

Sermon
Rev. T.S. Atkinson

"A COVENANT TO SEEK THE LORD"

March 8th, 1981
2 Chronicles 14,15

D.L. Moody once said that the best way to revive a church is to build a fire in the pulpit, and I think that perhaps that is true. Build a fire in the pulpit. Well, that's what happened in the reign of King Asa. The Lord built a fire in the pulpit. He, the Spirit of God came upon the prophet, Azariah, and that spirit filled prophet went with boldness, and he spoke to none other than the king in all of Judah and Benjamin. And he came to them with a very simple message, "Seek the Lord". If you seek the Lord, he will be found by you. But if you forsake the Lord, he will forsake you. And then he gave a number of illustrations probably taken from the time of the judges when everyone did what was right in his own eyes and did not seek the Lord. And the chaos that ensued. And then he called King Asa and all those gathered around him to be strong, and to take courage for the Lord would reward them for their work. And then King Asa took up the challenge, responding to the message of the prophet Azariah. And he sought to reform his kingdom by rooting out the detestable idols which had been introduced to the land, The false worship, the immorality. And he sought to reform his people according to the Word of God and in obedience to the Word of God spoken through the prophet. And then in his role of leadership, he gathered together all of his people to Jerusalem. Imagine that throng. Thousands and thousands, hundreds of thousands of people gathered together. And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with their heart and soul. And this passage conjures up images which have repeated. In a look to this passage throughout the years, I think of the Scottish covenants in the 17th century, where they gathered, thousands strong in the fields and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, heart and soul, and were willing to lay down their lives for that solemn oath and covenant and obedience to the Lord.

Every generation of Christians, every generation of the church is called upon by God, I believe, to renew that covenant, that covenant that God has entered into with his people. That first generation of a church, or a family, comes to know Christ as their Savior, they enter into that covenant relationship and they seek to serve the Lord, heart and soul. And then the second generation, some of that fervor and zeal diminishes, and then the third generation the fires have grown cold and then there is darkness. And God once more calls the people to seek the Lord, to renew the covenant (to seek the Lord, heart and soul). And I know from your own experience, perhaps when you became a Christian you were really zealous for the Lord, and you were joyful in the Lord. And then worship becomes a drag, private devotions fall off. It becomes more difficult for you to find time for prayer, to read the scripture and to seek the Lord. The joy is gone in the fellowship of God's people.

It's time to seek the Lord, to renew the covenant with him, to seek the Lord, heart and soul. And I think that it's significant that this renewal that took place in Judah began from the pulpit, when the Holy Spirit came upon the prophet Azariah, and he spoke to the king. And that renewal took place when the King who was the leader of the nation took his role of leadership seriously, and used his

power and authority to bring about renewal.

In the same way, when the leaders of our church, the elders and the deacons, renew their covenant with the Lord, to seek the Lord heart and soul and to exercise their authority in a very intentional and intensive way, to encourage and ~~seek~~ challenge the congregation to seek the Lord heart and soul. Then in answer to that promise, the Lord will be found by us.

But some of you, perhaps are saying, 'Why should I seek the Lord?' 'Why should I seek the Lord?' I've found the Lord. I've found Christ. My days of searching are over. I've found the Lord.

I imagine if I were to ask for a show of hands and ask you how many of you here this morning have found the Lord, I would imagine a good number of you would raise your hands and say I've found the Lord. I've found Christ. And then if I were to ask another question, How many of you are still seeking. How many of you would characterize yourselves as searchers as seekers? Maybe a few hands would go up, maybe a few of you would feel like your hands should go up, but would not put them up because you would feel afraid that other people would know that you are a searcher, that you are a seeker. But probably not as many hands would go up if I were to ask, 'How many of you are seekers?'

I think that the reason for that is that we get the idea that when we find the Lord, we no longer have to seek, that we've arrived. Andth I think that one of the deadly plagues that can fall upon an evangelical church, and I think that evangelical churches are particularly prone to it, is to have the idea, 'I have found the Lord', my searching is over, then we think that the only thing we have to do is stick around either until we die or until the Lord returns and that the real reason

I would challenge you at that point. If we are truly Christians, we are to be seekers. We have found Christ, and we can praise God that we have found Christ. But having found Christ doesn't mean that our journey is over. It has just begun. Conversion is but the first step of a Christian's journey and when you are converted and when you find Christ you enter a life of pilgrimage. The scripture is filled with this idea.

The writer of the book of Hebrews says here we have no city but we seek one to come. We are seekers. And again the author of the book of Hebrews says he is a rewarded of them that seek him.

Some of us think that we seek the Lord until we find Christ and then we don't have to seek the Lord anymore., And Paul says, 'If Christ be risen, seek those things which are above'. And that kind of a search never ends.

This Sunday is traditionally the first Sunday in Lent, and this is a time in which Christians are challenged to renew that covenant with the Lord, to seek the Lord heart and soul. And I would challenge those of you who know you have found Christ to renew your covenant with the Lord, and seek him heart and soul.

