

# Faith in Desperate Times

## 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

**[SLIDE]** Good morning, Cornerstone. It is great to be back with you again, and great to be back in person again after this most recent lockdown. I know that these lockdowns have been challenging for individuals, for families, for small businesses and for churches. And I'm praying that they will be a thing of the past and we will be able to continue to meet in person indefinitely.

Before we dive into this morning's message, I want to be quick to say two things:

#1: I want to say **thank you** to Cornerstone and to Redeemer City for your partnership with Prison Fellowship Canada, as we seek to equip and mobilize local churches to engage in ministry to prisoners, former prisoners and their families. Once again, you stepped up this past Christmas through our Angel Tree program to help create some restorative connections for local area children who have an incarcerated parent. Thank you for remembering the prisoner in this way.

It is also great to see some folks from Cornerstone who are engaging in Prison Fellowship's volunteer training program. There are a number of you who have been using this season to get prepared for ministry when prisons and jails reopen to volunteers. And there is at least one of you who is active on our prison phone lines providing spiritual encouragement, prayer and a listening ear to prisoners. So on behalf of Prison Fellowship Canada, thank you.

If you're interested in learning more, I would invite you to visit our website - [prisonfellowship.ca](http://prisonfellowship.ca) - where you can read the latest news on all that we have been up to, as well as our Annual Report for 2020 which will be able in the coming weeks.

#2: I also want to mention the good report that I am hearing from your pastor about how things are going here at Cornerstone. Pastor Paul and I were chatting by phone a couple of weeks ago, and he was bragging a bit about how great the people are at Cornerstone. A strong sense of unity in this season. An ongoing passion for the things of the Lord. Always encouraging to hear things like that!

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[INTRO]: Please open your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 20. "Drastic times call for drastic measures". The premise behind this is that when we find ourselves in seemingly difficult or even impossible situations, when we're in a place when we're totally desperate and have no other options, it is a perfect opportunity to do something radical or extreme.

It's no secret that there are times in life when we find ourselves in some pretty desperate places. We come face to face with urgent needs, situations that appear to be so much more than we can handle, that leave us feeling hopeless, and powerless and overwhelmed. Perhaps you've come here this morning and that's exactly the place that you find yourself in. You're staring at a pretty desperate situation in your own life or in the life of someone close to you and things are looking pretty bleak and grim. What are you supposed to do next?

As followers of Jesus Christ, we understand that from God's perspective there is no such thing as a desperate or drastic time. God is now and forever on His throne, sovereignly working in and through

every situation. So when you and I find ourselves in a seemingly desperate situation, no matter what that might look like, the call upon you is not to do something radical or extreme. The call is for one thing alone...faith in God. God wants us even in desperate times to put our trust in Him.

This morning as we open God's Word together, we're going to look at a story that illustrates this for us. In this passage, King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah found themselves in a pretty desperate place. They were surrounded by their enemies and completely powerless to do anything about it. In that moment, they made the best decision that could possibly make...they chose to look to the Lord and trust Him.

As we look at the story this morning, and allow the Word of God to penetrate our own hearts and speak to our own lives, the goal today is that, by God's grace, you and I would leave this place being able to genuinely say from our hearts, **even when times get desperate, I will trust in the Lord.**

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Even when times get desperate, I will trust in the Lord. What does that actually look like though to trust God even in times of desperation? How can that happen in your life today?

◇ **[SLIDE] We admit our powerlessness and seek the Lord for help (v.1-12)**

Look at the text with me and notice the desperate situation that the people of Judah find themselves in. It starts with the phrase (vs.1) "after this". After what?

[CONTEXT] It's going to be helpful for us to have a basic understanding of what's going on in this story. The main player here is King Jehoshaphat. Here are 3 things you should know about him:

- #1: He was the son of Asa and the 4<sup>th</sup> king of the nation of Judah;
- #2: He was a relatively good king, which was unusual back then. In fact, 2 Chronicles 17 speaks about how he did not fall into the trap of idolatry but instead sought the Lord and walked in His commandments. As a result of his faithfulness to God, the Lord's favour was upon Him by giving Him protection and peace from His enemies;
- #3: King J had a time of disobedience by making an alliance with Ahab the king of Israel. While King J did turn from His disobedience, one of the things that happened was that God in His sovereignty chose to loosen the grip He had on the enemies of Judah and allowed them to come against Judah.

So this is the situation King J and the people find themselves in. It says in (20:1) "*After this, the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites came against Jehoshaphat for battle*". The Moabites and Ammonites were people who could be traced back to the sons of Lot. And the Meunites were likely descendants of Esau (Deut 2:4).

