

The Prayer of Jehoshaphat

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter that we read in 1 Chronicles 20. 1 Chronicles 20.

And reading again at verse 15. And he said, Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat, And thus says the Lord to you, Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours, but God's.

We hate when we're taken out of our own comfort zones, and we hate particularly when we're put into situations where we don't see a way out, where we feel cornered, where we feel trapped.

And that can happen in various, lots of different ways in life. But it's a horrible feeling when you're turned, drowned, and squashed into this kind of corner, and you do not see any exit, you do not see any way out.

It can be very disconcerting, very troubling, and you can often feel overwhelmed. That was certainly what happened for Judah and King Jehoshaphat.

[1 : 21] Because we find that this three-fold army has come up to attack them. And it was a fearful situation.

This, as it were, like a coalition of forces. Different nations had grouped together, and they had decided to come up and attack Judah.

And we find that King Jehoshaphat here is completely overwhelmed by it all. And it's very interesting that Jehoshaphat was one of the great kings in the history of Judah.

And he had just followed through a period of reform in the land. And he had engaged the people in the sort of turning again to God.

There was a period of tremendous spiritual reformation in the land. God was at work. And Jehoshaphat was the one who was, as it were, the instrument in his hand.

[2 : 28] So it was a very vibrant period in the history of Judah. So it's very strange that on the back of what Jehoshaphat is doing, here is this good king, and he's restoring the worship of God within the land.

And he is reforming the land so that at the very center of public life and of the cultural life of everything is the established worship of the living and through God.

And you would say to yourself, now they're going to enjoy real prosperity and peace. But it's the very opposite. This threefold national front coalition of nations come up to war against them.

But, you know, we shouldn't be too surprised by that, because that's so often what happens spiritually with ourselves. Because you can be absolutely persuaded that if you ever decide to do for the Lord, or if ever you come to a time for your own personal reformation, where you're seeking to sort yourself out before God, and you're saying to yourself, Lord, I know I'm a Christian, but I'm not living in the way that I would want a Christian to live.

I am not the kind of person that I need to be. And so you're seeking to jettison, as it were, everything in your life that you feel is wrong, and you're seeking to devote yourself more and more to the Lord.

[4 : 02] But don't be surprised if this is what you decide on, and if this is what you begin to do, that the devil won't be far away where he will come, and he will try and spoil all that, and where he will bring something up to disturb you, to take you off course, where troubles will come and difficulties will come.

And even if tonight or today you're here, and you're becoming interested in the gospel, you're finding that your heart is opening up, as it were, to the gospel, that there's a new kind of reception going on within your heart towards the gospel, Satan will be whispering in your ear and saying, Hey, hey, you might not realize it's him, you might have no idea that it's him, but he will bring up the world before you in a more attractive way than ever before.

He will try and deaden your heart, blind your mind all the more to the reality and the power of the gospel. Reformation will always bring the attack of the forces of darkness, and that's exactly what we have here.

And so, Jehoshaphat and all of Judah are absolutely terrified. They feel overwhelmed, because it's looking like it's full-out war, and they feel that the forces against them are far too great.

And so there is this awful feeling as they face these forces out to invade, to destroy, and to devour. And war, as we know, is one of the most ugly, horrible things in this world.

[5 : 42] The world has never stopped being at war. There might not be a world war in the way that there was in 1418 and 39 through to 45, but the world continues to be at war.

Somewhere all over the world, there are conflicts, there are forces, there are wars. There is so much cruelty.

You know, it's part of the legacy of the fall. It's one of the most awful things of it. There is this lust for power. Lust for dominance.

There's a blood lust within people, where they're wanting to destroy. There are people who love cruelty. You know, there's a version of the Bible that says that in the dark places of the world, dwells cruelty.

That's a thought. In the dark places of the world, dwells cruelty. And that's how it is with some people. They love being cruel.

[6 : 44] It's part of the awful legacy of the fall. Well, here is this terrible situation facing Jehoshaphat. Now, we see in verse 4, now, I've looked at that before, at verse 4, where Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord.

