

Follow the Money

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 June 2021

Preacher: Jon Watson

[0 : 00] Now, do you remember, I'm sure you do, the American Watergate scandal, right? The Watergate scandal, famous scandal, went all the way to the top in my home country.

And in 1976, there was a famous docudrama about this scandal called All the Men's, or All the President's Men. And it made a phrase famous, follow the money.

Do you remember that? Follow the money. They wanted to find out where the corruption was at. They wanted to get to the heart of the matter. They said, follow the money.

Now, a couple of thousand years before that, a Jewish rabbi said something kind of similar when he said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

If you want to know where someone's heart is at, you follow the money. Quick caveat, I promise this has nothing to do with an offering for safe families. The second chronicles, 16, which is where we're going to focus for the rest of the morning, is a story, and it is, it's a narrative, it's a story in the Bible, a true story that invites us to follow the money.

[1 : 10] God is inviting us today to follow the money, to see where our hearts are, and follow the money to see where his heart is, too. So a little background information, so this story makes some sense.

It's really a story about two kingdoms. There's a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. If you'll remember after King David, his son Solomon took over the throne, and his son Rehoboam took over the throne, and at that time the kingdom of Israel split into two, the northern kingdom called Israel, and the southern kingdom called Judah.

And in this story, Judah is kind of the good guy, and Israel, the northern kingdom, is like the bad guy. And the main character of the story is a guy called King Asa.

King Asa, I think he's the fourth or fifth king since David. So King Asa is the king of Judah, the good guy, so to speak. Now in chapter 14, he's at war, and he's at war with Ethiopia.

And in chapter 14 is this great story about how he relies on God. He puts all of his trust in God. He relies on God for victory, and God gives him this victory.

[2 : 23] And for that faithfulness, God rewards him with 25 years of peace in his reign. And chapter 15, verse 17 tells us that Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord.

His heart was all in with God. He said, I'm yours, you're my God, I'm your king, you put me here, what do you want me to do? And in that 25 years of peace, he rooted out idolatry from the land.

He instituted all sorts of national and religious reform. He did a lot of really good things. And from that, the war that he'd fought with Ethiopia, he'd collected a ton of treasure, a lot of plunder.

And he took all this treasure, and he put it into the house of the Lord. He put all that treasure in the temple. Remember, we're following the money.

So the money's in the temple now. Then after the 25 years of peace, King Asa of Judah goes to war again. And this time it's with Bashar, king of Israel, the northern kingdom.

[3 : 31] And we should think, okay, Asa relied on God in the war with Ethiopia. This is going to go really well, right? God's on his side. This is God's king.

But he doesn't. Who does he rely on? Well, let's read 2 Chronicles 16, just the first couple of verses again, 2 and 3. Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the Lord and the king's house, and he sent them to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus.

This is a foreign country, saying, there's a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I'm sending to you silver and gold. So break your covenant with Bashar, king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me.

So follow the money. Asa takes the silver and the gold out of the house of the Lord and gives it to a foreign king for help.

The prophet Hanani comes and confronts Asa, and he says essentially, look, you should have relied on God. Don't you remember?

[4 : 38] He's for you. This is your God. And instead of relying on God, you relied on this foreign king from Syria.

So I'll continue reading verses 7 to 9. At that time, Hanani the seer came to Asa, king of Judah, and said to him, because you relied on the king of Syria and did not rely on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you.

We're not the Ethiopians and the Libyans, a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen. In other words, he's saying God delivered you from a massive army back here. Why wouldn't he do that again?

Why do you doubt him? Yet, because you relied on the Lord back then, he gave them into your hand. This is our verse that we're going to focus on now. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You've done foolishly in this from now on, you will have wars. Where your heart is, there your treasure is. Where your treasure is, there your heart is.

[5 : 49] When Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord, all that money was in the treasury in the house of the Lord. And when Asa's heart faltered, he put his trust in foreign kings instead and the treasure went to their house.

So that's the story in a nutshell. Now we're going to focus on verse nine in three parts. The eyes of the Lord, the strong support of the Lord, and the blameless heart.