But the main thing that matters here is that there were a lot of them! Notice (vs.2) "*Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea; and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)"*" Some of your translations use the phrase "a vast army" to describe them. It literally means an "abundance" with an emphasis on unrest and noise. These guys come to the King and say "You know that rumbling noise we are hearing. That's not thunder. That's the armies of our enemies surrounding us. We tried to count how many of them there are, but we lost track. But there's a lot them!"

Check out Jehoshaphat's reaction. It says in (vs.3a) "Then Jehoshaphat was afraid". Jehoshaphat and the people knew that they were surrounded and outnumbered by their enemy. They knew they were in a desperate place and were hopeless by themselves. And they were afraid. *Have you ever found yourself in that place? Staring down a desperate and seemingly hopeless situation, and starting to be overcome by fear and anxiety?*

Notice how Jehoshaphat responds in this moment. (vs.3-4) "Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. <sup>4</sup> And Judah assembled to seek help from the LORD; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD". They humbled themselves and sought the help of the Lord. Out of their desperation, they turned to God.

**[SLIDE]** I mentioned earlier that one of the programs we are running at PFC is called Prison Fellowship By Phone. (I know, it's a super creative name!) This program gives prisoners the opportunity to make a toll-free call directly from the phone in their prison range, and get connected to a PFC volunteer for a time of prayer, spiritual encouragement. I have the privilege of reading the reports each day from our volunteers. I'm struck by the desperation that many who are calling are facing.

The truth is that even as Christ-followers we may find ourselves in some pretty desperate places. These desperate situations come in various forms: financial, relational, physical and even spiritual moments of desperation. The key in those moments is to admit our powerlessness before God, and turn to Him for help. This is the gospel, right? I can't, but Jesus can. I don't have the power. But Jesus in His love and grace has come to do for me what only He can do.

Look down to the end of verse 12. Here's the key verse: **[SLIDE]** (vs.12) "O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you". Jehoshaphat and the people, in their desperation, acknowledged their powerlessness and turned to the Lord for help. They took their eyes off the situation and set them on the Lord.

Notice in the text what they were focusing on as they set their eyes on the Lord:

#1: *The greatness of His power.* Notice Jehoshaphat prayer as he cries out to God: (vs.6) "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you". What is Jehoshaphat doing? He's rehearsing the greatness of God's power. He speaks to the "God in heaven." He declares that God "rules over all the kingdoms of the nations", that in his hand are "power and might, so that none is able to withstand" Him.

*Question: do you believe those things about God? Do you believe that God is the Most High God? Do you believe that God's power far surpasses any person or situation or circumstance that you might encounter?* Your ability to trust in the Lord, even in desperate times, has a lot to do with what you believe about God. That's why it's so important to get your theology figured out ahead of time before you find yourself in those situations. You need to be convinced of these things and keep our eyes focused on them.

#2: *The greatness of God's previous acts and promises*— Notice how Jehoshaphat continues in his prayer in (vs.7-11) "Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? <sup>8</sup> And they have lived in it and have built for

*you in it a sanctuary for your name, saying, <sup>9</sup> 'If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you- for your name is in this house- and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save.' <sup>10</sup> And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy- <sup>11</sup> behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit”.*

What is Jehosaphat doing here? He talks about what God has done and how the people of God built a sanctuary for the Lord and vowed to seek Him for help. And then in vs.10-11, he describes the situation that he and the people of Judah find themselves in. He is reminding himself of the things that God has done previously for His people.

Why is he saying all this? **[SLIDE]** *(Psalm 77:11-12) “I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds”* One of the ways we build our faith, especially in desperate times is by remembering the things that God has done previously, reminding ourselves of the faithfulness of God to His people. T

Listen! The God that we serve is the same God who spoke the heavens and earth into existence. He is the One who parted the Red Sea and rescued the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians. He is the One who healed the sick and raised Jesus from the dead.

This is why we must get our Bibles open and read again the stories of what God has done. Remind yourself of the seemingly impossible things that God has done throughout history. What happens when we do that? It strengthens our faith! We become convinced that *“what is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:27)*, that it is God *“who has made the heavens and the earth by His great power...Nothing is too hard for Him” (Jer.32:17)*, that even in my desperate place, God is far bigger and is more than able to handle this. And I can trust Him!

That’s the place we need to live. This is the prayer we need to pray every single day as we seek to live for the Lord. *“Lord, I am powerless by myself. Apart from you I can do nothing. So I put my hope in You. I set my eyes on You, because I know that nothing compares to your greatness.”*

◇ **[SLIDE] We stand firm on His promises (vs.13-17)**

Look at the text with me and notice what happens next: *(v.14) “And the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly”*. God sends His Spirit upon some guy named Jahaziel to deliver a message to the people.

And what was God’s message? *(vs.15-17) “And he said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s.’ <sup>16</sup> Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. <sup>17</sup> You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’ Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you”*.