From all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord. And it's wonderful how, verse 3, Jehoshaphat was afraid, and set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

Can you imagine today, if our leaders said to our nation, you know, you know what we need to do?

We need to get right with God. And supposing David Cameron said, right, I'm proclaiming throughout the land a fast, and everybody must seek the Lord.

Can you imagine what the response would be? I think the media would go into a frenzy. There would be a national outcry, because so many people would say, what are you talking about?

[7 : 55] Parliament would go into chaos. Because so many people would say, what do you mean, turn to seek the Lord? We don't believe, what God? We don't believe in God.

There are so many people today who say, God, God, it's not in my thinking. I don't believe in God. You know, I think that's partly because we have it so easy, and I'm not saying that we have it incredibly easy, but we're not in war.

We're not in conflict. We're not facing death. Totally different thing when people are. An ex-soldier was saying to me, he knows of a situation where soldiers were offered, there was no conflict, they were offered Bibles or New Testaments.

Most take, some refused. But he was saying when there was a conflict and they were going in to fight, not one refused. And that's very telling, very interesting.

I remember my father saying to me during the war, he used to, he was in the destroyers, and he used to, there was always a lot of people of islanders, as was the case in all the forces.

[9 : 12] But there were a lot of islanders in the Navy. And he used to hold a Gaelic service, because he felt called to the ministry before the war.

But he believed that if the Lord was ratifying the call, that the Lord would take him through the war, which of course he did. But he had started taking service, a Gaelic service, for the island men who were Gaelic.

And there was this particular man who wasn't from the islands, who used to sort of mock him a wee bit, and say to him, there is no God.

And he would always be like that, and putting down on the fact, there is no God. But he said, my father said, you know the funny thing was, when we went into real conflict, and when the bombs were flying around on the ship, that man always stood as close to me as possible.

And I remember saying to him, why do you stand here? And he said, I know God will look after you, and if he looks after you, I'll probably get off as well. Here's the atheist, here's the man who says there's no God.

[10 : 25] But it changes completely when you are being bombed, because life, when you're facing death, and that's atheism, when the chips are really down.

But anyway, here is Jehoshaphat, and we see what a great king he is, how he's turned the whole nation, there they are, they're seeking the Lord. And his prayer, I'm not going to go through his prayer, because I remember we kind of looked at that prayer, but just to highlight one or two things about it, he addresses God as the God of heaven and earth, the God who is the God of nations.

And that's a question we have to ask ourselves today. Do you see the God, the living and true God, as this God, our creator God? So we're talking to the young folk today, the God who is over all the big things and over all the little things.

Or is our vision of God a small vision? Have we brought God right down? Have we sort of brought God to our own level? That's one of the charges God brought against Israel.

We find, read about it in Psalm 50, and he's saying to them, you know, he said, you think that I'm just like yourself. That was in relation to their sin. They were thinking that God was okaying their sin, because they had taken God down to their own level and said, oh, just because I'm okay with this, we believe that the Lord will be all right with it as well.

[11 : 55] And God's saying, no, I'm not like you. So, are we guilty of taking God right down so that he's just like ourselves? or is he the exalted, enthroned God of all glory and majesty?

It's important, because it makes a huge difference to our life, to our prayer life, to our spirituality, to our hope, to our journey through this world, the God who is all power.

And this is a God that we depend upon, because we find that this is what Jehoshaphat is saying, did you, verse 7, did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham, your friend?

I love that, to Abraham, your friend. Do you know something? We are actually friends of God as well, because Jesus tells us, he says, you are no longer servants, but you are my friends.

I think it's one of the great, it's one of the most beautiful statements that Jesus makes. Sometimes we're hesitant to say, I'm a friend of God. Our friends in life are so important, people that we laugh with, we cry with, we share with, important.

[13 : 12] But here's Jesus and he says, you know, you're my friend. I think it's absolutely wonderful. Well, this was a title that was given to Abraham, a friend of God.

But here's Judah and they're saying, our dependence is upon you. And one of the beautiful things that Jehoshaphat is doing, he is bringing before God who they are in relation to himself.

