

Kings and Prophets 13-06-07b

We resume our study now in 1 Kings chapter 15. We've set sort of a contextual background here, looking at the nature of ascertaining righteousness. How do we know that we are in the will of God? How do we know that our lives are accounting for something? And how can we be fooled into thinking we are when we're really not? This would seem to be a pretty important topic for us.

We don't want to waste our days, certainly the ones that are before us. We have the potential to maximize our righteousness by faith, to maximize our investment in God's kingdom, to present ourselves as living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to God. It is our reasonable service to not be conformed to the world, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

And these are not just platitudes, they're not just little spiritual refrigerator magnets. These are things we're supposed to do. And time is passing.

There's not a one of us that is as young right now as they were this morning. We've spent a day and this day is never coming back. There is a finite number of days and you've got one less now than you had when you woke up this morning.

And it will always be that way to the end of life. We think, well, I've got plenty, it's an infinitude, it doesn't really matter as a fractional amount. Well, the older you get, the more you realize there's really only a limited number left.

I better start paying attention to how I spend my time. Wouldn't it be great if we would learn that lesson young and early and really maximize the potential that God has given us? 1 Kings 15, beginning at verse 9. In the 20th year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa became king over Judah and he reigned 41 years in Jerusalem. His grandmother's name was Ma'akah, the granddaughter of Abishalom.

Interestingly, memory serves, I think Abishalom's mother was also named Ma'akah, the wife of David. Ma'akah, by the way, is a compound name or it's a name formed from a compound in Hebrew of the maim. You've heard me say many times that these Hebrew prepositions many times are just a consonant or a consonant with a vowel.

And the letter M means of or from, Ma'akah. And when you look at this, you find out that the word is one that basically means something that is pressed, something that is, it means to press, to pressure, to squeeze, to stick, you know, something to be stuck. It's a tight place.

It's a cessation of movement due to friction or pressure. So how would you like your grandma or your mother-in-law or anybody else to be named pressure? Billy Joel had a great song called Pressure and it echoed pressure, pressure, pressure. That's the lady's name.

Her name means under pressure, to squeeze, Ma'akah. Now this also becomes the name of a

region that is on the outskirts of Syria and on the border of Israel. And it is both topographically and geographically pressed between those two kingdoms.

It's a little place squeezed between Syria and northern Israel. And there are a number of women in the Bible who have this name and even a couple of men. So it's not without significance.

And especially so when you go back to verse, boy, the verse numbers in this Bible are too small for me to read in dim light. Verse 2 of chapter 15, 18th year of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Abijah became king over Judah. He reigned three years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Ma'akah, the granddaughter of Abishalom. You come down to verse 9, 20th year of Jeroboam, king of Israel. Asa became king, reigned 41 years.

His grandmother's name was... Why do we care who his grandmother was? How many other places in scripture are you going along and behold, here was Gideon threshing indoors and the angel came along. His grandmother's name was Elisheva or something. Why is somebody's grandmother suddenly popping out of the woodwork here twice in the same chapter within nine verses? Because she is a formidable woman.

She is a force of nature. She's something to be reckoned with. She's influential.

She's powerful. She's in the wings. She's like the queen mother.

She's this villainous in the background. Now, we don't know this yet because it's just mentioned. You say, well, people mentioned, you know, when women are mentioned in scripture, that's usually a good thing.

Line of Christ, Ruth the Moabite, Rahab the harlot, you have... And you say, wow, you know, these great women. Not so much here. This woman is the black widow spider.

She is the come into my parlor, said grandma to the grandson type of woman. And she is poison for the southern kingdom of Judah. Her influence.

And you will notice that when things are going well in Israel, people assume their proper functions. Now, in our day and age, you can't say this. There will probably come a day when what I am about to say will be illegal in this country.

So let me say it while I can before they take the MP3 down off the future website. I will say it now. There are assignments for people that do not reflect on their value, their intelligence, their worth, their standing before God or anything else.

But some of them are leadership and some of them are not leadership. Women in ancient Israel were not called to leadership. In the same way that the tribe of Zebulun was not called to be priests.

Did the men of Zebulun go up and say, harumph, harumph? How dare you say that we can? Are you saying that these men of Levi are holier than us? Are they more qualified? Do they do a better job of butchering beef than we do? How dare you restrict the priesthood only to the tribe of Levi? How politically incorrect can you get? You racist, right? It is the same argument when it comes to women in leadership roles, whether it is in ancient Israel or the modern church. It is a touchy subject. It has split churches and blown up denominations.

