

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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HOW THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH HANDLED BAD NEWS

2 Chronicles 20

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I have four points to my message today:

- Action One: Prayer.
- Action Two: Waiting for an answer.
- Action Three: Worship.
- Action Four: Following through on God's plans.

INTRODUCTION: Let's have a worry session this morning. Does anyone want to join me? We have a lot to worry about these days: COVID-19, the election, civil unrest, instability in different parts of the world. And then I am sure all of you have personal concerns that you worry about: your health, your finances, your family, your job, your car, repairs you need on your home. If I keep talking, I'll have us all really depressed.

I've seen worry rocks for sale – you know the flat rock with the indentation for your thumb to rub back and forth. I wonder if the indentation is ground into the rock or if it is caused by someone's thumb.

There are some people who worry all the time – and express it. There are others who internalize it. Then there are others who seem worry-free. I don't think there is a completely worry-free person, but people worry on different levels. Some are lightly worried, some are consumed with it. We might say, "I am concerned," when really we mean we are worried.

Worrying all the time, as a lifestyle, is not a good thing. I've known a few people who worry all the time. Their brains get caught in a mental trap where they worry non-stop. In fact, they aren't enjoyable to be around. I don't understand worry on that level, but I know it's real.

One thing I know for certain, though, is that it's common for us to say, "Don't worry about it." If someone says that to us, it doesn't really help, does it?

Before I read the scripture today, I want to be very clear – worrisome situations come from two sources. The first source is caused by ourselves. We don't listen to wise counsel, or we overextend ourselves financially, or we are simply caught in a cycle of bad decisions. When we go to the Lord in prayer over such self-inflicted situations, we need to own up to it as messes we've created.

The second source of worry comes from situations beyond our control. A natural disaster, pestilence, or even the decisions of others that cause us to worry.

BACKGROUND: Today's message is about King Jehoshaphat. He was the king of Judah at the time and was known as a good king. Israel had divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. The divided kingdom was not God's best plan. However, he did allow it, and later, the two nations were reunified. I will point out to you the positive way he and his people responded to worrisome news.

There are four ways we can learn from the way they responded to worry:

- Jehoshaphat took action when he heard the bad news.
- Everyone expected to hear from God.
- Jehoshaphat's immediate response to God's reassurance was worship.
- The faith of the people and God's plans played out simultaneously.

ACTION ONE: PRAYER

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 20:1-12

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. ² Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi).

The first action he took was seeking help from the Lord – hand in hand with declaring a fast. And the people followed their leader and took action, too. Listen.

³ *Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. ⁴ The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD;*

indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. ⁵ Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard ⁶ 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. 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?

A common prayer model in the Old Testament is reminding God of what he has done. We see this over and over. Do you think God needed a reminder of what he had done? No. Do you think people just stated these things as fillers? No. Reminding God of what he has done is really a build-up for a prayer request. It was an acknowledgment that God has been faithful and that he worked out things beyond their control.

Next, King Jehoshaphat reminds God of what the people had already pledged:

⁸ They have lived in it [meaning the land God gave them] and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, ⁹ ‘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.’

At this point, the king is finished with his review of God’s faithfulness and the people’s prior pledge, and he makes his request:

¹⁰ “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. ¹¹ 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? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us.”

[Now hear the words of a solid leader:] *“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”*

EXPLANATION: We must note that the first action Jehoshaphat took was prayer, and not just prayer but public prayer—that everyone heard. The people heard their leader calling out to God. He turned the focus of the situation away from the enemy and toward God. He proclaimed God’s faithfulness on the eve of a potentially terrible situation.

APPLICATION: The application here is incredibly obvious. When we are faced with surprising, worrisome news, the best thing we can do is take action—not go around worrying. The first action we must take is praying to God—acknowledging him as the God of heaven, recalling the times he’s been faithful to us, and telling him even though we don’t know what to do, our eyes are on him. What would have happened if Jehoshaphat had responded to the news with panic? What if he had said, “Let’s get together and worry!” “Let’s get together and have a pity party!” He would have sent the nation in a downhill spiral.