Notice God's message and the promise He is making to the people of Judah. "You are surrounded by your enemies and you are outnumbered. Things are looking pretty desperate from your perspective. But you don't need to be afraid. You don't need to be distraught or distressed. Why? Because I am with you. I am at your side". What a phenomenal message to hear from the Lord in a time of desperation. God is assuring them of His presence with them in their situation.

Notice the second part of God's promise to His people. The Lord says to His people in (vs.15) "*the battle is not yours but God's*" and in (vs.17) "*You will not need to fight in this battle*". God is essentially saying to them, "Not only am I promising to be with you, but I'm actually going to fight the battle for you. All you need to do is stand firm in your faith, hold your position and watch as I bring you through this."

I believe that one of the tactics that the enemy likes to use against us, especially when we're in a desperate place, is that he tries to convince us that God has given up on us. He tries to make us believe that the reason why we're in such a place is because God has abandoned us. Do you know what I'm talking about? In desperate times, whether it's financial, physical, relational, spiritual, or whatever else, it's so easy to doubt God. We start asking ourselves "Where is God? Where did He go? Why has He abandoned me? Why has He left me to deal with this situation alone?" This is the battle that we so often encounter.

And yet, what does God's Word say? (Deut. 31:8) "*It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.*" God promises to be with His people. This is the same promise that God makes to the people at the end of (vs.17b) "*Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you*".

Listen! If you find yourself in a desperate place this morning, and you are tempted to believe the lie that God has abandoned you, allow me to speak some faith into your life through the truth of God's Word. God has not abandoned you. He has not given up on you and left you to deal with this on your own. God is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. He is still there waiting for you to call upon Him and trust Him in your desperation. He promises to stand by your side and fight for you. You need to stand firm. You need to cling to the promises of God that "with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chr.32:8).

Just before we move on, I want you to notice one other thing. Notice that God doesn't tell them *how* He will fight the battle, but only *that* He will fight the battle. Do you see the difference? We need to be careful that as we choose to trust God with our circumstances and allow Him to fight the battles for us that we don't also place unreasonable expectations on how God should do that for us. Sometimes, as we'll see in a moment, God chooses to obliterate the enemies that surround us. But often times, the way God fights for us is by giving us the strength and confidence to carry us through the battle. Our job is not to dictate to God what He should do, but to instead to simply stand firm and cling to the promise of His presence with us as God in His infinite wisdom unfolds His plans. That is how we trust Him, even in desperate times.

If you are here this morning and you can say with confidence that you belong to Jesus, that you have turned from your sins by faith and embrace Christ as your Saviour, then the promises of God to His people belong to you. And you can stand firm this morning trusting the promise that God is with you no matter what situation or circumstance you encounter.

◇ [SLIDE] Fuel our faith through worship (vs.18-24)

Look with me at the next few verses and notice how King Jehoshaphat and the people respond. It says in (vs.18-19) *“Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. <sup>19</sup> And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a loud voice”*. God has promised them the assurance of His presence along with the promise to fight the battle for them, and their response was one of worship. Together as a people they bowed their faces to the ground and declared the praises of God.

Who are the “Kohathites” and the “Korahites”? They are two families of the tribe of Levi. The Kohathites according to 1 Chronicles 6:31 had been put in charge by King David of “the service of song in the house of the Lord”. At Cornerstone, they would be represented by your worship band.

Notice (vs.20) *“And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Hear me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets and you will succeed”*. What’s happening here? Jehoshaphat is giving them a bit of a pep talk. He’s calling them to remain firm in their belief and trust in God. You can imagine what it would have been like as the people prepared to go. Probably a far bit of excitement. Perhaps a bit of wondering what was really about to happen. So off they went.

But check out what happens next. Jehoshaphat does something quite unusual. It says in (vs.21) *“And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, “Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever”*”.

Let’s park here for a moment, because I want to make sure you understand what’s happening here. Think about it for a moment. If you were heading into battle against your enemies, who would be the ones you would want leading the charge? It would be the biggest, most scary looking guys, carrying some serious weapons. Yet who did Jehoshaphat send out first? It was the singers, all dressed up in their choir outfits! I have to believe that there had to be a few people wondering what was going on.

So why then did King Jehoshaphat choose to send out the singers first into the battle instead of the soldiers? Why did he call the people to worship the Lord as they headed out against their enemies?

[SLIDE] *“Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching. I have no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the devil and makes people happy; they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and the like. Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honour. I would not exchange what little I know of music for something great. Experience proves that next to the Word of God, only music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart. We know that to the devil music is distasteful and sufferable. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues.” (Martin Luther)*

**#1: Worship is an expression of trust in God** – We have already seen that God had promised that the people of Judah would not even have to fight this battle, but God would fight it for them. And King Jehoshaphat, before he sent them out, called them to believe in the Lord and remain firm in their trust in Him. Their decision to worship was an expression of their faith and trust in God.

