

Give Thanks To The Lord

2 Chronicles 20:1–30 Thanksgiving message 11-28-2010 IIT Campus in Glen Ellyn IL
Key Verse 20:21 Triton/DuPage/NIU UBF worship service. Shep Kevin Jesmer NIU UBF

“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.’”

Every family has their own Thanksgiving traditions. For us it includes a traditional Turkey meal with all the fixin’s (this year I had four) and a Joint Thanksgiving worship service. We prepare ten thanksgiving topics. Does this sound like your Thanksgiving tradition? This year we want to think about Thanksgiving in a different way. What about fixing your eyes on Jesus and giving praise and thanks to God, even before you receive anything tangible in your hands? Revolutionary you say? Indeed. Today let’s decide to face all of our problems head on and give thanks and praise, in advance, to God for what he has not yet done. What a powerful and God pleasing way to celebrate Thanksgiving!

Part I: Don’t Panic...Pray And Find God’s Direction Instead (1-4)

So what’s happening in this passage? Look at verses 1-2. Jehoshaphat was the King of Judah. He was the great-great-great-great grandson of King David and reigned in Judah from 853 to 848 B.C.. Historical enemies of Israel, joined forces to make war on Judah. They were a vast army. When Jehoshaphat heard about it, they were already marching against Judah. The news struck fear in the hearts of the people.

They were alarmed, but thankfully their king, Jehoshaphat, stood up as a true spiritual leader. Look at verse 3, *“Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.”* First, Jehoshaphat *“resolved”* pray. He could have panicked. He could have done nothing and despaired. Rather, he chose God’s way, resolving to inquire of the Lord (3a) forsaking all other choices in order to find God’s solution. Second, he declared a fast. This is possibly the worst military strategy. Fasting would leave the young men too weak to fight. But, from God’s point of view, prayer and fasting was the best strategy. They could devote extra time to consider their sin and pray to God for help. Hunger pangs would remind them of their weakness and dependence upon the Lord.

You would think that a call to prayer and fasting would not be popular. But not so. Look at verse 4, *“The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.”* People responded well. Jehoshaphat had prepared the populace mainly by appointing judges and Levites to administer the law of the LORD. (2 Chron 19:4-10) He reinstated Bible study throughout the land. Thus the peoples’ hearts were prepared for this. The prayerful study of the word of God helps people to respond to Jesus. Let us pray that Bible teachers may be raised on every campus across our land.

Judah had three enemies advancing. But we have many. Nationally, there is high unemployment; overwhelming debt; and home foreclosures. The majority of families are rocked

by divorce. 40% of Americans think marriage is obsolete. There is also the sin problem. People don't even know what sin is because they do not know God or his word. They think sin is normal and even glamorous. They live in it and though they deny sin's existence, they still must bear its heavy toll. People are rejecting Jesus and his precious gospel en masse. I haven't even talked about war, terrorism, pollution, abortion, violent crime; the spread of competing religions and philosophies; or the billions who are headed to eternal condemnation. We are tempted to derive "human" plans to solve our nation's problems, such as "*Cash For Clunkers*", "*Wall Street Bail Outs*". Becoming alarmed, our young people attempt to solve their problems in their own way too. But do they resolve to fast and pray to Jesus? If they did, God would surely reveal to them his sure way of salvation.

Part II: Jehoshaphat's Prayer (5-13)

In times of crisis our prayer becomes only a desperate cry, "*Oh my God!*" But let's look closely at Jehoshaphat's prayer to learn how to pray. Take note that he stood up boldly to pray. This encouraged all the people. (5) Let's break up the prayer into four pieces. First, he reflected on God's character. Look at verse 6. Jehoshaphat stood, "*and said: 'LORD, the God of our ancestors, 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.'*" The king knew who God is. He knew that God is the God of his people, Israel; that God is seated on his throne in heaven, untouched by events on earth; that God is powerful and almighty; that God is the sovereign ruler over all nations – both godly and secular and no enemy can withstand God. The more you know God personally, the more powerful a prayer servant you will become.

Second, he remembered God's promises. Look at verse 7. "*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?'*" God promised Abraham and his descendents the land of Canaan and he gave it to them. God works through history, faithfully fulfilling all of his promises to his people.

Third, he claimed God's promise to hear prayer. Look at verses 8-9, "*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 judgment, 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.'*" Years earlier, after the first Temple was built, God made a promise. 2 Chronicles 7:14–16 reads, "*...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*"¹⁵ *Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.*"¹⁶ *I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.*" The sword of judgment was upon Judah and Jehoshaphat remembered this special promise and he claimed it in his prayer. We can claim this promise too when we humble ourselves, seek the face of Jesus and turn from our wicked ways.