So number one, the eyes of the Lord. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth. God is not passively sitting back, waiting for someone to climb to the top and earn his attention.

That's not who God is. It's so common to see God as this kind of distant figure, this disconnected remote person, you know, outside of our universe.

You know, he creates everything, he sets the world to spinning, and then he steps back to watch and see how all goes. Just a cosmic experiment anyway, isn't it?

[7 : 00] That may be common, but what a small, small, impersonal view of God. And it's not what the Bible teaches us about who God is.

When our sins and sorrows overwhelm us, and they will, and they do, when they overwhelm us, we don't need a God who's passive. We don't need a God waiting for us to get our act together or to earn his attention.

We need a God whose eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth. A God actively engaged in our world, in our lives, actively seeking, looking, searching.

No need and no sorrow can escape the searching gaze of the real God. King Asa fell into that trap, that way of thinking that we just talked about, that remote, distant God who just sets the world to spinning, that same small view of God that's so common today.

King Asa, when Israel threatened war and the Northern Kingdom threatened him, he thought, God doesn't see my need. God's not watching.

[8 : 09] He's not actively engaged. So instead of relying on the God who is engaged, the God who's looking, the God who's searching, he called up Ben Haydad, king of Syria from Damascus, for help.

This is true about us. If we don't believe that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, then we'll start to put our trust into whatever seems most real to us, whatever seems most immediate to us.

In the message Eugene Peterson puts it this way when he translates this verse, he says, God is always on the alert, constantly on the lookout.

So imagine a sailor far out at sea, and he's been at sea for weeks maybe, and as he stands on the ship's deck, he's constantly scanning the horizon for the first sign of land.

His eyes are just constantly back and forth on the horizon line, and at the first sign of a distant shore, he puts all that ship's power to moving toward that point, no matter how small, no matter how distant.

[9 : 21] God is like that. He's alert. He's constantly on the lookout, constantly scanning the horizon.

So that raises the question, what is God looking for, or what is God looking to do? Right? He's looking, but to what end? So that's point number two, the strong support of the Lord.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support. A couple weeks ago, me and my family were on holiday, an Aberdeenshire, and we took a long walk along the coastline.

This is just south of Peterhead, if you know it, and the cliffs there are incredible. It's just beautiful, these stunning walks, but it's kind of terrifying because the paths go really, really close to the cliff's edge.

And if you go on those walks, I'm pretty sure any time of day, any day of the week, you'll see something out over the water. You'll see helicopters flying back and forth, back and forth.

[10:25] They are rescue helicopters. What were they doing? They were constantly searching for any sign of someone in need of rescue.

And who needed strong support? God is not on the lookout to give good advice. That's not what he's about.

Imagine if that rescue helicopter saw someone drowning, right, who'd fallen off the cliff and they shouted down, have you tried swimming? You don't need good advice when you're drowning. You need help.

God is not on the lookout to point out our failings. He doesn't want to point a finger at you and say, I told you so. Walking too close to the cliff, that was your mistake.

It's not what he's doing. He's on the lookout to give strong support. His eyes are not running to and fro throughout the whole earth for the people who have it all figured out, because they don't need strong support.

[11:33] God is eagerly looking for who, for the weak, for the needy. Which means that when you're floundering in your own sins and you say, God help me, I can't seem to get my head above water, that's a prayer that God loves to answer.

He loves it. That's who he is. It's what he's looking for. God does not scoff at the honesty which says, I can't do this on my own.

He delights in that kind of honesty. He calls that humility. He honors it. So here's a God we can run to with all of our sins and sorrows.

We can trust Him with it all. If He really is the God whose eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support, what couldn't we take to Him?

What sin or sorrow or misery or anxiety or failing or question couldn't we take to that God?

[12:45] Verse 9 says one more thing about the kind of person that God is looking to give strong support to. You probably noticed that when I said that He likes to support the needy and the weak.

You may have been thinking, well, it says who He likes to support. It's the blameless. So point number three, the blameless heart. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him.

Now who here could possibly say my heart is blameless toward God? Which one of us would dare? I mean, I couldn't say that. What if what we mean by that is I haven't done anything wrong, I'm pure and morally perfect before God?

