

# "Fear Not"

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to 2 Chronicles chapter 20. That is page 346, I believe, in the Pew Bible.

! 2 Chronicles chapter 20, page 346. We are going to look at one of the most exciting stories in the book of 2 Chronicles today. But this story, it's a story that has a lot to say to us today because it's a story that's all about fear.

It's about fear. Many human hearts today, most people, I think, are a wellspring of fears and anxieties and worries.

You know, some of our worries are kind of like familiar friends, aren't they? We carry them around with us wherever we go. But sometimes our fears kind of spring up on us, unawares. They surprise us out of nowhere, and they shake our sense of security and stability and our sort of sense of control.

Many of our fears get played out in the public square, after all. Is not the increasing anger of our public discourse, those shrill and condemning tones, is that not a great sign of just deep-seated fear?

[ 1 : 25 ] We're angry because we're afraid. Many of our fears haunt us privately. These are the ones that only come out in the quiet moments, perhaps, those moments of solitude.

We live with the fear of loneliness. We live with the fear of personal failure. Soren Kierkegaard once said that anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.

He meant that as modern people, we have almost limitless freedom to choose and to become. But with such freedom comes more choices, which means more opportunities to get it wrong.

And we live in fear. And underneath all these fears, there perhaps kind of yawns the greatest fear of all, the fear of death and what may or may not come afterwards.

2 Chronicles was written over 2,500 years ago. But it was written to people like us, people who live amidst great fears.

[ 2 : 36 ] And what 2 Chronicles 20 aims to do is to recount a particular moment in Israel's history when God met His people in their fears and showed them what it meant for Him to be their God and for them to be His people, even when they were afraid.

So we're going to walk through this passage together and see what helps it gives to us today in the midst of our fears. So let me pray for us.

And then we're going to walk through the passage section by section. Let's pray together. Father, as we turn to this ancient story, we trust that it is the word that You've spoken, not just to Your people many years ago, but the word You continue to speak today.

For You, God, are the same yesterday, today, and forever. Lord Jesus, help us to see Your abiding truth and goodness and beauty in this passage by the help of Your Holy Spirit.

In Your mighty name we pray. Amen. All right, well, let's read verses 1 through 4, and let's set the stage. 2 Chronicles 20, verses 1 through 4.

[ 3 : 50 ] After this, the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Mayanites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea.

And behold, they are in Hazazon Tamar, that is, En-Gedi. Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord. From all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord. Okay, context. So at this point in Israel's history, Jehoshaphat is the king of what we've come to call the southern kingdom.

After the golden age of David and Solomon, you'll remember, the kingdom split under the reign of Solomon's reckless son, Rehoboam. And then we've seen over the last few weeks, some of the kings down through the line.

After Rehoboam, there was Abijah, and then Asa, and now Jehoshaphat. And we looked at the first part of Jehoshaphat's reign last week, when he entered into an unwise alliance with the northern kingdom.

[ 5 : 00 ] And that alliance led to this spectacular military defeat that almost cost Jehoshaphat his life. So in chapter 20, or excuse me, in chapter 19, after that great failure, in chapter 19, Jehoshaphat's rebuked by the prophet Jehu, and in response, Jehoshaphat does what?

Well, he actually fears God. And he begins in chapter 19 a series of reforms in Judah and in Jerusalem. He calls the people back to God, and he begins establishing faithful judges in the land. He starts to do what's right. But in verse 1 of our chapter, we see these words, After this, the Moabites and Ammonites and with them some of the Maonites came against Jehoshaphat for battle.

Now, this was an alliance of three kingdoms located to the east of Judah, across the Jordan River, across the Dead Sea. And this Moabite alliance, we're told, has come around the southern tip of the Dead Sea and advanced all the way up to En Gedi, which was a small oasis about halfway up the western shore of the Dead Sea, which was only about 25 miles southeast of Jerusalem.

So you see, Jehoshaphat was now doing all the right things, and still the danger, still the threat, still the trials came. After this, the chronicler says, that is after Jehoshaphat was trying to bring reform, after he was calling his officials to fear God and exercise justice, right when he was doing the right thing, the good thing, right when he was obeying God, the trials came.

[ 6 : 37 ] The enemies invaded. They showed up right in his backyard within striking distance of the Capitol. Now, the same can be true for us today. You know, obedience to God does not guarantee a trouble-free, a fear-free life.

And trials aren't always a sign of discipline or disobedience. Living in a fallen world means that trials will come.

Fearful things will come flooding in, often unawares. And look at verse 3. The chronicler says, Are you and I able to admit when we are afraid?

Or do we pretend that kind of nothing can shake or rattle us? You know, we often think that if we ignore our fears, they'll go away. But that's actually not what we see in Scripture.

In the narratives of Scripture like this one, we see the acknowledgement of fear. If we ignore or deny our fears, they'll often grow and then begin to control us.

[ 7 : 55 ] But when we acknowledge our fear, then we can rightly respond. And that's what we see, actually, in the rest of this chapter. 2 Chronicles 20 invites us to acknowledge that we live in the midst of a great spiritual battle with many and great fears.

But in the midst of these fears, this chapter gives us three things. Three things in the midst of our fears. First, it gives us a prayer to pray.

Second, it gives us a word to trust. And third, it gives us a victory to remember. Here's how we as Christians can rightly respond in the midst of fear.

A prayer to pray, a word to trust, and a victory to remember. So let's look at that first thing, a prayer to pray. We see this in verses 5 through 12. So let's look at those verses together, and I'm going to read them.

Let's start back in verse 3, actually, and kind of pick up the context. So back in verse 3, we'll read through verse 12. Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

[ 9 : 02 ] And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord. From all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem in the house of the Lord before the new court and said, O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven?

You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand you. 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?

And they have lived in it and have built for you in it a sanctuary for your name saying, If disaster comes upon us, the sore or judgment or pestilence or famine, we will stand before this house and before you, for your name is in this house and cry out to you in our affliction and you will hear and

save.

And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, whom they avoided and did not destroy, behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit. O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us.

[10:21] We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. We are powerless. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

The prayer that Jehoshaphat prays turns our eyes away from ourselves and puts our gaze fully on God. First, you'll notice it's a prayer that highlights God's sovereign power.

O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand you.

The threat is knocking at the door. The great horde is encamped at En Gedi. That sounds pretty gnarly, doesn't it? There are massive worries in your life.

But what are they compared to the Lord? Are they too great for Him? Are the challenges that face the church today any match for the God who made heaven and earth and who rules over the kingdoms of the nations?

[11:39] You know, sometimes Christians can speak about the latest cultural trend or the latest technological advance or the latest political headline as if this were the issue that's just going to upend everything and make or break the church.

Have we forgotten what we mean when we say the name God? In your hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand you.

God upholds the universe by the word of His power. In Him we live and move and have our being. Friends, God is God, the sovereign Lord.

So, Christian, pray passionate prayers about the greatness of God and the fears of our hearts will begin to be put into perspective.

But this prayer doesn't just highlight God's sovereign power. It also highlights God's faithful promises. Verses 7 through 9 speak of God's promises to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants to establish them in the land.

[13:01] And it speaks of how God made good on that promise and how God continued to promise that if they called out to Him, whether in times of sword or judgment or pestilence or famine, if they called out to Him, He would hear them.

And so, in verses 10 through 11, Jehoshaphat does just that. He brings the current situation before God. And what does he talk about? He says, you know, the nations that Israel didn't attack when they left Egypt and traveled to the land of Canaan, those nations that Israel refused to attack, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, they're now attacking them.

Some way to return the favor, right? But Jehoshaphat brings it back to God's own promises. You gave us this land, God.

They're trying to drive us out of the land you gave us to inherit. Surely you must do something about this. So, this is a prayer that drives us to the nature of God and to the character of God.

God is incomparable in His power, and God is unshakable in His promises. It is this sort of God-centeredness that we must seek in our prayers.

[14:15] And when our prayers take us into the nature and character of God like this, you know, our fears won't just magically disappear, no, but they will start to lose their grip on us.

And when we start to exalt God like this in our prayers, you know, something else starts to happen. Then we start to admit the truth about ourselves as well. Notice where the prayer ends.

We are powerless. We do not know what to do. You know, admitting our inability and our ignorance is probably the hardest thing to do as human beings.

We are so good at being self-sufficient, and we are often rewarded in the world for presenting ourselves as wise and capable. But in order to really pray, in order to have a genuine relationship with the one true God who is incomparable in power and unshakable in His promises, we have to admit that at the end of the day, we are powerless, and we do not know what to do.

Now, at first, that seems like the opposite of what we should do in the face of our fears, right? Shouldn't we believe in ourselves? Shouldn't we trust that we've got what it takes? Well, that strategy works for a while until it doesn't, right?

[ 15 : 48 ] Until you realize that you don't have what it takes. Until you realize that in the face of the deepest fears of the heart, the fear of alienation, the fear of death, the fear of judgment, before these proper fears, we are powerless, and we do not know what to do.

That our only hope rests not in ourselves, but in God. You see, this prayer that we are invited to pray has us admit that we really cannot move these fears one inch in our own strength, in our own power, in our own knowledge.

But rather than this realization casting us into despair, it casts us into the arms of the almighty and faithful God of the gospel, the God who made promises to Abraham and who kept those promises from generation to generation until the great offspring of Abraham appeared, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all God's promises were fulfilled.

It casts us into the arms of that God. And that brings us to our second point. 2 Chronicles doesn't just give us a prayer to pray in the midst of our fears.

It also gives us a word to trust, a word to trust. This is verses 13 through 19. Let's pick up the story there. Meanwhile, all Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

[ 17 : 36 ] And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehaziel, the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jael, the son of Mataniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph in the midst of the assembly.

And he said, Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat, 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.

Tomorrow, go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.

Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow, go out against them, and the Lord will be with you. Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord.

And the Levites of the Kohathites and the Korahites stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. A word to trust.

[ 18 : 58 ] Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Through these words given through the prophet Jehaziel, God committed himself to fight this battle on the people's behalf.

They were the ones who were going to march out. They were going to stand firm. They were going to hold their positions, but they would not need to fight because the battle isn't theirs. It's God's. God will fight in their place, and he will do what they cannot do. They will go out, and the Lord will be with them. And because the Lord will be with them, they need not be afraid.

Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed, even at this great horde. In Romans 8, the apostle Paul says, if God is for us, who can be against us?

Brother, sister, what are you afraid of today? It can be a scary thing, you know, to really take the lid off of our fears and kind of stare them in the face. But listen to what God says here to his people nearly 2,500 years ago, and listen to what God has continued to say to his people throughout the ages.

[ 20 : 22 ] He says, I will be with you. Do you remember what the resurrected Jesus says at the end of Matthew's gospel?

He says, All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. There are the risen... In the times of fear, in the times of worry, I'm with you always, the Lord Jesus says.

When you face financial fears and job insecurity, the Lord will be with you. When you face emotional and relational fears, like when a new child is born or when a marriage is struggling or when a friendship is growing cold, the Lord will be with you.

But what about when you face those deeper fears, those fears of ultimate concern, those fears that we're too often afraid to admit, fears that our lives aren't as good or as purposeful as we try to make them seem.

Fears that if the books of our lives were opened up before a holy God, if the movie of our life was played before the gaze of His perfect and good judgment, if all of our deeds were brought before Him, we wouldn't just be embarrassed.

[ 22 : 10 ] We'd be undone. That fear that as sinners, condemnation is the rightful sentence that we deserved. Here, in that most ultimate of fears, here, the Lord Jesus also says, I will be with you.

I will stand with you. You know, when that great horde of your sins comes flooding in from behind, though you've tried so hard to reform yourself and reform your family and reform your neighborhood, though like Jehoshaphat, you've redoubled your effort to do the right thing, when the great horde of your sins comes rushing in and you stand powerless, not knowing what to do, when you stand condemned, there the Lord Jesus says, I'll be with you.

Do you see how this God, the God of the Bible, is so very different from the God of every other religion? Every other religion says, if you do the right things, then I'll be with you.

If you do the right things, then maybe you can be with me. But the gospel says, you're condemned in your sins without hope.

But God stands with you in your sin so that you might be rescued by His grace and not by your works. And friend, don't you see, if God is with you in your sin and condemnation, if He promises to take His stand with you in your sin and death, if He's gone down into that for you and with you, if He's made that battle His own, then is there any other battle that's too big for Him?

[ 24 : 07 ] Is there any other battle that now, now that that battle's been won, will ultimately be redeemed for your good, regardless of the outcome? can even death itself steal your greatest joy if God has promised to be with you?

What now are you afraid of? You know, the waves, they rise, and the waves crash, and like Peter, when our eyes turn from our Savior to the crashing waves, we begin to sink, right?

But Jesus' hand takes firm hold of ours, and He pulls us up. Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Why were you so afraid? The Lord will be with you. This is a word to trust, a word to trust with your whole life forever.

And that brings us to our last point. 2 Chronicles gives us a prayer to pray, a word to trust, and last, it also gives us a victory to remember, a victory to remember.

[ 25 : 23 ] Let's read the rest of our passage from verse 20 to verse 30. Verse 20, And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, believe in the Lord your God.

and you will be established. Believe His prophets and you will succeed. 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 as they went before the army and say, Give thanks to the Lord for His steadfast love endures forever.

And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir who had come against Judah so that they were routed. For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting them to destruction. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another. When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde and behold, there were dead bodies lying on the ground.

None had escaped. 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.

[ 26 : 39 ] They were three days in taking the spoil. It was so much. On the fourth day, they assembled in the valley of Barakah, for there they blessed the Lord. Therefore, the name of that place has been called the valley of Barakah to this day.

Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets to the house of the Lord, and the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for God gave him rest all around. The chronicler wanted the people of his day to remember this victory, a victory when God intervened and caused their enemies to turn upon each other and destroy themselves, a victory when God did all the fighting, when God won the battle, but the people got the spoils.

God triumphed, and the people got the reward. And friends, does this victory not point us to the even greater victory that God fought for his people, the victory that God's only son fought on the hillside outside of Jerusalem.

But this battle involved more than turning the enemies against themselves. On that day, that battle involved God Himself going down into defeat. Jesus Christ was stricken and afflicted for the sin of His people.

[ 28 : 17 ] He stood in the midst of the great horde of sin and wrath and judgment. The sinless one was crushed for our iniquities, and upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

Jesus Christ was crucified and buried, paying the penalty of death for all who believe. And three days later, God raised Him from the dead. The grave could not hold the victorious Son and King because His death had paid for sin.

Death itself was undone. And now, even though He fought the battle, we get the spoils. The battle was not ours, but His, and yet we are given the reward.

For all who admit their powerlessness and place their trust in Christ, we gather up the greatest of treasures, the forgiveness of sins, and complete reconciliation with God.

Spiritual regeneration by the Holy Spirit, a new heart that desires the things of God. Membership in His people, the church, where we live together with Christ as our King and pursue His kingdom, a purpose and mission to live for His glory.

[ 29 : 38 ] And when a race is run and Christ the King returns, He will grant us the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come and the healed and new creation where peace and justice dwell forever.

You see, friends, in the midst of our fears, this is the victory we must remember. When our fears are running high, when our anxieties and worries are pressing in, we have to return to the valley of Barakah, the valley of blessing, the place where God fought the battle and His people got the reward.

And from there, follow that same God to the empty tomb where God fought an even greater battle and we received an even greater reward. And as you remember this victory and the grace that you've been given, as you remember that victory, then you can come back to the Word.

I will be with you. And you can know that you can trust it. And then you can come back to the prayer and you can make it your own.

That the God of incomparable power and unbreakable promises is your God. And you can admit that you don't need to be powerful.

[ 30 : 58 ] And you can admit that you don't have it all figured out. Instead, you can say, our eyes are on you. Our eyes are on you, Lord, and we will not be afraid.

Let's pray. Father, in this moment, our eyes are on you.

We pray that by your Holy Spirit you would allow us to do just what this passage invites us to do. to see that you are the God who has fought the greatest battle on our behalf, won the victory, and offered us the greatest of treasures.

Lord, we take just a moment to confess our fears to you, our worries, our anxieties. We lay them before you. Some of them seem small, God, and we've got ideas of how to try to figure them out. Some of them seem so great that we're not sure what to do, and it's easy for us to say, we're powerless. God, help us now in this moment to see that underneath all of these fears that we wrestle with and engage with, the greatest fear of all.

[ 32 : 33 ] The fear of our exclusion from you, the fear that our sins would put us forever under your wrath, Lord, that that great fear has been met by an even greater gospel.

Lord Jesus, help us to see you as our rescuer and our redeemer. God, draw our hearts out in faith and trust to you again.

Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you. We pray this in Christ's mighty name. Amen. Amen.