Fourth, the king appealed to God's sense of justice. Look at verses 10-12a, especially 11 & 12, "*See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance.*"¹² *Our God, will you not judge them?...*" Ammon, Moab and Edom flanked Judah to the east. It was inhabited by the descendants of Lot and Esau. 600 years previous, the

Israelites wanted to pass through Edom peacefully. But the people would not let them. This made them mad. But Israel did not wipe them out for God had told the Israelites not to attack the Edomites. (Deut 2:4b-6, 9, 19). God was honoring his ancient promises to the descendants of Lot. And so they turned away from them. (Num 20:14-21) But now these same people were attacking and invading Judah. They had forgotten the mercy shown them earlier by God. This was not fair! The king's sense of injustice was turned towards God in prayer. In essence Jehoshaphat was saying to God, "*You have power. Please deal with this problem we are facing. For you are the God of justice.*" Our God of justice knows all that is happening. He cares about you. We can pray to him and he will surely bring about a fair and equitable solution in his way and in his time.

Fifth, his prayer was offered in humility and brokenness. Look at verse 12b, "*...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 on you.*" He was a king and yet he confessed his helplessness and turned things over to God. We learn that we need to come to God acknowledging that we can do nothing, but God can do everything. Then we must turn our eyes upon Jesus with no agenda or demands waiting for his answer.

The families were united in prayer. Look at verse 13, "*All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.*" What unity! They were led by the fathers. Even the little ones participated. May God raise up house churches, families of faith, across America, where children and parents come together before the Lord to pray for our nation and where husbands stand up as spiritual leaders for their families.

Part III: Stand Firm And See God's Deliverance (14-17)

God was moved by the humble, unified prayers of his people and he quickly answered them. Jahaziel, a little known Levite, prophesied how the battle would be fought and won. First, they must not be afraid or discouraged. Verse 15b says, "*...This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army...'*" These ancient armies were known for their extreme cruelty. If Judah lost, people would die horrific deaths and lose everything. This army was too strong for Judah. How could God tell them not be afraid or discouraged? The enemies we face today are also as menacing. Dark spiritual forces want to leave us cowering in despair and fatalism. They rob us of the joy of living. Evil spirits and false prophets are keeping young hearts closed to Jesus and his Gospel truth. (Eph 6:12) As a result people are suffering and dying in their sins. If they lose this battle there are eternal consequences for they will suffer greatly in this life and must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. How can we not be afraid and discouraged? There is a way however and we will see it here.

Second, know that the battle is God's. Let's read verse 15c, "*...For the battle is not yours, but God's.*" God had called his people to be a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation and a light to the Gentiles. He preserved Judah to send the Savior of the world, Jesus. God committed himself to his people. They are his people and he is their God. God's reputation was at stake. He must win the battle. And so the battle is God's. When you commit yourself to God, God commits himself to you. He, who called you, will fight for you bringing glory to himself through your life's struggles. You simply need to commit to Jesus.

Third, they needed to confront their enemies. Look at verse 16, “*Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel.*” To obey this they needed to overcome fears, trust God and exercise their faith. But the key reason is nestled in verse 17, “...*and see the deliverance the LORD will give you,...*” They could “*see*” the miracle that was about to happen when they obeyed God’s command. Whatever enemy that is advancing against you, confront it practically, and be ready to see the miracle that faith will bring about. Just do it!

Fourth, God wants us to stand firm. Let’s read verse 17a, “*You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you,*” Standing firm could be the hardest thing to do when all you want to do is run away. Standing firm involves planting your two feet, firmly in place, and not moving, trusting God to deliver you. Standing firm is an imperative for, “...*if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*” (Isa 7:9b) It is God who enables them to stand firm. Look at verse 17b, “...*Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.*” God promises to be with them. And who is this God again? Remember verse 6. God in heaven rules the world. Power and might are in his hands. There is no one who can withstand the Lord. This powerful God is our Savior. Knowing this God allows us to stand firm in Christ.

Part IV: Give Thanks And Praise to God...Even Before The Battle (18-24)

The peoples’ response was revolutionary! Look at verses 18-19, “*Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.* ¹⁹ *Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.*” They truly believed God’s word of promise and had a tremendous worship service. Some fell down and others stood up. They took praise and thanksgiving to the next level and worshiped God together...even before the battle.

We naturally give thanks after the battle. But thanking God before the battle, before any tangible benefits, requires pure faith. 1 John 5:14–15 reads; “*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* ¹⁵ *And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*” Sometimes we pray selfish prayers. God deals with these prayers on a person to person basis. But we are all invited to pray for things that are clearly in the will of God and we know God will answer. Try it. Instead of waiting for God to answer your own prayer topics, how about believing that God will provide as you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness? that he will make you into a shepherd of God’s flock? that he will forgive you of your sins and make you more forgiving person? that he will help you grow in the image of Jesus? that God will lead you along the narrow way that leads to eternal life? What about prayers on a ministry and national level? Believe that God will make our campus’ “*Christ centered*” campus’; that our nation will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; that God will raise up many American career missionaries; that Jesus and his Gospel will have a place of prominence in the hearts of our young people. Do these inspire you to erupt in praise and worship? I hope so. We can praise God that he will surely answer these prayers in his time and in his way as we stand firm in him.