If that's what we mean, count us all out. Then this verse is no help and no comfort to us because we don't fit into it, do we?

But that's not what this means. For instance, in chapter 15, verse 17, it says, but the high places were not taken out of Israel. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true all his days.

[13:54] The word wholly true in Hebrew is the same word as blameless in this verse. My point is this, blameless in this context can't mean morally perfect because Asa didn't destroy the idolatry that he was supposed to destroy.

Asa had moral failure and the Bible says was blameless toward God. So I want to teach you two Hebrew words briefly.

Two Hebrew words are short. The first is levav and the second is shalim. So levav, levav is the word for heart, the Hebrew word for heart.

And the Hebrew, the Israelites had a special kind of a different view. When we say heart, we just mean emotion usually, right? You're breaking my heart means I'm feeling sad. You're making me feel sad.

In the Old Testament, the idea of the heart was so much more. It was the center of our physical life and our inner life, the center of it. So the heart is the seat of our thoughts, our desires, our emotions, our affections, our will and our wisdom.

[15 : 13] And that's what God wants to be blameless toward him. Thoughts, desires, emotions, affections, will and wisdom. The heart.

Now what does it mean to be blameless? It's this word shalim. Shalim. It comes from, it's connected to the word shalom, which you may know, which is peace, right?

And shalim means to be whole, to be completed, to be unified, united. So for instance, in Joshua chapter 8, they talk about building an altar of uncut or shalim stones.

The stones haven't been split apart, they're whole. Or in 2 Chronicles 8, they talk about the house of the Lord being built and then it was shalim. The building is done, it's now shalim, it's complete. It's been finished. It's whole. In other words, the eyes of the Lord are looking for someone who directs all their thoughts, desires, emotions, affections, will and wisdom to God, your whole self, Godward.

[16 : 27] When we put it more simply, to have a heart blameless toward God is to wholly rely on God, but your whole self in His hands.

That's what it means to be blameless toward God. The New Testament speaks in a similar way. Paul says that we're made blameless and righteous, not when we get our acts together and stop doing wrong things and only do right things, but when we put all of our trust in the saving power of Jesus.

That's what it means to be blameless. It's all about relying on God. The key is we'll never have hearts that are blameless toward God like that until we see that He's actively and eagerly looking to give us strength.

We have to believe that God is actually as good as He says He is, that He really desires to do us good, that He's eager to support us. When we see Him for who He is like that, our hearts are moved toward Him, our hearts are inclined toward Him.

Then we can really fully commit our hearts to Him. That's faith, isn't it? A.W. Tozer has a great quote about faith. He says, pseudo-faith, fake faith, right?

[17 : 44] Pseudo-faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it. Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes.

For true faith, it's either God or total collapse. Not since Adam first stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who has trusted him.

I'm sure you're all familiar or many of you are familiar with George Mueller. He was a 19th century missionary and minister of the gospel.

He founded giant orphanages. His story is incredible. He loved and served and ministered to thousands and thousands and thousands of orphans. He did so in a way that demonstrated what the faith-filled life can look like and it glorified Christ.

You may know the story, but one morning he had about 300 orphans in his care and there was no food. There was not a scrap, nothing. So he called the children for breakfast and the housekeeper came and said, Mr. Mueller, we don't have any food.

[18 : 59] There's nothing to serve the children, I'm sorry. And so he said, it's all right. Come on kids, come sit down at this giant 300-person table apparently and we'll trust the Lord.

Weird, right? No food yet the kids are sitting down to breakfast. Well, they heard a knock at the door and it was the town's baker and he said, I couldn't sleep last night and I kind of felt like God maybe wanted me to bake twice as much bread today and give you the extras.

And he delivered bread for about 300 people. So they were just about to break bread and give thanks to the Lord when there was another knock at the door and it was the town's milkman. And he said, I'm sorry, my truck broke down, my cart broke down just in front of your house here and if I don't get this milk drunk it's all going to spoil.

And he gave him milk for about 300 people. It's not amazing. That's what it can look like to rely on God. I mean, it's a big example. But he put all of his eggs in God's basket, didn't he?

