

Praise Under Pressure

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[0 : 00] Please turn back with me to that passage we read in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Tonight we're going to learn what it looks like to praise God when we're under pressure.

It's easy to praise Him when the wind is behind us and life is going well, but what about when the wind is against us and we're under pressure?

How do we praise God when the demands of life outnumber the delights of life? Well, in 2 Chronicles 20, King Jehoshaphat and the nation of Judah are under pressure.

They've been invaded by a large army intent on their destruction. Many of the kings of Judah faced the same dilemma and they dealt with it in different ways.

Some, for example, tried to buy off their enemies with gold and silver. But Jehoshaphat chose a different path.

[1 : 07] We read in verses 3 and 4, As we read through this chapter, we learn how Jehoshaphat's victorious response was threefold.

Prayer, word, and praise. In verses 5 to 12, we listen to His prayer. One of the greatest examples of prayer in the Bible.

In verses 13 through 17, we listen to the word of God through Jehaziel, one of the prophets of Judah. And in verses 18 through 30, we listen to the praises of Judah as God deals with the invading army without them even having to lift a finger in their own defense.

It's here in this latter section from verses 18 through 30, we learn how to praise God under pressure.

And our praise under pressure is built upon two foundations. Why to praise and when to praise.

[2 : 35] In what senses are we as a church under pressure today?

Perhaps more immediately for us as individuals, in what sense are we as individual believers under pressure today? For all of us, the answers might be different.

But the message of 2 Chronicles 20, verses 18 through 30, is that praise under pressure is a powerful weapon available to every Christian.

It's powerful enough to throw our enemies into confusion. And the day shall be won, even as it was for Judah. First of all then, why to praise?

Why to praise? Well, this huge invading army, it filled the valley. Their soldiers were so numinous, they covered the ground like ants.

[3 : 40] But following the instructions God had given them through the prophet, the vastly inferior army of Judah stood on high ground at the head of the valley.

The battle commenced not with an artillery barrage, but with Judah's priests and Levites singing. Their combined voices thundered down the valley as the sound of their praises echoed from every side.

And their battle song was this. Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever. We don't know the tune to which they sung these words.

I guess it probably wasn't Dominus Regatme. But it probably struck terror into the invading army.

The army of Judah was loud in its defiance.

It wasn't cowed by the army ranged against it. Their appeal was not to their own power and to their own strength. But to the steadfast love of God which endures forever.

[4 : 50] Because how can an army, no matter how numerically and technologically advanced, fight against the God of heaven and earth?

Never mind what forces are arrayed against us and the situations we are facing in life. The primary reason we praise is because God's steadfast love endures forever.

The praise and worship of a God whose love knows no limit. His love defies limitation, measurement.

It's infinite. It's eternal. It's unchangeable. For the army of Judah steeped in the history of God's historic dealing with their ancestors. The steadfast love of God was not an abstract idea or something they had read about in a book.

It defined them as a people. It was the love of God which had chosen Abraham to be their father and from him to cede the nation of Israel.

[5 : 54] It was the love of God which had saved them from their bondage in Egypt, destroying the armies of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. It was the love of God which had sustained them for 40 years in the desert and had brought them into the promised land.

It was the love of God which had saved them time and time again during the troubled days of the judges. It was the love of God which had given them King David and his royal descendants.

It was the love of God which had given them his law. It was the love of God which had given them the temple of Jerusalem and had promised to dwell among them and to forgive all their sins.

The armies of Judah at the head of that valley remembered the songs of Moses. When delivered from the Egyptian army, he along with his people sang a song of praise to the Lord which included these words.

You have led in your steadfast love your people whom you redeemed. You have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. And you see, here in 2 Chronicles 20, picture the scene.

[7 : 05] The priestly choirs of Judah headed up the army to remind them of what their loving God had done before by destroying the Egyptian army. To remind them that what he had done before he would now do again by destroying this invading army covering the valley before them.

God's steadfast love endures forever, yes, even in the days of Jehoshaphat. That's why they sang. Because they were convinced that God had not abandoned them, but was with them and would fight for them in this battle.

So filled with that love, they advanced against a superior army. They responded to the threat of destruction by giving thanks to the Lord because they knew that God's love for them was stronger than the hatred of their enemies for them.

His love filled their hearts and pushed out the fear. Now we live in better days than King Jehoshaphat.

For we have seen the ultimate demonstration of the love of God toward us in the face of Jesus Christ. Our praise of God is motivated by the cross of Jesus Christ on which the Son of God gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sin and shame.

[8 : 36] Where He died our death. Where He bore our curse. That is why we praise as Christians. This is the power of our praise. Not our love for God, but His for us.

Not what we have done for Him, but what He has done for us in the cross and resurrection of His Son. Bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place condemned He stood.

When we feel the force of the substitutionary death of Christ on our account, our hearts and minds turn away from our own achievements and our abilities, and we fix on His.

We can hardly believe that for us, the King of glory endured the tortuous death of the cross and bore all our sins away.

Our lives are reshaped. Our hearts are filled with the cross of Christ, and our mouths take up the song of the men of Judah. Oh, give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love endures forever.