They are the people that God has chosen for himself and that he has placed them in this land. And he's saying to him, Lord, this is all yours.

And I think that's exactly what we find that God responds so positively to this. Because we find that Jehoshaphat comes to the point in verse 12 and he says, for we are powerless against this whore that is coming against us.

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you. And you know, that's where we are today. We feel often powerless, both nationally and individually.

[14 : 27] Because when you look out today, it seems that all the forces, certainly within our own country here, the forces of darkness are in the ascendancy.

The cause of Christ seems so small in comparison. The ratio, the ratio of people coming to church is far smaller than those who don't.

The ratio of those who love the Lord within your neighborhood, within your communities, is far smaller than those who love the Lord than those who don't. and when you look throughout the land, it seems that the ratio of believers is becoming smaller and smaller and we say to ourselves, oh Lord, what's going to happen?

We feel so weak, so powerless in the face of all this. And then we look at our own lives and are there not times when we feel utterly overwhelmed and we see the forces of darkness at work and we're so conscious of all the temptations that we face and all the battles that we face and we feel, you know, sometimes you say, you know, it's too much Lord, I don't know if I can make it anymore.

Have you ever felt like that? And you think, I don't know if I'm going to make it as a Christian. I feel so weak, I feel so helpless and I've battled and I've struggled for so long and Lord, I don't seem to be making any headway.

[15 : 56] In fact, sometimes I think I'm struggling even more than ever. Do you ever feel like that? And you say to yourself, here I am at this stage in my life, I thought I would be, have made so many strides, I would have grown to such a level but here I am, I'm still struggling and you think, that's the way it's always going to be and what if I struggle in vain?

What if I don't make it? We feel sometimes so powerless against the forces that are not only around us but particularly within us.

We struggle. There's a personal struggle. Even in church there's a personal struggle going on. Because there's the old and the new at work all the time.

But we find this wonderful response. As the Lord through his prophet says, we find it at the end of verse 15, do not be afraid and do not be dismayed.

Sorry, no, the Lord is saying do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde for the battle is not yours but God's. God's. It's not wonderful.

[17 : 12] That must have been music to Jehoshaphat's ears. This battle is not yours the Lord is saying. It's my battle. And you know the Lord is saying exactly the same thing to us as well.

See this battle that you are in. Ultimately it's my battle. And God deals with all his enemies in one of two ways. Either he will make all his enemies one day his footstool and he will tell us that he will trample them into the dust or else he will make his enemies his friends.

He does one of two things. Saul of Tarsus is a prime example of that. A man who hated the Lord Jesus Christ with a passion so much so that he was his whole aim in life was to put into prison and to death the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord has two options of how to deal with Saul. It's either eventually to destroy him or to turn him round. And he turned him round.

He met with him. He subdued him. And Saul of course became Paul that great ambassador for the Lord Jesus Christ. In the church here there are many people who are going completely in the opposite direction.

[18 : 28] Do you know this? We might not accept it but outside Jesus Christ we are enemies. We might not be enemies in the sense that we're at the forefront of hatred towards God but the Bible shows us that outside Jesus Christ we are actually living as enemies because we're not prepared.

We're living in rebellion against God. We are fighting against God, against his invitations, against his will, against his great gift, the greatest gift that God has given.

And he's saying to us, look, here's my son. And we're saying, no, don't want. it's an awful thing to do. And if today you're still saying to God, I don't want your son, ask that the Lord will subdue your heart to give you a willing heart so that rather than rejecting that you will accept his son, the great gift, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And so the battle is the Lord's. And personally, that's what the Lord has done for us. That's what Jesus has done. He is the captain of our salvation. The Lord Jesus went to the cross for us.

He subdued the powers. He took on the forces of darkness. He took on all the powers of hell. He took on death itself. He took on the grave. And he won the battle.

[20 : 03] the Lord's. It's not ours because we couldn't do any of that. We couldn't take one step on our own.

And so what we're told here is you will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm. Hold your position and see the salvation of the Lord.

And that's what the Lord is asking us to do, to stand firm. To stand firm and to see. And may we be given, this is where we need the vision. This is where we need to have our vision restored to see the Lord, to see the Lord at work.