Not since Adam first stood up on the earth as God failed a single man or woman who trusted him. I want to think briefly about just kind of three little examples about what it can look like because not many of us are feeding 300 orphans.

[20 : 14] What can it look like to actually rely on God to put that kind of faith in practice, to treat God like he is who he says he is? So let's talk about sin, anxiety and dullness.

So if you've sinned and you feel ashamed, what do you do with that? Relying on God for strong support is taking that sin to the cross.

And it's going to the cross and it's appealing to God for a clean conscience. Not on the basis of, you know, I feel really, really, really bad so isn't that enough already?

Please give me a clean conscience because I just felt guilty enough. Not because you do good things to make up for the bad things that you've done but because Jesus died for you because Jesus died for that sin that you feel ashamed of.

So you don't need to feel unclean anymore. That's what it looks like to rely on God for strong support when you sinned. You appeal to God for a clean conscience on the basis of the death of Jesus, his perfect son.

[21 : 26] What if you're feeling a weight of anxiety? What do you do with anxiety? Well of course we take our concerns to God and we look to the resurrected Jesus.

So often with sin we need to take it to the crucified Savior. With our anxieties we need to follow the cross further to a resurrected Savior because we need to know deep down that God gives strong support to those whose hearts are blameless toward him.

You will not see that demonstrated anywhere more clearly than the resurrection of Jesus from the cross, from the grave. When he defeated death and stepped out of that tomb for the last time, history knows now for certain God gives strong support to the blameless.

God is for us. If God took the worst evil that could possibly happen, the murder of the Son of God and turn it to the greatest good that could possibly happen, life eternal for people like us, that truth can start to gnaw away at the foundations of our anxiety.

That God is for us and he's in control and we don't have to be. So relying on God with anxiety can look like taking our worries to the resurrected Christ.

[22 : 55] What about spiritual dullness? Do you know what I mean? Spiritual dullness. You just kind of feel apathetic about your Christian life.

Doesn't seem or feel real to you. What do you know to be true about God? What are you encountering in the Bible that's teaching you something about God?

And you take that truth about God and then you ask yourself, what would it look like? If right now I really believed this, what would I do?

What would be different? God help me. God help me to believe this. I believe, help my unbelief. What a good prayer.

When we feel spiritually dull, we rely on God by going to what he says about himself and asking him to help us believe it and to live like it's true.

[23 : 53] Now let's return to our idea of following the money. We could see where Ace's heart was by seeing where he put his treasure, right?

You can see where God's heart is by looking at where God puts his treasure too. God looked out and he saw that we were drowning in our sins and we couldn't get our heads above water.

We needed strong support and he sent heaven's treasure into our house. He sent Jesus, the glorious, the eternal Son of God to die in our place.

He didn't just send us treasure. He gave us the life of the person most precious in the whole universe.

So we cannot look at the cross and then look at God and accuse him of being a holdout or cheap.

We cannot accuse God of not going eagerly to any lengths necessary to give us strength and strong support.

[25 : 10] If we are ever to have hearts fully committed to God, blameless toward God, we must let him transform us by seeing his heart fully committed to us.

It's God's for usness demonstrated at the cross that can transform our hearts to be blameless toward him. John 3.16 that we read earlier, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Strong support.

Let you love and trust him for it. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, heaven's treasure, we look to you on the cross, not just as the crucified Savior but as the risen Savior, not just as the crucified risen Savior but the crucified risen reigning Savior.

You're our King. And we believe not only are you mighty to save but you're eager to save. Lord, if any hear or any hearing your word this morning haven't relied on you, haven't yet followed you and submitted their hearts to you, would you save them?

[26 : 50] Would you help them to admit now that they're drowning in need of rescue? And Lord, we're all still thrashing about in the water sometimes.

We ask for your sake, for the glory of your name that you will this day, this moment, send your spirit to outpour on us such a sense of the glory of God, such a sense of the fore dustiness of God that our hearts are compelled to you, that are inclined to you, that you just crack open to your love and that we will respond to your love with love.

Amen.