

The Power of Praise Part 5

We've been talking about the importance and the power of praise. I began this series talking about Paul and Silas and how praising the Lord in prison made a difference in their circumstances. In spite of the physical pain they were in, in spite of the hopelessness of their circumstances, they began to praise the Lord at midnight. Their feet were in stocks, they were miserable, but I believe as they praised the Lord their perspective began to change. They were reminded of the faithfulness of God. Their praises reminded them of God's goodness, that God makes a way where there seems to be no way, that God is Sovereign and in control. As they praised him, even that dungeon jail cell began to look differently. They realized "God is with us here and we can trust him." Praise lifts you to the place where you can say "God, your will be done. I trust you and I'll praise you in these circumstances until I can praise you for my circumstances. Regardless of what is happening, you are worthy of my highest praise!"

I want to look at another story that shows the importance and power of praise in our lives. Turn to the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles 20. Some of you may remember a musical our children did years ago about good king Jehoshaphat. If so, that's who we are talking about.

Jehoshaphat was a king of Judah. Remember it was a divided kingdom with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Jehoshaphat inherited the throne after his father Asa died and Jehoshaphat ruled from around 873 to 848 BCE, about three hundred years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile.

Jehoshaphat was a good king who served the Lord, removed heathen worship and pagan shrines, sent priests and Levites to teach the law to the people, appointed judges to help settle disputes according to God's word. He trusted in the Lord and he trusted in a strong defense, building up a strong army. You can read about all of this in 2 Chronicles 17-19. However, trouble comes. **"After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in En Gedi.'" 2 Chronicles 20:1-2**

These armies were coming from modern day Jordan on the other side of the Dead Sea. It's interesting these enemies of Israel were pagans, idol worshippers. We don't know who the Meunites were and the rest of the chapter refers to them as people from Mount Seir, but the Ammonites and Moabites could trace their lineage back to the Israelites and a sinful decision made by the daughters of Lot after Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. It's a reminder that

sin and sinful choices, ignoring the warnings of God have long term consequences effecting generations. The Moabites were descendants of Moab, the son of Lot and his oldest daughter. The Ammonites were descendants of Ben-Ammi, the son of Lot and Lot's youngest daughter. This ancient, tragic, incestuous relationship led to this sinful confrontation. Again, just a reminder that sin will always cost you more than you anticipated. It will take you farther away and keep you longer than you ever imagined.

The enemy armies were massive. "Vast" the bible says and they were already at En Gedi on the Western Side of the Dead Sea, maybe 50 miles from Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat realizes they are "in a tight spot, boys." It looked like a good time to panic, a good time to pray, but it may not have seemed like a good time for praise. What are we supposed to praise God for? That we are about to be attacked? But praising God is part of what they did and it made the difference. The bible says, **"Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed they came from every town in Judah to seek him." 2 Chronicles 20:3-4**

The King wisely decides to inquire of the Lord. It's the first thing all of us should do when trouble comes. Inquire of the Lord. Ask for his help, his wisdom, his direction. The king calls the people to fast and pray and so the people of Judah came from every town to call on the Lord. They gather in Jerusalem at the temple and King Jehoshaphat stands to lead them in prayer. Part of the purpose of his prayer is to give praise to God. You could say he is reminding God of his promises to his people, which he does, but more importantly he is reminding the people of their God and his promises, his faithfulness. He prays a prayer of gratitude, a prayer of declaration, a prayer praising God for who he is and for what he has done in the past.

"O Lord, God of our Fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgement or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress and you will hear us and save us.'" 2 Chronicles 20:6-9

Jehoshaphat and the people must have felt better after this prayer because the king calls to memory many of the miracles God had performed for his people. He reminds them of who

God is. He is the God of our fathers, the God of the generations. He is God of the Heavens, God over all the kingdoms and nations and no one can withstand him. He is Sovereign Lord and God over all. Wow! And he is not just our God in name or God in theory, Jehoshaphat says, you are the God who is actually involved. You are the God who drove out our enemies and gave us this land. You made a covenant with us and you've honored that covenant and you are still with us, still keeping your word. He even quotes from Solomon's dedicatory prayer (2 Chron. 6), recalling this is what God said we were to do, to gather here at this place and pray and believe God will hear and answer us. So here we are, facing a new challenge, another crisis.

“But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” 2 Chronicles 20:10-12

Powerless to face this vast army. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you. Does that sound familiar? Does that sound like you or someone you know this morning? Can anyone relate to that? I'm powerless to change these circumstances. It feels like there is an army coming against me. My back's against the wall. I don't have a clue what's next, I don't know what to do about my problem, but I'm doing the one thing I know to do, I'm looking to you Jesus. I'm fixing my eyes on you, locking my gaze on you, trusting you, waiting on you!

Here is a great lesson concerning praise. It's what Jehoshaphat was doing in his prayer. By praising the Lord, quoting Scripture, reciting times in the past when God came through for us and met us, praising him for his faithfulness, we are putting our eyes upon Him. We are focusing our attention on him - focusing our energy on him rather than on our worry. The king said, “We do not know what to do” acknowledging our weakness, “but our eyes are upon you” acknowledging the source of our strength. Remember Paul cried out in his weakness about that thorn in the flesh and God told him his grace was sufficient and Paul said, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” In our weakness we look to the Lord and discover His strength changes everything. So I can praise him even from this position of weakness. When we praise Him, we change the entire focus from the immensity of the problem to the absoluteness of God's power to more than handle whatever problem or crisis we face.

Verse 13 tells us all the men of Judah with their wives and children and little ones are standing there before the Lord. Their trust is in Him. Then the Spirit of the Lord moved upon Jahaziel and he stood before the King and the people and declared this word from the Lord. **“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow, march down against them...You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow and the Lord will be with you.” 2 Chronicles 20:15-17**

Do not be afraid or discouraged. The battle is not yours but God’s. There is an enemy coming against you, an army marching toward you and you don’t know what to do, but God is sending you a reminder, you’re not on your own. You belong to him. You’ve been bought with a price and God isn’t about to let his own child face down this enemy alone. God’s got this.

Notice he didn’t tell them to just go home and not worry about it. He didn’t say, “do nothing and wait.” He told them not to be afraid or discouraged, but he still told them to take up their positions and to march down against the enemy. We still go out to face the challenges of life, we face the enemies of our soul, we take action, but we go knowing “the Lord will be with you.” That’s how we walk in faith. That’s why we keep on praising, because we believe, we know the Lord is with us. The more we praise him, the more confident we are, the more we can rest in that assurance he is faithful and he is with us. He says we won’t have to fight because if it’s his battle, he is going to do the fighting, but we must obey his word.

Verse 18 says King **“Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Then some Levites...stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with very loud voice.” 2 Chron. 20:18-19** The people are praising the Lord for the word of encouragement that’s been spoken to them. God says the battle is his and he is going to fight for us. “Shout to the Lord!”

Early the next morning the army sets out, marching south to meet the enemy forces. The King tells them, “Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.” It’s one thing to have a preacher stand up and tell you not to be afraid that the battle belongs to the Lord and he is going to fight for you. It’s another thing to have the general give the order and you start marching to battle to take up your position. “I’ve got faith in the Lord and I’m believing we will be successful, but... what if something goes wrong? I’m not sure how this is going to work.” Then the king throws a new twist into the plan.

“After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying, ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.’” 2 Chron. 20:21 This has to be the strangest army, the strangest sight anyone had ever seen. It’s at least as crazy as the Israelites marching around the walls of Jericho. An army with a choir leading them to battle. “Praise the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever.”

Bryce and I have talked about how to recruit members. I’m thinking this was not exactly the best way. “We want you to march out in front of the army. Now, we are certain there is nothing to fear, even though you are unarmed and just singing praises. If anything goes wrong, well, the soldiers are right behind you.” I don’t know if the choir members felt like singing that day or not, but singing and praising the Lord is what they did. Praise him and give thanks for his mercy – his steadfast love, his lovingkindness, endures forever.”

They begin singing and praising the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord for his mercy endures forever. That’s what his love is all about. They may have been a little timid at first. Their eyes diverting in every direction looking for enemy soldiers. Maybe they are singing at a whisper, “Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever.” And then they sing it a little louder, and a little louder. Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever! Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever. Maybe they start thinking about what they are singing. His mercy, his lovingkindness, that love that he showed to our fathers, that covenant he made with Abraham our Father, he is the God that has kept that covenant through the generations. He is keeping that covenant with us and our children. He is going to show that love and mercy to us today. Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever! GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD FOR HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER!

The army marches behind the choir as they sing and praise the Lord for the splendor of his holiness and as they praise him for his greatness and faithfulness. And look what the bible says. **“As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.” 2 Chron. 20:22**

Do you see what that says? As they began to sing and praise the Lord, the Lord set ambushes against the enemy. They never even made it to the battle field. They never even had to take up their positions against the enemy because as they gave thanks and praise to the Lord, the Lord set ambushes against the enemy. I don’t know how it happened. What the bible says is

that the enemy turned against each other and destroyed one another. It appears to me that when God's people praise the Lord in spite of the circumstances, in spite of the odds, in spite of the size of the enemy forces, praise confuses the enemy! The enemy doesn't know what to do when God's people in faith put their trust in the Lord and start praising him anyway. Praise him in spite of. Praise him in everything. Praise him for everything. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Let his praise continually be in your mouth and on your lips. That's what the bible says. Sing praises to him and let the Lord fight the battle.

I have to believe God is setting up an ambush for someone's enemy this morning. You walked in here with this burden and all of these problems staring you down and you don't have a clue what you are going to do, how you are going to pay the bills, how you are going to deal with this crisis, but like Jehoshaphat, you told the Lord this morning that you were looking to him and you were going to focus on the Lord and you weren't going to let the devil keep you from praising the Lord. In spite of what you are facing you went ahead and praised God, you gave thanks to the Lord because you know his love endures forever, and I think the Lord set up ambushes for your enemy. He is going to confuse the enemy and you are going to have reason to rejoice even more.

The choir and the army of Judah came marching over the hill and looked down into the valley expecting to see this vast army. Instead, what they saw was dead bodies lying on the ground. King Jehoshaphat and his men went in to carry off the plunder and the bible says there was so much plunder, it took them three days to collect it all. When God defeats the enemy, he turns the battlefield into a place of provision.

Three days of gathering the plunder and rejoicing in the victory God provided. Look at verse 26. **“One the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, where they praised the Lord. This is why it is called the Valley of Beracah to this day.” 2 Chron. 20:26.** Beracah means praise, blessing, to bless. They gathered to praise the Lord, to bless the Lord. Listen to what I'm telling you, praise leads to blessing and obedience leads to victory. They obeyed the Lord and their obedience led to victory. They praised the Lord and kept on praising him and praise led to blessing. With more plunder than they could carry, Jehoshaphat and all the men returned joyfully to Jerusalem. The bible says, **“For the Lord had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies. They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the Lord with harps and lutes and trumpets.” 2 Chron. 20:28**

Hopefully you don't have Ammonites marching against you, but you certainly may be facing some enemies today. Giants and mountains that stand in your way. Things that are bigger than you can handle; things beyond your ability to change. I'm here to tell you to begin to praise the Lord. You see, the God we serve is the God of our Fathers, they one who has been faithful through the generations. He is the God of the heavens and of this earth. He rules over all the kingdoms of this world and no one can stand against him. He is the God who has met your needs before and he is the God who is still at work in your life today. Praise him. Give thanks to the Lord for his love and his mercy endures forever. Praise him because he is going to fight for you. Praise him because he is going to be with you. Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged.

Praise him in the face of those enemies you are facing. By praising the Lord in all things you participate in the will of God for your life. Praise him because he is at work. Praise him because he is worthy of praise. The bible says, "**And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace for his God had given him rest on every side.**" Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Praise the Lord and give thanks to him and let God give you rest and peace on every side!