

The Restoration of Lady Liberty

2 Chronicles 14-15

For one hundred years, the world's most famous symbol of freedom had stood on tiny Liberty Island in New York Harbor. For an entire century the Statue of Liberty silently greeted millions as they arrived in America. But weather, pollution and time had so deteriorated the statue that she was fast becoming structurally unsound.

A study team recommended a renovation program to be completed in time for the Statue's one-hundredth birthday celebration in 1986. A national fund-raising campaign raised the millions of dollars necessary to complete the project which required the highly-specialized skills of more than fifty business firms.

What a glorious time that was for America! The American people spared no cost to see that this beloved symbol of liberty and independence was restored to its former grandeur and beauty. And rightly so. It should not have been any other way. But when the entire task was completed, when all the speeches were finished and the smoke from the fireworks had drifted away, when life settled down to normal routine once again, we needed to be reminded then, as well as today, that that copper figure fastened to an iron framework is, after all, just a lifeless, motionless statue. Liberty is only symbolized in that statue. The real glory of Liberty is to be found in the hearts of individuals whose God is the Lord.

The Statue of Liberty has been a symbol of America in more ways than we realize. Just as *the statue* had deteriorated, so have the standards and ideals of the American people. How tragic that we spent millions of dollars and thirty months to restore a lifeless symbol of freedom, while at the very heart of our country we allow deterioration and decay to continue unchecked! The real restoration of Lady Liberty must take place throughout our land, and it must take place in our hearts.

If America is to be restored to her former glory, then Americans must once again look to God's Word to find guidance, as we did at first. In the pages of 2 Chronicles, we discover a remarkable parallel between the United States of America and the nation of Judah. You see, for more than two centuries, America has offered freedom to oppressed people of the earth. We learn about Judah in 2 Chronicles 15:9 that large numbers of people had come to Judah from other nations when they saw they would have the freedom to worship the Lord God there.

But that didn't happen overnight. There had been a time in Judah's history when the people had worshipped other gods, when they did not follow after the Lord God. Then a man named Asa became king. He led the nation of Judah to make some sweeping changes in their land. Certain priorities had to be firmly established before they could restore Liberty in the land of Judah. **The restoration of Liberty in our land today requires the establishment of the same priorities as it did thousands of years ago.** Let us look at them.

1 Priority Number One: Righteousness Before God, 14:2-5

Every one of the kings of Israel is described as having done evil in the sight of God. Only eight kings in Judah's history were described as having done good in the eyes of the Lord, and Asa was one of them. Verse two reads, *"Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God."* Because his heart was right, he was able to lead his country in the paths of God. He realized deep inside himself that the people of his country were being led astray in the worship of other gods. All around were the signs and symbols of false religion.

So Asa went to work. Verse three tells that he removed the foreign altars, high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles, all of which were used to worship false gods. He completely eradicated the land from the influences of false worship. He even carried it so far as to remove the places where incense was burned to these false gods. All these gods had taken the place of the one true God in the hearts of the Jewish people.

A king could do that. No one would question the right of a monarch to make such sweeping changes. A nation could be led back to the worship of the only true God by a king whose heart was pure before God. But it doesn't work that way here in our own country. No president of the United States has the right or the authority to force the people of his country to worship in a certain way, or even worship the same God he worships. That is part of what makes America so great.

But that also clearly emphasizes the importance of our electing men and women to public office, either on a national level or even right here at home, who have made personal righteousness before God a priority. But it doesn't stop there. It doesn't even begin there. **It begins here in my heart. It begins there in your heart.** If we are going to restore Lady Liberty in our land, we must establish as the first priority our own righteousness before God.

2 Priority Number Two: Redemption of the Opportunity, 14:6-7

After Asa had completed the reform of his kingdom's worship, he went to work in other areas. Verse six says that he *"built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace."* Those fortified cities were population centers located near the borders of the country which served as the first line of defense against any foreign invader. But notice that the Scripture says he built up these cities *since* the land was at peace. When wartime came, there would be no time to strengthen those cities. It had to be done now, while there was peace.

Asa was redeeming the opportunities before him to strengthen his kingdom. He said to the people of Judah in verse seven, *"Let us build up these towns and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side."* **The land is still ours,** Asa told them. Let us do everything we can to protect our land while we have the opportunity!

Listen to Matthew 11:20-22: *"Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.' "* Korazin and Bethsaida had more opportunity to hear and obey the Gospel than did Tyre and Sidon. America has had more opportunities laid before her than any other nation on earth. For that very reason, we are to be held most accountable before God.

Folks, the land is still ours! It is not too late to turn America back to the Lord.

What opportunities do we have before us? Romans 14:12 tells us that every one of us will give account of ourselves to God. Jesus told us to open our eyes and look at the fields, for they are ripe for harvest! Redeem the opportunity!

The restoration of Lady Liberty requires that we make the redemption of opportunities a priority. While we have the opportunities to witness and send missionaries around the world, let us do so. While we have the opportunities to gather with other Christians to worship the Lord God, let us do so. While we have the opportunities to do good to others, let us do so. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church (in the words of the KJV): *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, **redeeming the time,** because the days are evil"* (5:15-16). The NIV says *"making the most of every opportunity."*

Making the most of every opportunity is going to require that we stop twiddling our thumbs and go to work now to strengthen our nation and our churches. Liberty does not run on autopilot! It must be maintained by us as we redeem the opportunities Almighty God has placed before us.

3 Priority Number Three: Reliance Upon God, 14:8-15

Verse eight describes the army Asa had: three hundred thousand men from Judah, all equipped with large shields and spears, and another two hundred eighty thousand from Benjamin, who were armed with small shields and bows. That doesn't sound like much by today's standards, but we are talking about a very strong army in Asa's day. The end of the verse says that *"all these were brave fighting men."*

But verse nine marks the end of the peace Asa's kingdom had enjoyed for ten years. Zerah the Cushite, or Ethiopian, marched against Asa with an even bigger army, one much better equipped. The KJV comes closest to the original Hebrew when it says that Zerah's army was a *"host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots."* A "thousand thousand" is a million men. Yet Asa was sure of his own righteousness before God, and he had redeemed the opportunities before him, so without hesitation he went out to meet the army of the Ethiopians.

Asa had worked to restore Liberty to the Land of Judah, but now that Liberty was being threatened. **Something had to be done.** His army was vastly outnumbered by these foreign invaders. **What could be done? Only one thing, and Asa did it,** as we see in verse 11: *"Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, 'Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you.'"*

So vv. 12-15 describe how the Lord brought victory to Asa and his army. Because the nation of Judah utterly relied upon God for their victory, the Ethiopians or the Cushites were crushed before the Lord. The victory was absolute and complete.

The psalmist had declared years before this: *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,"* (33:12) and we today quote those words most often around this time of year. But listen to the verses which follow: *"From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love."*

Asa obviously remembered those powerful truths. **What was true for Judah is true for America: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."**

Relying upon God is something we Americans almost never do anymore as a nation. We rely instead on our military hardware and our highly advanced technology. We rely on courts and governments and legislation. We have grown strong, rich and proud, but in the meantime we have forgotten how to rely on the Lord God! The years have threatened the Statue of Liberty, but we are the ones who have threatened real Liberty, by the very fact that we have sought the blessings of God upon our nation without depending on God. **We have attempted to forge our own paths, to solve our own problems, without pausing to seek the counsel of God or to rely upon Him. Once again, reliance upon God must become a priority of the American people.**

4 Priority Number Four: Resolve to Finish the Task, 15:1-7

When Asa's troops were returning to Jerusalem, a prophet of God came out to meet them. Did Asa expect congratulations and praise? He didn't get them. Instead, the prophet of God had another message from the Lord, as we see beginning in verse two: *"The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."*

Strange words to come from God right after such an incredible victory, weren't they? Not at all, because God wanted Asa to know that just because he had won one battle didn't mean that he could relax his defenses or his standards. In verses 3-6 the prophet of God reminded Asa of how in the past Israel had not followed the Lord, and as a result, they did not have peace. They had nothing but trouble.

Then he says in verse seven: *"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."* Asa, **you** must stay righteous before God. **You** must keep on redeeming the opportunities before you. **You** must keep on relying only upon God. Asa, there must be another priority in the life of your nation: **you** must have the resolve to finish the task.

Asa took courage from the words God spoke through the prophet. The rest of chapter fifteen describes what Asa did to finish the task of making his a nation where the people could be free. Let us take courage from what God's Word says as well. There have been and will be again times when we have grown tired of constantly trying to follow the right. To us in those times God's Word says, *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* (Gal 6:9)

Jesus is our example of resolve to finish the task. He did everything the Father had given Him to do. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "*endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" Then the author says, "*Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*" (Heb 12:2-3)

Now is not the time for America to give up! It is not the time for any of us to relax our defenses or our standards. Now, more than ever before, we must pursue our dreams to the outer limits of the earth. We cannot give up or let down if Liberty is to be maintained in our land and in our churches. Now, more than ever before, we must give priority to those elements which will guarantee the genuine restoration of Lady Liberty in our land: **Righteousness before God, Redemption of Opportunity, Reliance upon God, and Resolve to Finish the Task.**

Restoring the Statue of Liberty was an important task, weighted with responsibility. It became a project of national scope, capturing the interest of the American people. But even though it is a beautiful, much-loved symbol, the statue is just a symbol of the Liberty which is ours. It is not Liberty itself. Today's message from the Lord is a call to each of us to give ourselves to the *genuine* restoration of Lady Liberty.

But, as with any principle of God's Word, the process must begin in our individual hearts. Will you commit yourself to making our country what she was born to be?