It is a political football. It raises emotional hackles. But hear me, from the word of God, God does not assign leadership roles in Israel or the church to women.

Get over it. That's the way God chose it. You might just as well get upset when he only assigned the priesthood to Levi.

It is not a commentary on ability, value, worth, intelligence, or any other attribute that people ought to get upset about. Anytime you hear somebody caviling and saying, how dare you not let women do this or that or the other, you antique dinosaur patriarch stuck in the past bad guy, you racist. Now, you can be labeled a racist for anything you say that in any way restricts anybody from doing anything they want to do.

They get emotional and call you a bigot and a racist. And it has nothing to do with race. Ma'akha, so when you see Ma'akha prominent in the governmental life of Judah over two different reigns of kings, this is a bad thing.

Remember all of the evil that we saw in the days of Adonijah? How was he trying to perpetrate that? Who did he go to to try to get himself wormed into the rulership? I want to marry Abishag. I want to negotiate with Bathsheba. I'm working it on the women's side, on the non-authorized authority side.

Women do a lot of things. I don't have to make a big defense of this because it is obvious to anybody who looks at it dispassionately, enlisted men are not inferior to officers. They have a different role.

Officers are useless and worthless without enlisted men to command and to carry out the policies. And in many ways, it's great to be enlisted because you do not have to sit through endless meetings. You do not have to sit there and draft up plans.

You do not have to waste your time with political infighting and hoping that somebody doesn't stab you in the back or give you a bad fitness report that ends your career because of a personality conflict. Pro-con marks, I mean, you can get crossways with somebody, but in the enlisted world, it's much easier to survive one bad set of marks, one guy that you don't get along with. It's not personality driven.

The beautiful thing about the enlisted function and staff NCOs is you are doing the job. Your performance is measured by whether or not the job gets done. It's not how politically satisfactory it is or if you blacked somebody's eye because they were for it and you were against

it and now they're forever your mortal enemy.

There is some but far less politics for the ladies. There is a lot of subtlety and relationship based interaction that can be exploited for political purposes. God knows this about ladies.

You're built to be nurturers, built to have relationships, built to have these complex multifaceted, multidimensional, multitasked lives. And it's great. But it is easier to exploit that world for political gain.

And God says, no, I'm going to use your gifts and talents and your architecture to do these tasks over here. I'm going to build men to be less that way for what they do. These guys can just build different, different job, different architecture.

Look at the body. My elbow doesn't bend in a way for nursing children. Women's elbows do.

That's why you can't throw a rock in a lot of cases with the same force or accuracy as a guy. Your elbow is built for cradling children. Your hips are built different.

Your body is built differently and padded differently. Your whole physiognomy is organized for the functions that God has assigned. It's a gift.

It's a blessing. It's a plus. Men built differently to do a different job, built different emotionally, built different men, compartmentalize in ways that women can never do.

Women don't understand how can you sit there? And it's because it's in this room and that door shut right now. I see no mystery. That's over here.

This is over here. Women, everything is integrated. Everything is synthetic.

Everything affects everything else. And, you know, I dropped my favorite vase and now I just pruned my bush down to the prune, my flowers and my trees and everything right down to the roots because I was annoyed over dropping this vase for me. You know, if I saw a board too short, it doesn't affect the way I mow the lawn.

But for a woman, one thing goes wrong. Everything is colored. The skies have clouded over in the I'm speaking in generalities now.

But women are built to be synthetic. Men are built to be compartmentalized. It's not Mars and Venus.

It's outdoors with the bunnies in the daisies and the flowers versus the harsh lunar landscape of foxholes and flying bullets. It's just a different way of being built. I say that to say this.

When you see Maaka mentioned twice in this passage, why is that? It's not because she should have been the queen. She shouldn't be in this chapter. It begins with Rehoboam.

This lady shouldn't have been anywhere near power, shouldn't have been able to position

herself like some Mata Hari or Cleopatra or name your modern political wife that's up there being powerful when she shouldn't be and doesn't have an elected office. But she is. It is the responsibility of everyone to figure out what their assigned role and function is and concentrate on it and fulfill it.

And don't be looking over the fence saying, well, just because I'm not a woman, why can't I do this and the other? Just because I'm not a man, why can't I do this, that and the other? It's not a matter of can you? It is a matter of should you? Should you? What did we talk about in the first lesson this evening? Don't go on feelings. I feel oppressed because I cannot do this thing that these people over here are doing. I feel limited.

I feel unfulfilled. I feel unhappy. And I think that if I could do this thing, if I'm somebody tells me I can't.

