

Victory Through God

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During our preparation for the Lord's Supper, we noted that one of the predominant characteristics of God is His faithfulness. We know that we can trust Him to care for us because of the way that He cared for the righteous men of old, as recorded in Scripture. No matter the circumstances, if they leaned on God, He blessed them.

In the difficult times of our lives, we often need that assurance. When it doesn't seem like God is addressing the problem before us, or He isn't giving us the answer we want, or we're so stressed that we forget about Him entirely, those are the times when we need to take confidence from the stories of the past. Let's look at one of those stories this morning, as we consider how we too can find victory through God.

Judah's Predicament

This morning, we're going to be looking at a story that doesn't usually appear in any books of children's Bible stories, but has many useful lessons for us nonetheless. It concerns Jehoshaphat king of Judah and the predicament that he and his people faced as the result of a foreign invasion. The story comprises the bulk of 2 Chronicles 20, so I invite you to turn with me there this morning. Let's begin by reading 2 Chronicles 20:1-13.

The first part of this reading describes **THE PROBLEM**. Before we go on, let's re-acquaint ourselves with the geography of this area of the world at this time. When we think of nations today, we think of nations like China or the United States, or at their smallest, like France or Germany. However, when we're talking about the nations of the Old Testament, that shouldn't be our frame of reference at all. At the time of 2 Chronicles, the nation of Judah wasn't a whole lot bigger than Will County. It was a teeny-weeny little postage stamp of a country, and it was surrounded by a whole bunch of other nations that were about the same size.

When these nations went to war against each other, as they often did, it was rare for one to be able to conquer another. However, when two or three of these nations ganged up on one of them, that meant serious trouble. Such is the case in 2 Chronicles 20. The people of Judah must contend with the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Meunites, who were probably from the south, toward the Arabian peninsula. In straight-up battle, this would be anything but a fair fight. The Jews clearly realize this and are terrified. They turn to God because they know He is their only defense.

There is an important reminder in this for us. Even for God's people, life isn't necessarily fair. We can have a job where the boss is a jerk and continually makes our lives miserable. We can be stuck in some kind of personal conflict that goes on and on, that we can't get out of. We can have crushing health problems, crushing financial problems, or a whole host of other difficulties. We might think to ourselves, "This just isn't fair!" and yeah, it probably isn't.

But you know what? Fair isn't part of the bargain. God has never said to any of His people, "I promise only to put you in fair situations." From beginning to end of the Bible, we continually see the righteous being given more than they can handle on their own, and it's in times like those that they, and we, truly learn to trust God.

In consequence, Jehoshaphat is driven to prayer, but he begins this prayer, in front of all of the people of Judah, by describing **GOD'S GREATNESS**. This opening statement has three components: first, God's intrinsic power; second, God's gift of the land of Canaan to His people, and third, His promise to hear and deliver them when they prayed to Him from His temple. None of this is about Jehoshaphat and his problems. Instead, it's all about God.

Here, we find a valuable lesson about the way we should pray. A lot of the time, we want to skip the preamble and get straight to the important stuff, which is about God giving us what we want, but there is much more wisdom in praying like Jehoshaphat did. When we begin by praising God's power, we please Him and remind ourselves that He is capable of helping us too. When we repeat the things that He has done for His people generally and us personally in the past, we remind ourselves that we've been in bad situations before, but God has gotten us through them, and what He has done before, He can do again. Finally, when we pray about the promises that God has made to us as His people, we bring to our attention the very reason why we should pray confidently in the first place—because God has promised to listen. Once we've spent the first part of our prayer focusing on God and not on ourselves, that will help us to pray with greater faith and greater peace than if we had just launched into our Christmas list without thinking about Him.

Finally in this section, we see **JEHOSHAPHAT'S PLEA**. He begins by pointing out the injustice of the situation. All of these nations that he had not offended were coming to war against him. However, his solution is interesting. More precisely, his lack of solution is interesting. He doesn't tell God how God needs to solve his problems. Instead, he makes three observations. First, there is nothing that he himself can do about this problem. Second, he is so far from being in control that he doesn't have any ideas about something to do. Finally, his eyes, along with the eyes of the people, are on God. They're going to wait on the Lord and trust in His solution.

Here too, we see some dramatic contrasts with the way that we pray. We aren't interested in glorifying God or in listing out all the things He's done for us before, but when it comes to what we think God ought to do, we've got all kinds of specifics in mind. We think He should give us this job in this place on this timetable. We think He should heal us in

this way at this pace with this result. In other words, if only God will let us pull His puppet strings for a little bit, we think we can manage our own lives just fine. Often, even the way we ask for help reveals our arrogance.