Because you know, the Lord's doing great things and often we're missing it. Because our vision is, we're distracted, we're all over the place, we're not seeing things, we're all caught up with this and that.

Lord, give me the focus again, help me to see you at work. You know, it's a wonderful thing when we can see God at work. Because he's working all the time. And what we find here, so many other things we could see, just to move on in response to this.

[21 : 10] Because it's all tied up. The Lord says, for the battle is not yours but God's. Do not be afraid. And then, verse 17, you will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf.

the response of Jehoshaphat and Judah to this is absolutely wonderful. Here is, I believe, one of the great displays of faith in the Bible.

Jehoshaphat accepted God's word. Nothing had changed round about. All the hordes of the coalition forces were there. Nothing had changed. But as Jehoshaphat looked out, he says, you know, we won this.

And he took counsel with the people. And this was the suggestion. I think it's wonderful. He got the Levites, the temple choir, those appointed for the leading of the singing.

And they were in their holy attire, all the official clothing that they wore, in the engagement that they would be involved in, the public singing.

[22 : 19] They were to go out in front of the army. As the army was to move on a wee bit, it was the temple choir that was at the front.

The coalition forces must have had a moment of rubbing their eyes and thinking, what is going on? Because it's almost a bizarre situation.

That Jehoshaphat is sending out singers with no swords, with no shields, with no spears, just with a voice, singing and praising God.

And that's what it tells us. Verse 21, And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire. And as they went before the army, they sang, and that was from Psalm 136, give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever.

Here is the response of faith. faith. And as they began to praise God, what happens? The coalition forces, as so often happens, when different nations who might have had previous conflicts, maybe were suspicious of one another, whatever happened, some spark ignited.

[23 : 38] And in a moment, we find that one nation of these coalition forces turned against the other before they reached to the army of Judah.

And they began to fight with one another, and then they turned on the others, so that Judah and Jehoshaphat didn't have to do a thing but watch, as these coalition forces fought with one another and destroyed one another.

And the Lord said to them, all you have to do is stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. And although they were standing still, faith was at work, praise was at work, they were standing still, yes, they were holding their position, but they were full of faith, they were engaged with the Lord, they were praising the Lord, and that's a way to move forward.

And as we move forward in that way, that is where the Lord will display his power and display that he is in control of all.

May we have that faith, may we have that response as we move forward, by faith, giving praise to the living and through God.

[24 : 54] Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks for your graciousness and your compassion towards us. We pray, O Lord, that we will have the faith, like the people of Judah and the days of Jehoshaphat, where we will have that belief in your power, and that we will go forward in praises, looking to you, and may we see your hand at work doing great things.

O Lord, be merciful to us, grant us grace in all the different situations that we confront. We pray to bless the cup of tea and coffee in the hall, and grant us grace in everything, and take away our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to conclude singing from Sing Psalms, Psalm 100, no, Psalm 18, Psalm 18, from, and this is from Sing Psalms, Psalm number 18, verse 27.

It's on page 21, Psalm 18 from Sing Psalms, on page 21, verse 27. You save the humble and the meek, but bring the proud down from their height.

You, Lord, will keep my lamp aflame. God turns my darkness into light. With help from God I can advance against a troop and rout them all, and with the aid my God will give I can leap over any wall.

[26 : 25] For perfect is the way of God. No flaw is found within his word. To all who put their trust in him, a shield and refuge is of the Lord. For who is God except the Lord?

Besides our God who is a rock, he is a God who gives me strength, he perfects the path I walk. These verses of Psalm 18, you save the humble and the meek.

You save the humble among the weak, but bring the prides out from their height.

You, Lord, will keep my lamp aflame. God turns my darkness into light.

With help from God I've got at time. I give the truth and write them all.

[27 : 36] And with the faith my God will give. I can be over anyone.

For perfect is the way of God, no glory is found within his word.

To all who put their trust in him, a shield of refuge is the Lord.

Who is God except the Lord, each time our God who is the Lord.

God is the God who gives me strength and he perfects the path I want.

[28 : 52] Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.