And so now I'm going to be frustrated until I prove them wrong. That's not rational. That's emotional.

Our spiritual life before God is rational. It is guided by the truth of God's word. So this Ma'aka woman should never be here.

And the fact that she is there creates what her name means. Pressure, a tight sticking place, a problem, friction. Why is she mentioned twice? It didn't go away.

She's still there. This is now her third king reign where she's still in the wings. You know, the guy under the crown may change, but I'm still here weaving my webs and pulling my strings and exerting my influence.

And the more elderly she gets, the more authority she wields because she's been around so long and she knows where all the chains are to be pulled and where all the goats are tied and where all the bodies are buried, where all the skeletons hang in what closets. She's entrenched. Well, this is an issue for King Asa, not his fault.

You don't get to pick your grandma. Right. By the way, this word I think in Hebrew is just mother.

Uh, it keeps drifting down. She's, she's the queen mother. That's not the queen grandmother or the queen great grandmother.

She's just the queen mother. Um, his grandmother's name was Ma'aka, the granddaughter of Absalom. Ab, Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father, David.

Notice mother and father are floating terms that can skip generations. This becomes important when you're looking at some of the genealogical records where generations are skipped. He banished the perverted persons from the land and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.

Fathers, plural, who are the fathers that had made these perverted idols? Solomon, Rehoboam and Abijah. Did you ever hear Hank Williams Jr. sing family tradition? These idols are a family tradition. Asa broke that tradition, jumped back to the days of David, removed the idols that his fathers had made.

Also, verse 13, he removed Ma'aka, his grandmother, from being queen mother. Why? She had made an obscenity of Asherah. I don't care who you are, you old bat.

You're making idols. I don't care if you are my grandmother, I'm the king. I don't care how long you've been entrenched.

Don't care how many political allies you have, how many threats you make. You're out, you're gone. This is a hard decision to make about your grandma with all the history and all the connections, all the potential threats that she can fulfill.

What is Asa operating on here? Soft spot for grandma or what is right? You see the distinction between appealing to an absolute standard. He has weighed her in the scale and found her wanting. That's objective.

Lady, you're gone. You're out. Now, what exactly did he do? He removed his grandmother from being queen mother.

Where in any of the Mosaic legislation or any of the history of Israel has there ever been some sort of a chair for the queen mother? When did this become an office that you could be removed from? Well, she's pretty much invented the thing. She has, it's a self-created appointment and he just abolished it. You don't get your own little staff.

You don't get your own court. You don't have your own chair. You're not a part of the government of Judah anymore.

And that's what she had become. And Asa knows it's wrong. How does he know? He didn't find it out from his father.

Didn't find it out from his grandfather. He had to go back and find good teaching, faithful teaching of the word of God. Listen to the prophets who are still functioning, the priests who are still faithful to their commission.

And he has a responsive heart and it doesn't matter what the rest of his family is doing. He does what is right. Asa cut down her obscene image and burned it by the Brook Kidron, but the high places were not removed.

There are shrines, the idols have been taken out. The worship has been discouraged, but the places are still there. And I asked myself, why did he not remove the high places? There is an issue of practicality that comes into play when you try to sweep clean with a new broom.

There's a lot of things that are within your power to do. And there are some things you cannot.

What kind of property do you think these high places sit on? Are these national parks? Is this the King's land? The King has control over his land.

But remember, under the law of Moses, land that is the hereditary possession of families and clans within tribes belongs to them. And Asa does not have the authority to go on private property and demolish these high places. He can outlaw the idols, but structures on land, that's beyond his authority.

And he also knows where his authority stops. It's not Asa's fault that these high places are not removed. He can outlaw the worship.

He can get rid of the idols, which are like contraband. They're like illegal drugs in this country. But there's a point that his authority cannot, practically speaking, he cannot exceed his own authority.

And I submit that the reason these high places are not removed is he really can't remove them. He would have to go send troops. This would create pretty much civil war because he's having to send troops into people's private property.

This would be like saying, well, you can't have, you know, the government said you can't have a still during prohibition on your land. And they would send government agents onto people's land to find the stills and dismantle them and so on. But there was a huge amount of bloodshed over that.

It was virtually a civil war, especially in the South. Revenuers are coming in and guys trying to operate illegal moonshine stills and so on. And it wasn't really practical in terms of enforcement without creating huge amounts of bloodshed.

So the high places are not removed. This is my speculation on why it did not happen, because you don't see anything in Ace's heart or in his policies that he didn't have the will or the desire. I think it wasn't practical.

