

2 Chronicles 20

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles, if you will, to 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Next Sunday, Reuben is beginning a new series in the book of James on Sunday mornings, which will be terrific.

! I'm going to move to Sunday nights and carry on in John. But I wanted to kind of finish the year in, I've never preached in 2 Chronicles. I was reading 2 Chronicles in, you know, the McShane Daily Bible Reading Plan.

And there's loads of them as you go out to pick one up over this last month. And I don't know why, but I'd never really come across chapter 20 before.

And the chapter, you know when you get a chocolate orange, you bang the chocolate orange and it kind of opens up perfectly before your eyes. And I felt a bit like that with 2 Chronicles chapter 20.

And I thought it'd be a really good chapter to look at at the start of our week of prayer. There are times, aren't there, where life seems particularly unfair.

[1 : 05] I'm not talking about the times when you've got in trouble because you've been stupid or because of our sinfulness. I'm talking about the times when you've tried your best and you've actually tried to follow the Lord.

You've tried to put him first, but things have gone very wrong. And that's what 2 Chronicles 20, that's the context. The story is not really about King Jehoshaphat, who got it badly wrong and then his army came and kind of took him out.

No, King Jehoshaphat had just carried out the most radical of reform programs that Judah had ever known. King Jehoshaphat, he'd reformed the nation's worship.

He'd overhauled the justice system. He'd established a teaching program so the people would know the law of Moses. He'd done great things for the Lord.

And what's the result of that? Is it that the Lord blesses? No. There's a vast coalition of attackers come. They come from the north, they come from the east to attack him.

[2 : 17] And it's a mystery, isn't it? At the heart of the life of faith in living as a Christian, it's often mystery. And you might say to me this morning, we're not King Jehoshaphat, Paul.

We're not King Jehoshaphat, the son of Judah. And I know that very, very well. But the truth is this. Jehoshaphat's God of 2 Chronicles 20 is the same as our God.

And the point about stories in the Bible is that these things, as Paul says, are written for our learning. These are people that experience faith, the life of faith.

They experience the ups and the downs of faith in the same way that you and I do. If you read Jehoshaphat's story, you'll find he's one of the better kings.

He was a genuinely good man. He was a genuinely kind and generous man. He did have one fault. And his one fault was that he did not know how to say no.

[3 : 22] He didn't know how to say no. And he didn't say no how to say no, particularly to the godless house of Ahab, who reigned in Israel at the same time. In other words, you're not dealing with a particularly strong man.

You're dealing with a weak man and a man who knows his own weakness. And on this story, he rises to the occasion. The key verse is verse 12, I think.

He says this. Oh God, verse 12. He says, can you see it in the middle of the verse? He says, for we are powerless. We have no power against this great horde that is coming against us.

We have no power against this great army that's coming against us. We do not know what to do. But our eyes are on you.

Oh God, we have no power. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you. There's a certain type of Christian biography, you know, the Christian biographies you can read, where the heroes and the heroines, they don't seem to have any problems.

[4 : 34] They seem to pray all the time. And they seem to trust God all the time. They never seem to struggle with temptation. But wonderfully biblical characters aren't like that at all. If you look at the characters in the Bible, they are human.

They have flaws. They have failures. They're sinful. And fallen like us. But what makes the difference is they have faith. Without faith, Hebrews chapter 11 says, it is impossible to please God. But the emphasis is not so much on human faith, but on the faithfulness of God. If you and I rely on our faith, we'll soon be tripped up. Our faith, my faith is fickle.

It blows hot. I'm cold. It comes and it goes. It's not so much human faith, but the faithful God. The strength of weakness. There are three parts in the story.

Three parts in the drama. And they all follow the same pattern. You turn to God first and then there's a response. And the three parts all begin with PR. It's homiletically nearly perfect, this sermon.

[5 : 40] And so the first part of the story is about prayer, verses 2 to 13. It's fast army. It's not full of household names, are they? But they were hugely prominent in Jehoshaphat's time.

So he inquires with the Lord in verse 3. He calls the people to prayer. And in verse 6 and following, we have his prayer. It is not that prayer changes things.