*[I read recently that right before Jim Eliot and the other missionaries with him headed into the jungle to bring the good news of Christ to the people there, the last thing they did before they went was sing a hymn together. Why? Because it was an expression of their faith and trust in God over them, knowing that no matter what happened to them they were in the sovereign and powerful hands of God.]*

Listen! When we worship and sing praises to God, we are acknowledging the greatness of who God is. We are declaring that there is no one or nothing in heaven or on earth as great and powerful as He. We are affirming that He is sovereign over our circumstances and is able to do more than we could ever ask or imagine, that His incomparable greatness. We are expressing our trust in Him.

The challenge in this though is that at times we don't always feel like worshipping the Lord. It's easy when life is going well to sing God's praises. But when times are desperate, it can be a lot harder to have that kind of heart attitude.

Yet we need to make the choice, as Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah did, to worship God no matter what the situation. We need to say along with David the words of

**[SLIDE]** *(Psalm 34:1) "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth".* We must continue to worship, as an expression of faith in God.

**#2: Worship is an opportunity to encounter God's power.**

*(vs.22-23) "And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. <sup>23</sup> For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting them to destruction, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another".* This is almost unbelievable, isn't it? As the people of Judah sing their praises to the Lord, God, as promised, steps up and delivers on His promise to fight the battle for the people of Judah.

What exactly happened? We don't really know specifically. The text only tells us that God set some kind of ambush or trap which caused the Moabites and Ammonites to turn against the Meunites and destroy them. And when they had finished with that, they turned and started destroying one another. And listen to this incredibly graphic verse, *(vs.24) "When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde, and behold, there were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped".*

Question: Did God step up and come through on His promise? Yeah, big time! The people of Judah went from being in a desperate place, completely powerless, to watching their faithful God come through for them just as He had promised. Their job was to trust Him and worship Him, and as they did, God unleashed His power and righteous judgment against their enemies. He totally came through.

Here's the point. When we worship God, acknowledging His greatness and expressing our faith in Him, it creates an opportunity for the power of God to flow in our lives. While we need to be careful to not make worship about what we can gain from it, we do know that often times of worship before the Lord is what God uses to refresh our weary souls and to build our faith and confidence in Him. Hopefully you

leave your times of corporate times of worship each week and your own personal times of worship feeling refreshed in the Lord and strengthened in your faith.

I believe that, especially in times of desperation, when we choose to worship the Lord and put our trust in Him, the enemy hates it, and just like it did with the armies that came against Judah, it creates confusion and chaos in the enemies' camps and God's power and glory is made know. Even when we face desperate times, we must trust the Lord, humbling ourselves through worship and prayer, as He steps up and unleashes His power in our lives.

In the remaining portion of this passage, King Jehosaphat experience the overwhelming blessings of God upon their lives as a result of their faith in Him.

It says in verse 25 that the people of Judah went down into the valley and collected all of the physical possessions that were left from the armies of their enemies. The text tells us that it took three days to collect everything, and it was so much that they couldn't carry anymore.

Notice though that beyond the physical possessions, God also overwhelmed them with joy and peace. It says in (vs.27-30) *"Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. <sup>28</sup> They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of the LORD. <sup>29</sup> And the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. <sup>30</sup> So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around".* For the people of Judah, the overwhelming goodness of God meant rejoicing in their midst, and peace and rest from their enemies who heard of the awesome thing that God had done.

Ultimately the blessings of joy and peace are what we get to enjoy even as we face desperate circumstances. As we put our trust in God, He may not necessarily remove our situation or obliterate our enemies like He did in this case. But He does promise to fill our hearts with peace and joy, knowing that the One in whom we trust is unmatched in His greatness, that He is sovereign over our circumstances, that He is by our side as we walk through the challenging times, and that the victory belongs ultimately to Him as we choose to trust Him.

*"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup> GOD, the Lord, is my strength." (Habakkuk 3:17-19a)*

[CLOSE] As we close this morning, I want to give you an opportunity to respond before the Lord. Without a doubt, there are people in this room today who are facing desperate circumstances and situations in various forms. It may have to do with finances. It might be related to your marriage, to your children, or to another relationship. It may have to do with a health issue either in your own life or in some who is close to you. Or perhaps it is the ongoing battle against temptation and sin in your own life.

Believe it or not, the place you're in is actually a good thing, because it's a perfect opportunity for you to trust in the Lord and strengthen your faith in Him. I want to invite you this morning, in the quietness of your own heart, to lay these things before the Lord, and to trust Him. I want to invite you to say to the Lord this morning, "Even in desperate times, I will trust in You". Will you do that today?

[PRAY]