It wasn't feasible. A guy that will remove his own grandma, I don't think would have any philosophical difficulties with, you know, getting rid of high places. I just don't think he could.

And that's one idea of why. But Ace's heart was loyal to the Lord all his days. Wouldn't this be a great epitaph? Wouldn't this be a great entry at the close of the book that will be opened at the judgment under our name? You know, it's going to be kind of like a who's who.

If you've ever read one of those articles on different people organized alphabetically, you come to the entry in the book under your name, born here, saved here, went to this church. Here are the things that were done in faith and obedience. Here are the challenges that were faced and the tests that were passed.

Here's some of the failures. Here's some of the unrepentant, unacknowledged stuff. But when

you get to the end, fill in your name here.

Had a heart faithful to the Lord all his days, all her days. I cannot think this is the equivalent of well done, thou good and faithful servant. And notice it doesn't mean that he didn't make mistakes.

Ace doesn't do everything exactly right. Just like David, his forefather didn't do everything exactly right. But what does the Bible say about David's heart? He had a heart that was loyal.

He was a man after God's own heart. This is what we're after. God can forgive a lot.

God can overlook a lot. God can mend and fix a lot for the man or woman whose heart is for him. His heart was loyal to the Lord all his days.

He also brought into the house of the Lord, the things which his father had dedicated and the things which he himself had dedicated, silver and gold. And utensils. Now, this is interesting because he brought into the house of the Lord, the things his father had dedicated.

His father did this, you know, you remember Abijah, the man of all talk and few actions. Behold, I dedicate this wonderful set of gold utensils to the service of the Lord. And they sat in his backyard.

Behold, I dedicate these silver shields to the service of the Lord. And they hung on the barracks wall. Asa said, look, if these belong to the Lord, we need to put them in the Lord's house, not my house.

And so he had the troops pack those things up and take them where they belong. If this thing is designated holy to the Lord, then it goes to the Lord. Remember, Jesus is going to chide the Pharisees for this kind of thing.

They would declare stuff to be Corban and whatnot. And, oh, sorry, mom and dad, I can't support you because I've dedicated my money to the Lord, but they hadn't given the money to the Lord. They still had it, but they wouldn't give it to the parents or to the Lord.

They just hung on to it. Asa is paying attention to detail. He looked around, he said, I remember, you know, 17 years ago, we had this big dedication service and here this stuff sits.

It belongs to the Lord. And so he took it down and put it where it belonged. And when he dedicated a thing, he didn't hang on to it like his father did.

When he dedicated a thing, he sent it down to the temple, to the house of the Lord, where it belonged. We often make these notional, nominal commitments to God or about the things of God. Do we fulfill that commitment? Do we look after it? Do we pay attention? Do we follow up? You know, I think there's some opportunities in the church or in the congregation.

I think there's some opportunities in my family. I've got, I seem to have a knack or God has

given me an ability or, you know, I've got a way I can serve. I've got people that occasionally want to talk to me and I told them I would look something up and get back to them.

You know, last time I was at a gathering or whatever, somebody brought up a question. I said, you know, I'll do some research on that and follow up and send it to you. I've got a great book on that.

I'll send it to you. Where's your follow up? Where's your commitment? Where's your attention to detail? We want to be sure that we are people of our word, that we are people who are diligent. He that is faithful in that which is least be faithful, follow up, pay attention to detail, look at where things may have fallen to the ground, pick it back up.

You know, you can have a large tent, one pole falls over and you don't think much about it, but if you don't fix that, there can be this domino effect. There are stories of these huge circus tents falling down because one, one stay gave way, one support line stake came up, which made a collapse, which caused this to lean, which caused this to lean. And while some guys up there trying to fly the trapeze, the whole thing comes down, you know, for want of a nail, the war is lost.

Faithfulness in little things. Asa is faithful in the little things. What do we know about Asa so far? We've only read a few verses.

What do we already know about it? He sits and analyzes. He figures things out. You know, grandma's got to go.

These idols have got to go. This false worship, this doesn't line up with the covenant we have with our God. I don't want to be like my father being a big blowhard about God and not doing anything about God.

I'm going to do, I'm going to be, I'm going to act. I'm going to ensure that these things take place. And he follows up.

Large things, small things. Who cares if a set of shields do or don't hang down at the house of the Lord? If it's dedicated to the Lord, that makes it a big thing, no matter how small. Now there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days.

How long is Baasha king in Israel? Skip down to verse 33 of this chapter. In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah became king over all Israel. Skip down to verse eight of chapter 16.

In the 26th year of Asa, Elah the son of Baasha became king over Israel. So they've got quite an overlap here. Do they not? And all their days, there is war between them.

Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah. We know something about Ramah. Who's from Ramah? Who hangs out in Ramah and has a big ministry there for many,

many years? Who's the first prophet in Israel? Samuel.

This place has a spiritual history, a spiritual connection. It's the origination point for prophets in Israel that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. It's a strategic location.

He can control commerce and traffic to the south at Ramah. By the way, this is one of the reasons Samuel was there because it is a place where traffic passes. People going either direction can get spiritual guidance and support.

It's a nexus. It's a strategic point. And so Baasha recognizes this and says, I'm going to seize that thing and I can dominate the south.

Asa took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the house of the Lord. Look at the opportunity that he now has some years later because he has done what was right before the Lord. Now he's got assets that he can draw upon that he would not have had otherwise.

So he goes to that same silver and gold that he has collected and placed in the house of the Lord. It's consolidated its assets, its resources. Now in a time of crisis, he can draw on those to accomplish a strategic objective.

And that's what he does. So Asa gathers all these up and sent them to Ben-Hadad, the son of Tot-Ramon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus saying, let there be a treaty between you and me as there was between my father and your father. Look, I've sent you a present of silver and gold.

Come break your treaty with Baasha, king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me. Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. He attacked Ehon, Dan, Abel, Bat, Beit Ma'akah.

There's that word again, Beit Ma'akah. What do you think Beit Ma'akah means in Hebrew? House of pressure, pressure, pressure, house of pressure. Syrian allies attacked that thing.

Asa doesn't have the military resources to do this himself. So his ally does it for him. And all of Chinoroth, with all the land of Naphtali, it happened when Baasha heard it that he stopped building Ramah and remained in Tirzah.

So King Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah, none were exempted. They took away the stones and timber that Baasha had stockpiled in the city of Ramah to make this fortification and control them. And now he gets that as well.

And he's going to use those materials to build Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. The rest of the acts of Asa are recorded elsewhere, which is what we're going to look at next time, the more detailed record of Asa in Second Chronicles. But here's the thing, Asa has a heart that is loyal to the Lord.

There are people who say, well, you know, Asa, why didn't he just go to the Lord and have a

supernatural victory over the North? Why did he go to the Syrians? Was that a good idea? Here's the thing. If you have a heart that is loyal to the Lord, we'll look next week and try to decide if everything Asa did was good. But if your heart is for the Lord, God can recover you from any misstep.

Look at the life of King David, his forefather. David didn't do everything right, but David is the most beloved man in the Old Testament in the eyes of God. Why? His heart remains loyal to God.

He has many faltering steps. He has many human failures, but his heart is steadfast toward the Lord. And you see that reflected in psalm after psalm after psalm, where David pours out his heart, about his love for the Lord with all of his heart and all of his soul and all of his strength and all of his mind.

And because of that, even your missteps can work together for good. When Abijah went up there and made a fool of himself in Northern Israel, it worked together for good. Why? Because God was blessing those people who had a heart for him down in Judah.

It wasn't time for them to be overrun and brought under the hegemony of the north. And even though they had a fool for a king who made a really stupid strategic mistake, God blessed them by blessing him. God delivered them by delivering him.

We have that same blessing. We have that same opportunity. We're not always going to choose right.

We're not going to always step in the right direction and think correctly and act correctly. But if our heart is loyal to the Lord, if we return to him, if we try to pay attention to detail, if we try to follow this example of Asa in being committed and following up on our commitments, God will bless us. God will turn even our failures into blessings.

It's all a matter of heart, not a matter of feelings. Anytime you say heart, we think, oh, I just have to really feel gushy about God. I hope we've established tonight that it's not related to feelings.

Your heart establishes policy. Your heart establishes priority. Your heart is your motivation and your momentum in a particular direction.

And if you maintain that at all costs and under all circumstances toward God, there is no blessing that God will not grant to us in the outworking of his plan and purpose and in the accomplishment of his goals for us. We are blessed now and we'll be equipped and blessed for service in the future. Well, we'll close here in a word of prayer.

We're going to pick up with some very interesting details about the reign of Asa and his contemporaries in the North. And when I say contemporaries, plural, he has a lot of them. There is a stability in the South that is utterly lacking in the North, and we're going to see that

contrast next time.

But we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the variety of ways that you encourage us to faith, to dedication, to commitment, to our transformation and renewal after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, to have his mind in us.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will use these examples and these illustrations from your word to create a compelling case in our souls for redeeming the time in these evil days, for pursuing your will for our lives on a moment-by-moment basis in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.