The scriptures are filled with the challenges to continue to be a seeking people. ~~xxxxxxx~~ One of my favorite books, when I was a child or even when I became an adult was Bunyans', Pilgrim's Progress. How many of you are familiar with that? How many of you have read that? A number of you have, that's good. All of you should. Next to the

Bible, Pilgrim's Progress should be one of the most influential books in your life. I challenge you to read it. AND THE life of a Christian is characterized by the life of a pilgrim, a person seeking and keeping in his mind that yon wicked gate, that celestial city which he seeks for. And in his travels he goes by the slew of the spawn. He goes by the mountain of despair. He may be caught by ~~the~~ giant ~~of~~ despair and trapped in doubting castle. He must do battle with a pawlyan - it's a searching life, a seeking life, seeking God, constantly renewing that covenant with the Lord to seek him heart and soul.

Some of you thought, are not in that first catagory. But you are in another catagory and you say, but I'm afraid to seek the Lord, and the reason you are afraid to seek the Lord is becaue you are afraid that if you seek the Lord, you are afraid you will become some kind of a religious nut.

We look at other people who have the reputation of ~~being~~ really seeking the Lord, and we think, 'My goodness'. If that's what it means to seek the Lord, I don't want to have anything to do with that kind of a thing. I remember in college- I went to a Christian college - and there was a girl who usually wore makeup and looked very attractive all the time but every once in a while, perhaps she stayed up late studying or something like that, and she would come to breakfast or to one of her classes without any makeup on and no special preparations or anything and I would nudge my roommate and say, She must really be seeking the Lord, today. Because the idea is that if we seek the Lord we must really look miserable and all joy in our life is gone and our aptitude and our own likes and desires are completely overlooked. We get the idea that if we were to really seek the Lord and if we like ~~music by Bach and Beethoven, and if we really want to seek the Lord~~ we would have to stop listening to Bach and Beethoven and start listening to gospel rock or gospel rock and roll or country and western kind of music. Or if we really were to seek the Lord we cannot really read Dosteyeski and Dickens anymore, we've got to read Billy Graham and contemporary Christian books which are so popular nowadays. But to seek the Lord, we think is to overturn all of our natural inclinations and those God given desires which God has given us to be used to his glory. We're afraid to seek the Lord because we look at other people who really kind of turn us off with their religiousity and their outward forms of religiousity, maybe their self-righteousness, and we're afraid to seek the Lord because we don't want to become like them. But that's not what it means to seek the Lord. What does it mean to seek the Lord?

I think that each one of us may seek the Lord in different ways. But I think basic to all of them will be prayer. And I think an illustration from my own life might give some indication of that. When I heard that the pulpit at Knox Presbyterian Church was open and I heard that you were looking for a pastor, I entered into a covenant with the Lord, to seek the Lord heart and soul. And part of that covenant, and I'm reluctant to say it because as Paul said, It almost sounds like boasting and I

don't want it to sound that way. But part of what was involved in that covenant was to pray an hour every morning for God's guidance and direction. And I entered into this covenant with the Lord to seek the Lord heart and soul in this time of prayer, an hour a day for a week. And every morning I would get up and I would go to the church and kneel before the communion table and seek the Lord in prayer, heart and soul, not only for direction in where I would go but for my own ministry at the time, as well as for my family and friends and many other things. And at the end of the week, I renewed that covenant again because I had such a great time. So the second week I got up and prayed for an hour every morning seeking God's guidance. And this continued week after week until it went to months and months. And it was a tremendous time of renewal that I experienced myself. But then the cares of the world ^{entered} ~~mayed~~ in as well as a new

baby that gets up at 3 in the morning and makes it very difficult for me to get up and pray for an hour in the morning without falling asleep. And other things enter into my life and I come to the place where I realize that I have not been seeking the Lord as I should have, and I need to renew that covenant. And so I enter again into that covenant to seek the Lord heart and soul. And I think that if we really are to seek the Lord heart and soul, we cannot do it apart from prayer. Not necessarily an hour a day. John Wesley, ^{prayed} 3 hours a day. Others & Martin Luther

may pray however the Lord leads you to pray. Maybe while riding in your cars to work or sometime to find time to pray. That is, I think, basic and crucial to any seeking of the Lord. And I call upon you this morning to enter with me into a covenant to seek the Lord heart and soul, particularly as we begin this season of Lent. To enter into a covenant through the discipline of prayer, through the discipline of study, through the discipline of personal morality and social righteousness, through the ministry of mutual support of those sitting around you.

And let me just conclude by saying one more thing. Who is this Lord whom we're called to seek? Sometimes we think this Lord who calls us to seek him is some kind of evilent to the Aitollah Ka---, some despot, some oriental despot, some harsh, unfeeling despot who wants to impose everything upon us that's going to wipe out joy from our lives. As Paul Little has said, "God is some kind of celestial Scrooge who leans out over the balcony of heaven and when he sees anybody having fun and enjoying life, he says, 'Stop that! Right now.' And we hesitate to seek the Lord heart and soul because we are afraid of who this God is who calls us to seek."

But those who sought the Lord heart and soul in our scripture lesson experienced joy and rejoicing. And this Lord who calls us to seek him is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who holds out his arms to Jerusalem which rejected him and said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and ^{are} ~~heaven~~ ~~haden~~. Come unto me. Why will you not seek me."

I encourage those of you who know and have found Christ as your Savior to enter into a covenant to seek the Lord heart and soul. And for those of you who perhaps have not found Christ as your Lord and Savior to enter into a covenant with the Lord, not to seek experience but to seek the Lord as he is revealed to you in the scripture, and to go home this afternoon and spend this time in seeking the Lord in fellowship with other Christians, in prayer and in the study of scripture.

AMEN.