The king continually planted faith in the peoples' hearts in verse 20. After getting up early to prepare, the king stood up and delivered a powerful daily bread message. He said, *"Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."* Then the king placed the most powerful weapons in front of the army, a men's choir. Look at verse 21. *"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.'"* The people of Judah could hear the roar of the army over the trees. Many were trembling in their boots. Yet the men were singing psalms and the rest were praying. They all obeyed God, taking their eyes off the enemy and focusing on God's holiness and love. These singing men must have totally psyched out the enemy. You may not be able to handle an M-16, like brother Carl Heusel, but all of you can give God thanks, praise and worship because of your own personal experience with God's holiness and his love. Let's take up these spiritual weapons and fight like true soldiers of Christ.

God remained true to his word and fought for his people. Look at verses 22-24. It was a miracle! God set ambushes. When enemy soldiers passed by a bush, "Pow", it started on fire. POW! POW! The ambushes were very effective. The enemy forces slaughtered each other, right to the last man. They were completely defeated by God. We have many types of battles in life and ministry. God promises to be with us and fight our battles to the end when we do things God's way.

Part V: The Fruit Of "Standing Firm" Faith (25-30)

God eventually gave his people lots of tangible things. Look at verses 25-26, *"So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great amount of equipment and clothing and also articles of value—more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it."²⁶ On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berakah, where they praised the LORD. This is why it is called the Valley of Berakah to this day."* Great plunder was left. It took three days to collect. They were surrounded by a gruesome scene, but in the midst of that darkness great joy overflowed in their hearts. They called the battlefield, *"The Valley Of Praise"*. God will give each one of you something tangible as long as you stand firm in Jesus, even when you are surrounded by all kinds of bad news.

Their thanksgiving and praise was carried to completion. Look at verses 27-28, *"Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the LORD had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies."²⁸ They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the LORD with harps and lyres and trumpets."* Surely they should have scattered to have street parties in all of their towns. But they knew that their success came from God and that they could not declare, *"Mission Accomplished"* before coming to God at his dwelling place to give him thanks and praise.

The best plunder was peace. Look at verses 29-30, *"The fear of God came on all the surrounding kingdoms when they heard how the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel."³⁰ And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side."* By God's grace, Judah came to enjoy a time of peace. They prospered, planting crops that

weren't plundered; sleeping at night without fear of home invasions; enjoying their sons' presence at home without war; trading with neighboring countries gaining wealth. Indeed peace is one of the best gifts from God. Our inner struggles leave our hearts weary and burdened. According to verse 30, God wants to give us peace on every side as stand firm in his love and holiness. This peace is not the peace that the world gives. It is God's special peace given to his people of faith. Listen to the promise of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*"³⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" In the context of this passage, Jesus' yoke is praying and fasting, obeying God by confronting the things that assail our hearts, focusing on God's holiness and love and trusting God-standing firm in our faith. May God grant you his peace on all sides this Thanksgiving and always.

Over the last 25 years of being in Christ, God has fought many a battle for me. Let me share a couple of them with you. My first great battle was family misunderstanding. My parents loved me but initially did not understand my decision to follow Jesus. A battle ensued that lasted for five long years. I shed tears. But God gave me his word in Genesis 15:1b, "*Do not be afraid, Kevin, I am your shield, your very great reward.*" God helped me to stand firm by remaining true to my calling as a shepherd for campus souls while growing in Christ's love and holiness. After 6 years God moved my family's heart to appreciate my life and ministry. They became supportive of my family. In 2008 I took my family to my home town. We saw the grocery store that my mother managed for decades. Managing this store was her life and a symbol of my family identity. I was shocked that it had been converted into a church and Christian book store. Across the roof was a huge sign that read, "Jesus Is Lord!" God fought this battle for me and won. He did it for his glory. I am waiting for the day when my parents will accept Jesus into their own hearts.

The other battle, that God fought and won for me was the battle to establish a family. My sin had left me devoid of hope to establish a family with a holy woman of God. I was also getting along in age. What hope did I have? I could have tried to fight this battle on my own by going to a mega church where there are hundreds of possibilities to find that perfect someone on my own. But God promised to fight this battle for me, because he loved me. All I needed to do is stand firm and see the deliverance that God will bring. Standing firm meant for me to continue serving God as shepherd and Bible teacher and entrusting everything to God. I found comfort in Jesus' enduring love living as a single. God had in mind what he was going to. One day he brought Julie into my life. I did not fight for her. She just arrived. And in 1992 we married and established our family. God has given me lots of plunder from this battle. These are just a few battles that God has fought for me. There has been many.

If God's wills it I could have another 50 years serving God. There will be different battles and fears. I will face health issues, financial crunches, relational battles, battles against sin and temptation, with fatalism and despair and times of deep sorrow and loss. But I thank God that I can find life long direction through this passage. He has fought and won the battle time and again for me in the past and he will surely do it in the future for he is God and he can do it. Praise Jesus!

In the midst of our many crisis' let's not panic, but resolve to turn to God in prayer. Seek and follow God's direction, deciding to stand firm depending on Jesus alone. Be a revolutionary! In the face of impossible situations thank and praise God for what he is going to do. Then, in God's right time and in God's way, you will witness the victory he will bring about in your life. He will open up the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much spiritual blessing that you will not have room enough for it. The things menacing your soul will be completely defeated by God. The best blessing you will receive is the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding as you enter eternal life with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let's read our key verse together, verse 21, *“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.’”*