ILLUSTRATION: It’s possible you forget how God has been faithful to you. When the kids were little, I bought a book with blank pages and lines in it. I wrote “God’s blessings to us” and challenged the family to write in it. Some time passed and my son Matt wrote, “Somebody write in this.” In time, we turned it into a prayer request book, and occasionally I brought the family together for prayer time. Now, when we are all together, which is not often, I’ll open the book and recall our prayer requests from the past and point out how God has been faithful to us.

If you have any inkling to do that at all, I suggest that you do it. If you live alone, it would be helpful. If you live with others, someone has to take the lead in creating such a simple book, but you can do it. If others don’t want to participate, that’s OK. You might leave the book out for people to write in.

In our home, we have documented proof of God’s faithfulness to us. It’s quite simple, there are still many more blank pages than there are pages filled with writing. None of the writing will win any literary awards, but it’s a record of God’s interaction in our family’s life story.

ACTION TWO: WAITING FOR AN ANSWER

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 20:13-17

All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD. ¹⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

¹⁵ He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.’ 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. ¹⁷ You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.’”

EXPLANATION: In the Old Testament, I believe that God spoke audibly to people and literally through people. In this case, I don't believe that Jahaziel would have said, "I feel the Lord telling me," or "I sense that the Lord want us to do such and such." I believe that the spirit of the Lord overtook him in such a way that there was no human margin of error.

In this story, Jehoshaphat prayed, and the people just stood there. I assume his prayer was so powerful and he sought God with such fervor, it conditioned people to hear from God right then. And they did.

APPLICATION: Imagine a nation of people with a leader who prays and in turn, everyone just stands there waiting on an answer from God.

I want to point out here that no one gave God any hints how he could help them. When we give God suggestions, I wonder if it comes across as nagging to him?

ACTION THREE: WORSHIP

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 20:18-19

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.

EXPLANATION: God’s voice supernaturally spoke through a natural voice of a person. Then they fell to the ground, others stood, worshiping God. Wow, it must have been a sight!

Let us, too, have an attitude of reverence and praise when God answers our prayers and gives us direction.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 20:20-21

Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and 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.”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.”

ACTION FOUR: FOLLOWING THROUGH ON GOD’S PLANS

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 20:22-23

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.²³ The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

EXPLANATION: I want you to note: *“As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes...”*

A long time ago, I mentioned this story to Terry Taylor and he said, “Imagine an army headed toward your army and the people in front of your army holding choir folders!” A men’s choir singing praise to God while God was setting ambushes.

Let’s look here at the point of view in this story. If a person writes a novel, the writer must carefully consider the point of view. Does the writer tell the story from the main character’s point of view or what? If we go back verse by verse, we can easily say that we have been getting this story from Jehoshaphat’s point of view, or maybe a bystander, but here we have the point of view that goes beyond Jehoshaphat or an observant person in the crowd. We get to see a transcendent view as if we are safely hovering above the enemy watching it all happen.

If the point of view had been only from the soldiers, we would ONLY know they sang and praised God, and when they arrived on site, they saw both sets of enemies dead. But we are allowed a point of view that the soldiers themselves did not see, that God was at work behind the scenes, tripping up the enemy so they would fail.

APPLICATION: We must have this higher-minded view when we take the action we believe God wants us to take. We must remember stories like this, mustn't we? We must remind ourselves in our prayer how God has been faithful, that he will never leave us or forsake us. We must realize that our own individual points of view are limited, and we must remind ourselves there is a higher point of view. God is working in mysterious ways in this world to accomplish his will while leading us to the precipice and challenging us to take that step of faith.

The story tells us that when Jehoshaphat's army arrived, all they saw was dead soldiers. It took them three days to carry away the plunder. As they went home, they praised God.

CONCLUSION: The people followed through on God's plans. Do we follow through on God's plans or do we expect God to follow through on our plans?

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