Prayer puts us in touch with God who changes things. So if we say prayer changes things, which often people do, you put the emphasis in the wrong place. And so you'll want to know, well, how long do I pray?

Or what technique should I use to pray? Or how earnest do I need to be in my prayers? It's a great story, isn't it, in 1 Kings 18, where Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal.

And the prophets of Baal, they have an all-day prayer meeting. And the prophets of Baal, they pray with increasing fervor and increasing fanaticism. What do they say the whole of these hours?

[6 : 47] These hour-after-hour prayer meetings, they say, O Baal, hear us. O Baal, hear us. Why is that? It was because Baal hadn't spoken to them.

Baal had nothing to say to them. He had not revealed himself to them. But then Elijah prays, and we'll see this with Jehoshaphat in a moment.

Elijah starts with the God who's revealed himself. You see, we would have nothing to say to God unless he first spoke to us.

So this prayer of Jehoshaphat, it starts with God. Can you see it in verse 6? He says, O Lord God of our fathers.

O Lord God of our fathers. What does that mean? It means, God, you have been faithful in history. You've kept your promises, God, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob.

[7 : 47] You were faithful to those who came before us in the faith. Are you not the God that is above us in heaven? You are over, and you are above this crisis.

They're great truths about God, aren't they? And those two great truths run throughout the whole of the Bible. He is the God of creation, and he's the Lord of history. You get that.

You get right to the heart of Israel's faith. You get that more than once in the Psalms. My help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. It means, of course, doesn't it, that there's nothing in heaven or on earth that can stand against him.

It means that there is nowhere in heaven or on earth where God is absent. It means that there is no problem that will arise in this coming year that is too great for him.

And the great truth of history, the history of the world, the history of the church, your own history.

Going back to the time of Abraham, look at verse 7. Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people, Israel?

[9 : 04] And you gave it forever to the descendants of Abraham, your friends. You have the exodus all the way to Joshua and the coming into the land.

And there are echoes, aren't there, of the great prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple.

And later, this chapter is going to become part of Psalm 136. The point is this.

What God did and what God does shows the kind of God that he is. What God does shows the kind of God he is.

And we have the same God as Jehoshaphat has. And in verse 6 it says, In your hand are power and might.

And in verse 9 it says, You will hear and save us. Prayer must begin with God. But then it comes to our helplessness.

[10:07] Verse 12, can you see it? We are powerless. We have no power. But our eyes are on you. And that is true, isn't it?

Not just in Jehoshaphat's day, but in our day too. We have no power. To turn people back to God. We have no power in our Christian lives. We cannot face temptation, can we, without the power of God. You see, this is why Jehoshaphat, although he's not a particularly strong man, he's given help. And remember, this is always true. We have no strengths. When we're struggling in our individual lives, and when we're struggling in our church lives, of course we know that, don't we? We know at those times when we're really struggling, we have no strength. But the danger is, we forget that when God blesses us. And when God blesses our work.

[11:15] When the work grows, and when there's encouragements, it's still true, isn't it? We have no strength. But our eyes are to you.

And as you live out your Christian life, in 2024, remember this, you have no strength. But our eyes are on you.

And prayer begins with great thoughts of God. And it brings these right down into our helplessness. And so often, I start the wrong way.

I look at my problems, and then I bring my problems to God. And if you look at the visible problems first, and then the invisible God second, you will be in trouble.

It was said of Moses, isn't it, in Hebrews 11, that he persevered because he saw him who was invisible. Now before we move on to those points, can you just notice the three knots?

[12:17] Can you notice the three knots of the prayer? Look at verse 6. Are you not? And then look at verse 7.

Did you not? And then did you notice in verse 12, will you not? Isn't it great? Panam is really tempted to just stop. How do you pray this year?

The three knots. Are you not the Lord God of heaven? Did you not redeem your people? Will you not bring judgment and salvation? Are you not?

Did you not? Will you not? Prayer flows naturally into prophecy. Look at verses 14 to 17. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehaziel, the son of Zechariah.

He's not exactly a well-known figure, is he? I don't expect many of you this week have been thinking about Jehaziel. The point is, it's not the individual that brings the message.

[13:26] It's the message that the individual brings. And he brings, can you see it? The word of God. And once again, it's the same pattern as prayer. God shows what he will do.

Verse 14. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehaziel, son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jael, son of Mataniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph in the midst of the assembly. And he said, Listen, all Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat, thus says the Lord to you.

Do not be afraid. Do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is yours. Not yours, but God's. Stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you.

And once again, he's drawing on the earlier words of God. Once again, this prophet is using what has gone before. He's drawing on the great Exodus story where the Egyptian army, do you remember it?

It goes through the river and it's destroyed, not by military power, not by the might of the Israelites, but by the action of God. And the Exodus story is so, so important, isn't it?

[14:35] So you come to the New Testament and you read Luke 9 and Jesus is on the Mount of Transfiguration and who's with him? But Moses and Elijah, they're with him on the mountain and Luke tells us they spoke about what?

They spoke about Jesus' Exodus. They spoke about what God did with his people long ago. He continues to do.

He's still the God of rescue and redemption. And the Exodus is a picture. It's a picture of from death to life, from darkness to light, that God is going to win the victory.

Ultimately, God has only one worker, the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit. Verse 14, the Spirit of the Lord. came upon Jehaziel, the son of Zechariah.

Now, we can plan, can't we? It's right to plan. And we can train and we can educate, we can even entertain. But we cannot convert.

[15:43] And we cannot cause people to be born again. And we cannot cause people to grow in Greece. Remember that.

When we're discouraged, and when our efforts seem to be coming to nothing, it is God who converts, and it is God who causes it to grow. Paul plants Apollos waters, but it is God who causes it to grow.

And we must remember that, and we must remember that, even more so, when God blesses us. When blessing comes.

It is not us, but to God, that glory must be given. So God shows what he will do, but then he also goes on to talk about what we need to do.

It's really interesting, isn't it? The fact that it is God gives life. It is a work that God does. That doesn't mean that we do nothing. And so only the Lord can plant and cultivate and cause his church to grow.

[16:48] But look at verse 17. Verse 17. You don't need to fight, but you do need to stand firm, hold your position, and see.

Keep doing what is right. Keep on obeying the commandments. Keep on trusting the promises. Keep on preaching the word. Keep on praying.

Keep on working amongst the various people God brings into your life. That's wonderfully encouraging, isn't it, as we think of Hope Explored, starting in January.

We're praying that this room will be packed full. We're praying that lots of people will come. We're praying, I hope, for our neighbours and our friends and our work colleagues, people who we've invited, people who we've brought to the carol saves. We're praying that people will come.

And hear the gospel. And we can ask and we can invite. We can't convert. We can't cause people to be born again. But we can keep on doing what is right.

[17:59] I was thinking, there's lovely illustrations of this in John's gospel, isn't there? So, do you remember the first sign of the water into wine? We can't turn water into wine, can we?

Only Jesus can do that. But we can fill the water pots. We can't raise Lazarus from the dead, but we can roll the stone away from the grave.

And so we are to continue in the work that God has given us. And we're to continue in the work that God has given us in good times and in bad times. We're to continue it when they accept the invitation and we're to continue it when they don't accept the invitation.

And we're to continue in it when there's great growth and we're to continue in it when it seems to be declining. It's lovely truth, isn't it? Take up your position, stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give.

So we have a prayer which looks to God. A prayer which trusts God. And we have a prophecy which shows who God is and what he will do and then finally it runs into praise.

[19:12] That's the final act of the story. Verses 18 to 30, it's very upbeat, isn't it? It's the same pattern as verses 18 to 21. Praise to God for who he is.

So remember, this happens before an army is defeated. This happens before the problem is solved. you see, it's not about feeling good.

It's not about being upbeat. It's not about a stiff upper lip. It's about believing the promises, trust the promises, obey the commands. And we need to remember that, don't we?

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. These are the truths that we hold on to.

You see this throughout Scripture, Psalm 136, which takes up this praise, is a meditation on God's love, God's steadfast covenant love of God.

It's a really difficult word to translate. It's the love of the God of the covenant who is committed to his people by promises that he will not and he cannot break.

[20:29] Charles Williams was a friend of C.S. Lewis. He wrote a novel. The novel tells the story of a vicar in the Church of England, but it could be any Christian.

And this vicar is at the centre of a drama where he feels that the forces of good and evil seem to be battling together in his life. It's rather like the drama in the book of Job.

And this vicar feels that the darkness is about to overwhelm him. He's on his study on his knees one day and he feels that the powers of darkness have won. And then he says it's as if his eyes and ears open and he sees the hosts of heaven and he hears the words that they sang.

Let them give thanks whom the Lord redeemed, the great voice sang. But once the answer came the room filled with light for his mercy his love endures forever.

And again they sang his love endures forever. my point is that kind of experience may or may not come to you as a visible experience but that is the reality of the life of faith.

[21 : 37] We see him who is invisible we see the angels and the archangels and the whole company of heaven and so when we gather to worship on a Sunday it is not just the people who happen to be here.

do you realise when you come on a Sunday you are surrounded by the angels and the archangels and all the company of heaven with the saints with what C.S. Lewis calls deep church the faithful throughout all the ages and the hosts of heaven and that is why when we praise it's not just to fill a gap.

As we praise God we are actually declaring the truth. When our children sing my God is a great big God they are challenging the principalities and the powers for sport.

Psalm 8 says you have ordained praise from children and infants to silence the enemy and the avenger. As we sing together on a Sunday and praise God we are telling Satan and his legions you will not win.

you may have gained a few battles but you cannot and you will not win the war. My God is a great big God. And that of course is right through the Bible isn't it?

[23 : 00] Isaiah 40 perhaps more eloquently in powerful language says to whom will you compare God? Praise declares that God will be God and the world will know it.

And if you go out into the streets today that's not particularly obvious that Jesus is Lord. And if you look into your own heart like I look into mine it's not particularly obvious that Jesus is Lord.

And that is why praise is so important. Praise that focuses on God praise that tells of his greatness praise that opens our eyes to the reality of who God is.

Praise declares that God will be God. praise begins with God but praise has results verse 22. And they began to sing and praise the Lord.

The Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir who had come against Judah so they were routed. The defeat of God's enemies that doesn't always happen as we know it in that way in this world.

[24 : 15] But scripture is doing here what it's always doing it's pointing you to the future. It's pointing to the day when all the world will owe allegiance to this God. When Jesus will reign wherever the sun.

And then in verse 30 can you see it? So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet for his God gave him rest all around. It wasn't permanent in Jehoshaphat's day in his life.

Our rest now isn't permanent is it? But in our lives when we pray and when we read his word and when we come together and praise God we have an anticipation of what is to come.

Of peace and rest. The Sabbath day is a rest day which is pointing you to the rest which is to come. That's why it's so important.

And in these kingdoms of Israel and of Judah and the better kings there was a genuine glimpse of what the world to come would be like. Long ago in Genesis the Lord God had said that a descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

[25 : 31] And I can imagine every faithful people in every generation would have wondered will he come? Will it be David? No. Will it be Hezekiah? No. Will it be Josiah?

No. The rest was temporary wasn't it? They all failed. They all had flaws. However in their better days and in their better times there are pictures of the Christ who was to come when peace and rest would mark the earth when Christ will reign.

So you see in verse 27 they return to Jerusalem and they rejoice with hearts and lyres and trumpets. That doesn't mean that you have to be happy, clappy all the time. My hunch is that's not really a temptation for most of us.

but there is isn't there a kind of shallow silly Christianity which is frankly embarrassing as if the Lord should have sung a chorus at the grave of Lazarus. There are times out there many of you are going through them times when there is doubting times when you are fearful times when we get it badly wrong.

One day all enemies will be defeated and praise will fill heaven and earth. We have no strength we have no strength to face our problems.

[26 : 56] We have no strength to deal with our lives but our eyes are on you. are you not?

Have you not? Will you not? Let's pray.