[9 : 47] Now the devil, he hears our voices. He hears our voices singing the praises of King Jesus. And he is thrown into frustration and confusion.

Just like this invading army in the days of Judah. He curses us this evening. And he asks, How can they still praise God after all my attempts to discourage and defeat them?

After all the temptations I have thrown in their way, how can they still praise Him? He fails to realize that the steadfast love of God demonstrated in the cross of Christ is so much greater than any army which can be drawn up against us.

So you see this invading army, so numinous it covered the valley floor, is powerless against the praises of God's people. They thought their swords and their spears would assure them the victory. But the praises of the people of God overwhelmed them. The heart of our praise as Christians is the enduring, steadfast love of God demonstrated on the cross of Christ and extended to weak, sinful outcasts like us.

[11 : 19] So we look around our world today and there ain't much reason for gladness. But as we look upwards, we see at the right hand of God the Father on high, the Lamb of God, and we are filled with praise.

We might be under pressure at work. We might be under pressure at home. But Christ's victory over sin and death fills us with joy.

Praising under pressure isn't just possible, but certain if we will but keep our eyes fixed on God's love toward us in Jesus Christ.

But the sound of our praise is muted. Could it be that we have taken our eyes away from the cross and latched them over much on the pressures of our lives?

We must switch our vision and view our pressures through the lens of God's enduring love. For in the cross, God has spoken and His word to each and all of us is this.

[12 : 32] I have so loved you. I gave my one and only Son for you so that through faith you should have everlasting life. I have so loved you.

How shall I not along with Christ and His cross freely give you all things? Why to praise? The steadfast love of God or as Stephen would call it, Chesed.

Second, when to praise? When to praise? Now of course, in the light of the Bible we can say always is always the right answer.

But 2 Chronicles gives us deeper insights into when especially we can and will declare the enduring steadfast love of God for us.

According to our passage, there are three occasions on which the army of Judah praised God and as we move into the New Testament helps us to understand as well when we are to praise.

[13 : 46] First, when the word is proclaimed. Second, when the cross is preached. Third, when the victory is published.

The first occasion of our praise is when the word is proclaimed. Please follow this in your Bible with me. Jehaziel does not rank alongside the great prophets of the Old Testament but perhaps he should.

God spoke to him and through him at a pivotal point in Judah's history. King Jehoshaphat faced with this huge horde prayed and in verse 12 his final words were I think this is a phenomenal prayer.

I'm sure many of us have prayed it often. We do not know what to do but our eyes are on you. Jehoshaphat and his people were filled with fear.

Would we have been any different? But it was then we read the spirit of God came upon Jehaziel and God answered Jehoshaphat's prayer by telling them what to do.

[15 : 02] God said to them do not be afraid do not be dismayed at this great horde for the battle is not yours it's God's. Jehaziel proclaimed the word of God to the people assuring them that God would be with them and would fight for them.

And then in the words of verse 17 as they stand firm and hold their positions at the head of the valley they shall see the salvation of God because the battle isn't theirs it's God's.

Jehaziel's words fill the king and the people with such courage that we read in verse 18-19 the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord worshipping the Lord and the Levites of the Kohathites and Korahites by the way these many of these men were those who wrote some of the Psalms stood up to praise the Lord the God of Israel with a very loud voice in the face of a huge enemy horde and under great pressure the word of the Lord came to the people proclaiming God's salvation because it would be God who would do the fighting and not them.

And their response was worship and praise. Proclamation of the word of God was followed by praise of God.

The good news of God's salvation was followed by the people of God worshipping. Now this pattern continues in the New Testament where the proclamation of the gospel is followed by praise.

[16 : 51] The Spirit of God speaks to the word of God proclaiming what God has done in sending Jesus Christ as our Savior what we could not have done for ourselves defeating sin and death God has done for us through the cross and resurrection and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God has fought the battle for us and the response of God's people is to bow down and praise Him. To follow in the footsteps of the Levitical singers of Judah who we read stood up to praise the Lord with a very loud voice.

voice. It is when the word of God is proclaimed and the gospel of Jesus Christ for salvation is proclaimed to everyone that we praise Him.

The word of the gospel as it's preached it breathes new life into our souls and it gives us courage to keep going under all the pressures we're facing. We learn that if God is for us who can be against us and that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our pressures cannot separate us from the love of God. Our stresses our troubles our illnesses be they physical be they mental cannot separate us from the love of God.

[18 : 27] for God's gospel love for us is infinite eternal and unchangeable. When the word of Christ is proclaimed from this pulpit in our church on account of the cross and resurrection of the Lord we respond by standing up to praise Him with a very loud voice just as those Levites.

Let's be prepared to receive the very word of God which proclaims that God is with us and the battle belongs to Him and let's offer Him as our response the voices and hearts of our worship and praise even though we may be under pressure.

we praise when His word is proclaimed. Second we praise when His cross is preached we praise when the cross is preached so Jihaziel informs the army of Judah that the invading army will advance on Jerusalem by way of a valley and the word of God calls them to stand firm at the head of this valley and to see God's salvation.

