

Looking for Loyalty

2 Chronicles 16:7-9

Sunday, April 3, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

- Introduction: Loyalty

Let's start with a bad joke from the internet. "A German Shepherd, Doberman and a cat have died. All three are faced with God who wants to know what they believe. The German shepherd says: 'I believe in discipline, training and loyalty to my master.' 'Good,' says God. 'Then sit down on my right side. Doberman, what do you believe in?' The Doberman answers: 'I believe in the love, care and protection of my master.' 'Ah,' said God. 'You may sit to my left.' Then he looks at the cat and asks, 'And what do you believe in?' The cat answers: 'I believe you're sitting on my seat'"* This passage speaks to loyalty and to winning battles, and the application to us becomes clear when we consider that some of the greatest battles are within ourselves, or among individuals.

Some years ago I wrote in my Bible to compare this verse, 2 Chronicles 16:9, with Galatians 5:1, and I've spent all week trying to remember why. I think I might have it because it mentions that God searches the earth, so does Satan and there are different traps or opportunities before us because of this. Satan roves around like a lion looking for victims in 1 Peter 5:6-9. In 2 Chronicles 16:9 God looks for loyalty that He may show Himself strong. In 2 Chronicles that would mean military victory. In Galatians 5 that victory means freedom in Christ from legalistic, manipulative people. Let's take a look at this promise and at a couple of possible applications.

- Set the stage

In the days of the Old Testament, 2 Chronicles tells the story of Asa, a godly king who determined to seek God in prayer before making major decisions and did well, but later in his life stopped this practice and made decisions based on his best judgment at the time. He entered into a treaty with the King of Syria and in doing so estranged himself from his former ally in Israel. Afterward, Hanani, a seer (an old term for a prophet) visited the king and scolded him for the bad alliance. He had traded a trustworthy ally for an untrustworthy one, and he had not sought God first. The prophet reminded him that he had won great battles trusting in God but because of this mis-step, he would suffer warfare. Asa does not take this well and has Hanani thrown into prison. The rest of his reign did not go well, and he eventually dies.

- Amplify

In the middle of his critique, Hanani states a principle that is of great value to us today. He said, "for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." This was something that King Asa and the nation of Judah had experienced in the past, but Asa had stepped away from it, and would have trouble because of it. The promise in this verse is that God is always on the look to "show Himself strong" in the lives of people who "whose heart is loyal to Him." The word for "loyal" is literally "friendly", and for King Asa that meant winning battles. We are not commanding armies into the field of battle, but we do face battles in our lives of a different sort.

- Application

Earlier on in the chapter back in 2 Chronicles, Asa, the king, participated in a national revival in which everyone committed to seek the Lord, and all went well for some time. It was late in life that Asa made the choice to form a partnership with Syria that leads Hanani the seer to criticize him. When confronted, Asa could have admitted his poor choice, repented, and asked Hanani if the Lord had any advice for him now. Instead, he got mad and there revealed that some of the greatest battles involve not armies but are within us. Our battle is when we are tempted to simply get mad when an apology or repentance is the proper response. What would have happened if the king had responded that way? God would have found a way to show Himself large in his life again, I suspect. Sometimes our greatest victories are when we humbly admit our failures and ask forgiveness. That can be a time when God rises great in our lives.

I think there is another application, and it is when the battles get interpersonal. Galatians 5 finds the Apostle Paul arguing with false teachers who deny that Christ is sufficient for salvation but rather there must also be the keeping of the Law, whereas Paul affirmed the value of all the Old Testament but maintained that the feasts and practices were optional for those who were not raised in them. Hidden in this argument, I believe, is the issue of control. People were trying to dictate to the fledgling churches how they must believe, and live. Such a position of power will always be attractive to manipulative people who love to define and command. May God give you wisdom when dealing with such people, to recognize their efforts and refute them when they try to control. There is no place in the Christian life for manipulation and intimidation.

- Conclusion

God's eye's rove around the world looking for those who are loyal, so that He might show Himself strong on behalf of that person. For the Old Testament King Asa that meant military victories but there are victories within ourselves and among people that are just as important, perhaps even more important than military victories. If that king had the self control to admit his fault and seek God, would he not have been forgiven? Is it not a victory for us to admit our faults rather than give in to anger when confronted? Is it not also a victory when God gives you discernment to recognize someone who uses religious manipulation to gain control over people? Those are just a couple of examples of how God could rise up great in the lives of loyal people today.