Instead, in our prayers, we should recognize that God is not only more powerful than we but also wiser. Even if God were willing to listen to our attempts at micromanaging Him, why would we think that anything good would come as a result? Is our solution going to be superior to His? We may well be better off to echo Jehoshaphat, to acknowledge that we can't do anything, that we don't know what to do if we could, but that our eyes are on Him.

God's Deliverance

As the first half of this story details Judah's difficulties, the second half describes God's deliverance. This account appears in 2 Chronicles 20:14-30. Within it, the first sub-context details **THE ANSWER OF THE SPIRIT**. The answer is all that Jehoshaphat and the people could have hoped for. Not only is God going to rescue them from their enemies, but He is also going to do all the fighting for them. All they have to do is go out like they're going to fight a battle, but they aren't actually going to have to lift a finger to repel the invaders.

Today, of course, we don't have reason to expect one of the Christians here to burst into prophecy in the middle of the assembly, but we can still draw comfort from God's prophetic word nonetheless. In fact, that's what we're doing right now. Because God is faithful, there is no better guide to what He will do in the future than what He has done in the past. Similarly, the word will remind us that God is always with us, that He will never fail us nor forsake us, and that we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. When we are waiting for an answer to our prayers, there is no better way to spend that time than in study. It will remind us of who God is and what He will do to bless His people.

The next few verses reveal **JUDAH'S FAITH** in what God has said to them. They show this faith first of all by loudly expressing their trust in what the prophet has just revealed. Early the next morning, even though they are hopelessly outnumbered, the people march out to battle anyway. What's more, instead of putting a screen of skirmishers or a spearhead of veterans in front to lead the way, Jehoshaphat puts a whole bunch of Levites in front of his army to sing praises as they marched. From a tactical standpoint, these things are foolish. From the standpoint of faith, they're wise.

We too need to show our faith in God's promised answer. Before I go on, though, let me emphasize that this is about faith in God's promises, not faith in our own wisdom. If we ask God for a new Mercedes, it is not a display of faith for us to start building a garage for it when it arrives. That's arrogance.

However, we should show faith in what God has promised. For example, let's say that we've hit a rough patch financially. The wisdom of the world would suggest that we ought to cut back on our contribution to the Lord's work and the help we offer to the poor. After all, both of those things are surplus. They're not in the same category as the cell phone bill, right? Likewise, the wisdom of the world would urge us to get another job, even if we would start missing church as a consequence of that second job. However, before we start filling out employment applications, we need to remember God's promises. He has told us that if we put the kingdom first, we will receive everything else we need. Likewise, He has promised that if we choose to be generous, He will make sure that we always have enough to be generous. Either we trust God enough to make decisions on the basis of His promises, or we don't. The devil loves to maneuver us into choices like that, but if we want God's blessing, we need to walk by faith, not by sight.

Not surprisingly, the faith of the Jews results in **A GREAT VICTORY**. Here, God returns to one of His old standbys—sowing confusion in the camp of the enemies of Israel. The people of Judah don't have to fight because the Ammonites, Moabites, and people of Seir all obligingly kill one another for them. If a human commander is able to destroy half of the enemy army, that's considered a crushing military victory. However, God kills all of His people's foes.

This should remind us, friends, that the victories that God brings are often far different and far better than we can imagine. Let me give you an example. After I graduated law school, 10 years ago now, I had terrible trouble finding a job. I prayed and prayed and prayed about it, but still, even a year later, no job. However, at the end of that time, I started thinking about something I would never have considered at the beginning—becoming a gospel preacher—and here I am. I probably don't make as much money as I would as an assistant county attorney someplace in the wilds of Texas, but I'm doing the most important work that anyone can do, and I get out of bed every morning with a smile on my lips and joy in my heart, because I love doing it. To me, the choice between money and happiness isn't a choice at all. God knew that all along. He knew that being a preacher was best for me, and rather than answering my prayers in the way I wanted and asked for, He gave me what He knew was best. It's different from what I wanted, but it's far better.

This story concludes by describing **THE FRUITS OF VICTORY**. In addition to all the spoil that we saw the Jews lugging back to Jerusalem in the previous section, they are so impressed with the victory that they name the valley where all this happened "The Valley of Blessing". What's more, all of their enemies leave them alone. Nobody else wants to be next on the list of armies annihilated by God. This should remind us, friends, that once God gets involved in our lives, those lives start glorifying Him. When He gets us through massive trials that we never could have overcome on our own, once they're in our rearview mirror, they become monuments to Him. All the glory goes to God—just as it should.