The next day Jehoshaphat and his small army move to the head of the valley. We read in verse 21 He appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise Him in holy attire these are the singers of the Levites as they went before the army and say give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love endures forever.

And as these men began to sing the sound of their voices positioned as they were at the head of the valley must have sounded like the rising roar of musical waves.

[20 : 25] The sound would have been magnified and amplified by the sounds at the sides of the valley. The invading army would have been thrown into confusion as from at least three sides if not four sides they heard the deafening sounds of God's praises being sung.

That is what happened when the enemy army began to turn on itself. It started to destroy itself. The men of Judah did not even need to pick up a sword.

Not one of them shed any blood. The fighting was done by the sound of the praises of the Levitical singers singing at the top of their voices and God gave them the victory.

Ian could do a better job of this than I could but as far as I can make out even though we don't know the tune they sung these words to the words they sung sounded like this.

Can you imagine the crescendo of noise making its way down the valley being magnified by every side give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever.

[21 : 41] Every time we sing the Psalms we're connecting with this historical salvation episode in 2nd Chronicles 20 because the words give thanks to the Lord his steadfast love is forever is an occurring theme in so many of them.

So you see the fight is joined by the Levitical singers of Judah and before a sword can be drawn by any of the warriors God has utterly destroyed the invading horde.

Now we could apply this by talking about how praising God is how we fight against all the pressures we face and certainly it's true that when we feel under pressure it's a good thing to sing.

Sometimes if you're in the car for example and you're feeling under pressure it's a good thing to turn your music dial to your radio dial to Premier Praise or UCB and listen to some praise music but the better application the biblical application is when we are under pressure to look to the cross of Christ where God has done the fighting for us and won our salvation through the sacrifice of his son.

It is as we praise God for the cross and resurrection of our Lord we're following in the footsteps of Judah because God won our salvation without any of us having to even lift a finger.

[23 : 20] were any of us there when Christ cried out on the cross it is finished? God won our salvation that day and together we join our voices with those of the church both on earth and heaven.

We sing the hymn together sometimes the power of the cross and we worship God with the words the power of the cross son of God slain for us what a love what a cost we stand forgiven at the cross when the cross is preached the people of God who stand forgiven there lift up their hearts and voices and praise God for his ever enduring steadfast love for he has won the victory without

us even having to lift a finger even though we're under pressure the changing stresses of this world are overcome by the unchanging salvation of God and for this we shall worship him forever we praise God first of all when the word is proclaimed we praise him secondly when the cross is preached and we praise him thirdly when the victory is published when the victory is published so the destroying army left much behind them we read in verse 25 when

Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil they found among them in great numbers goods clothing and precious things which they took for themselves until they could carry no more they were three days taking the spoil it was so much God won the victory for his people and he left them the spoil God won the victory and he gave them many gifts of his triumph so many gifts they could carry no more and we read that upon their return they came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets to the house of the Lord no doubt they placed many of the precious things they had taken from the invading army before the Lord and they worshipped him in his temple the victory was made known it was published and all the people rejoiced and praised God over the millennia the city of Jerusalem has known more sorrow than any other city in this world but this was a happy day for Jerusalem the day that

Jehoshaphat's victorious army returned and they gave glory to God for it because they knew it was God who had done the fighting for them and had won the victory the praises of God's people are always sounded because of the victory God has won for us on the cross listen to the words of the apostle Paul who in Colossians 2 verse 15 says he that is God disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame triumphing over them in him that is Christ we stand as those who have seen Christ triumphing on the cross and rising victorious from the grave three days later we stand as those whom God now invites to claim the spoils of his son's triumph the peace hope and love of the gospel the fellowship grace and forgiveness of the gospel everything

Christ won for us on the cross he invites us it's all yours go and pick it up and take it home we praise God not for what we are or what we have done we praise him for who he is and the victory he has won for us on the cross and when that victory is made known among us we stand up to praise God with everything we've got with our intellects with our ambitions with our talents with our voices with our hearts and with our minds with our money with our energies with our resources the pressures and stresses of this life pale into insignificance before the triumph of the Lord our God reigns because he is victorious over all his enemies yes every one of them even the anxieties and depressions of our minds the sicknesses and degenerations of our bodies the apathies and coldness of our souls yes he's victorious even over them we began by asking what it looks like to praise God when we're under pressure how do we praise God when the demands of life outnumber the delights of life the answer is to fix our eyes on the cross and resurrection of Jesus on the steadfast chesed love of

[28 : 52] God demonstrated toward us in this while we were yet sinners Christ died for us let's fix our eyes upon it even though the stresses and pressures of this life do everything they can to distract us when we're stressed open up our Bibles to Revelation 5 and hear the cry of our victorious God as he proclaims the lion of the tribe of Judah he has conquered when we're stressed let's pray for God's help to see the pressures of this life in light of his triumphant grace in the cross and resurrection when we're stressed let's make the house of God what our salvation is proclaimed week by week our priority it may seem guy trite but when we're stressed let's sing along with psalms and songs of worship let's raise our spirits by raising our eyes to the cross and resurrection of our Lord and then just like Jehoshaphat we'll hear his voice saying to us whatever stands against us stand firm hold your position and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever