty road, Saul heard an authoritative voice that called him by name and demanded to know why Saul was persecuting Him. Saul of Tarsus was being arrested by Jesus Christ. Saul had warrants written by human hands. Jesus had His own warrant which was authorized by the throne of the Father. The Lord knew just how to get through to Saul. With the strong, Jesus shows Himself to be stronger - *incomparably* stronger. Jesus says to Saul that it was not wise for him to make things so hard on himself. When Jesus spoke of Saul's kicking against the goads, He was referencing the previously undisclosed reality that Saul had been resisting the pricking of his heart from the Holy Spirit. Yes, Saul had suppressed the voice of God that had been warning him that he was living in misguided zeal. Jesus was bringing an end to any lingering doubt. He got through to Saul with a display of power that reduced the enemy of the Church to being face-down in the dirt.

C. As Lord, Jesus initiates a reset (15-18) - “And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles-to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

In a conversation that would have lasted less than thirty seconds, Jesus Christ summons Saul of Tarsus into His everlasting purposes. Saul asks a question that he was probably dreading the answer to: Who are you, Lord? Jesus identifies Himself as the One whom Saul had been fighting. Imagine the terror that must have filled Saul's soul as he realized that the One whom he hated was the Messiah. Everything Saul had lived for and believed came crumbling down on him. In addition to the ruin of his former purpose as an enemy to the Church, Saul is now told that he will spend the rest of his life serving Jesus. He was going to give witness to this moment of his conversion and calling. Besides that, Jesus told him, he would be sent to the Gentiles to proclaim the truth about Jesus. Nothing would have been more astounding than for Saul, an orthodox Jew, to learn that his life mission would be spent serving the despised Gentiles for the glory of Jesus. Adding detail, Jesus tells Saul that he would bring spiritual light to the Gentiles' blindness. Satan would lose his grip on their souls as Saul ministered life, love and truth to them. The Gentiles would receive forgiveness and a place within the family of God. This, friends, is a massive reset for Saul of Tarsus. Yes, everything changed in that encounter. In our generation there is an assumption that God does not do this anymore. That is a lie. God still reserves the right to turn on its head any life that He chooses. His purposes can swallow our own. He has bought us with the price of His Son's blood. We are no longer our own. When Jesus initiates a reset in an individual, a local church or a region, our only response must be to align ourselves with what He is saying and what He is doing. If we persist in our former paths, we will be opposed by the God who loves us. His commitment to His own plans is so strong that He will put any of us face-down in the dirt if that is what is required. If we trust, submit, believe and obey, there will be no need for such drama. His ways are best. When He ordains a reset, we must say Yes.

III. The Flow from a Calling (19-23)

A. Obedience (19) - "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision..."

What glory there is as the Apostle Paul testifies that his response was one of obedience. Jesus called and Saul obeyed. This testimony summarizes Paul's entrance into his own life purpose. The vision came, the calling was communicated, and Saul of Tarsus became the Apostle Paul who would be the face of the Gospel mission until the day of his own martyrdom. Will you obey the calling of God on your life? When He releases a vision for our lives, will we boldly embrace it? Will we give in to the temptation to negotiate the calling with Him? Will we ignore it and stay determined to live the life we envisioned for ourselves? Not Saul. Saul said yes to the heavenly vision and the course of human history would begin to swing on this hinge of his obedience. Never underestimate the force of your obedience to the call of God. He never gives all the details at the onset. He wants you to obey the headline in the absence of all the fine print.

B. Hard work (20) – "...but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."

It is not all signs, wonders, visions and supernatural encounters. Every calling comes with hard work. He sought to win his fellow-Jews and also had to break up the hard ground of Gentile pagans' hearts. Paul also committed in certain seasons to raise all of his necessary funding by stitching tents and selling them. Ministry is not for the faint of heart or the slack of hand. Kingdom calling involves a tenacious work ethic. Never let anyone tell you otherwise.

C. Opposition will arise (21) – "For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me."

For Paul there would be ceaseless travels, times without money, sleepless nights, rejection by former friends and long seasons of training new converts. Add to this all the warfare that would come against him from Satan, and you will quickly understand that those who answer the calling of God for their lives will experience fierce opposition at times. If the enemy does not fight it, the reason is

because that it is no threat to his own hellish agenda. Paul endured beatings, imprisonments, at least one stoning, constant defamation and occasional betrayal and abandonment. Religious opposition was the reality for Paul as he lived out his assignment from Jesus. Those who stand with Christ become a bullseye for the devil and for those whose deepest commitments are to religious control and maintaining a system that benefits them while manipulating others.

D. Dependence (22a) – “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great...”

The devil was against Paul. Zealous Jewish controllers fiercely opposed him. The Greco-Roman culture hated his message of one God who requires unalloyed devotion. With everything that Paul had to press through, his testimony in this verse was that he was able to stand as a witness because he had received the help that God offers. Paul did not testify of his theological brilliance, his thick-skinned endurance, his supernatural power or anything else that would have drawn attention to himself. Paul simply gave God the glory and made sure everyone knew that he had advanced simply by depending upon the power of God. That is true for all of us who faithfully live out our Kingdom callings. Your giftedness cannot carry you all the way. You will never have enough resources to make it without daily dependence upon Jesus. You do not have enough friends in the world to carry you across the finish line. No, when all is said and done, you will also be able to testify that God’s grace led you thus far, and His grace will lead you home.

E. Tenacity (22b-23) – “...saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

During his decades of serving Jesus, Paul never moved off his message. Jesus of Nazareth was God’s Messiah and the Savior of all who trust in Him. He kept his Gospel message free from debris - Jesus lived, suffered, died and rose. Jesus was the Light of the world. Jesus was Life to the spiritually dead. He was the Savior of both Jews and Gentile. Nothing can be added to Paul’s message. Nothing dare be taken away from Paul’s message. Paul remained tenacious and was never moved off his message. There was no spin from the Apostle. Jesus was his Lord. Jesus was his Savior. Jesus was his message. Paul’s calling ended on earth at the hands of a Roman executioner whom, history says, chopped off Paul’s

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head. Our callings have great impact upon the generation in which we live. Additionally, our callings follow us into eternity where we will be given a final review at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul obeyed his calling, lived it out at great cost and finished in faithfulness. May every believer be motivated and committed to do the same.