



THE FIRST WORD

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IT'S NOT YOUR BATTLE

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A Hostile Takeover Attempt

In April 1995, the CEO of the Chrysler Corporation suddenly cancelled a scheduled speech at the New York City auto show and raced back in his corporate jet to headquarters in Detroit. The news had just been announced on CNBC and the other business cable channels that Chrysler was the target of a hostile takeover. The aggressor was the notorious corporate raider Kirk Kerkorian, billionaire owner of movie studios and half of Las Vegas; and in his camp was retired Chrysler legend Lee Iacocca, now seen as a Benedict Arnold to his former company.

The Chrysler top brass reacted to this assault with high anxiety. They brought in all the high-priced lawyers and bankers they could get their hands on, and in round-the-clock strategy sessions plotted their counterattacks. It was an ugly, public battle. It looked at first as if the company had been saved; but it was weakened by the struggle, and a couple years later fell into the clutches of the hungry German giant Daimler-Benz—a takeover that was publicly billed as a “merger of equals” but proved to be anything but. The Germans made a mess of Chrysler, and before long it was bought by the Italians. The iconic Chrysler Corporation was undone by a poor response to a hostile takeover.

Many centuries ago, another CEO got the news of a hostile takeover attempt by his enemies. He, likewise, huddled with his top advisors to consider how to defend against this attack. But unlike the Chrysler bosses, who blew tons of money and ultimately failed, this particular CEO handled his crisis in a different manner—and emerged victorious.

Confronting a Threat

The story is found in the book of 2 Chronicles in the Old Testament. The CEO's name is King Jehoshaphat, and the raiders attacking him were called the Moabites and Ammonites. The way this godly man and his nation responded under severe stress and conflict has stood for nearly 3,000 years as a powerful example of how to do it right. Let's begin to read the story:

20 After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat.

²Some 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).

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

⁵Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard ⁶and 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."

2 Chronicles 20:1-6

What do the king and the people of God do when they're confronted with this huge threat to their happiness, health and prosperity? Do they call in the lawyers and bankers and doctors first? Do they sharpen their swords and spears first? Do they panic and run away? Do they laugh at the danger and ignore it? None of the above. They take their need and their crisis immediately to the Lord. He's supposed to be our first resort, not our last. He wants to be the One we turn to immediately for help and guidance, not an afterthought. Some of us have been struggling with a problem this past week in our own wisdom and strength; it's time, even belatedly, to do what

Jehoshaphat did: to get on our knees, figuratively if not literally, and invite God into our problem.

Notice also that Jehoshaphat began his time of prayer by praising God and remembering His greatness. Why do we do that in church each week? Why do we remind ourselves of God's glory, His power, His love, His forgiveness, His promises to His people? Because our memories need to be jogged, frequently. How easy it is to forget that our Father, our Daddy, is the Lord of all, the King of the universe. Praise is meant to get our minds refocused on who He is. In comparison to the greatness and might of God, even the most ferocious enemy looks puny and weak.

Eyes of Faith

Let's go on in our story, resuming with verse 10:

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. ¹¹See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. ¹²Our 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 on you."

2 Chronicles 20:10-12

Again we see a remarkable example of faith: taking their needs to God and trusting that His love for them is so great that He will help them. They don't tell God what to do; they just surrender themselves to Him and His will. They aren't naïve or blind to the realities of their danger. Listen again to verse 12: "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."

Some of us here today are facing huge, terrifying enemies, and you don't know how to overcome them. That enemy might be a microscopic organism or mutant cells multiplying in your body; it might

be a problem in your job that's threatening your career; or an important decision you have to make that has huge consequences for your future. It might be a family problem that seems greater by far than what you can solve.

It's okay as a Christian to admit your weakness, that you're not smart enough and strong enough to win every battle all by yourself. It's okay to get help. That may, in fact, be just what God is waiting for, as it was with the Jews in 2 Chronicles 20.

The LORD will be with you.

The story resumes in verse 14:

¹⁴Then 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.

¹⁵He 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.** ¹⁶Tomorrow 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. ¹⁷You 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.'"

2 Chronicles 20:14-17

There is the key principle, the truth for us to remember and store away for the times of trial and struggle that inevitably come. That's what we need to survive the battles of life—and they do indeed come to all of us, sometimes when we least expect them. What is this great truth? That **when we commit ourselves into the hands of God, it's no longer our battle. It's His.** Verse 15: "For the battle is not yours, but God's." Verse 17: "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged ... the LORD will be with you."

One of the favorite themes of Hollywood screenwriters and best-selling novelists is the arrival of help “in the nick of time.” Think of the besieged pioneers in a John Wayne movie or Louis L’Amour novel, their wagons circled as the Indians attack; and then on the horizon comes the cavalry, in the nick of time! Think of Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, pursued by the bad guys, when one of his buddies arrives at just the right moment with a plane or truck or boat to zip him away from danger. I think we love those rescue scenes so much because we all long for that kind of help in the times of danger we face. And that’s what our Lord promises in 2 Chronicles: when we need Him most, He’ll be there for us.

Ultimately it’s not our battle—although we’ll still have to strap on our armor and be ready to fight, as Jehoshaphat and his people had to do. God does not say, “Do nothing, sit back in your La-Z-Boy recliner and channel surf.” We have to do our part. But ultimately the victory will come from Him. “For the battle is not yours, but God’s.”

The only way that we can truly claim that verse and that promise, however, is if we have genuinely **surrendered our lives** to Christ. And that means every part of them. The reason why the battle will be the Lord’s and not yours is because you are no longer your own, but His. There are a number of members of our church right now who are fighting some very serious, even deadly battles against cancer. Truly we are blessed by the wonderful medical resources in our community. But ultimately it is God who decides on life and death. I was talking a while ago with one of our courageous cancer warriors. This person said to me, with absolute sincerity, “Doug, I’m doing everything I can to lick this disease. And I have great confidence in my doctors. But I know that whatever happens is totally in the Lord’s hands, because I belong to Him.”

That’s a person who is living in faith like King Jehoshaphat. And you, too, can claim the promise that God will fight your battles—if you have surrendered your life and all its parts to Him—your career, your marriage and children, your health, your finances, your future.

We're not going to take the time today to read through the rest of the story, but you might enjoy doing so yourself. It's an exciting and remarkable tale. Here's what happens: the three advancing armies were caused by God to start fighting amongst themselves. And they ended up wiping each other out, without God's people having to raise a sword or spear in anger. It was an incredible turn of events, a miracle—and Jehoshaphat witnessed God's deliverance, just as He'd promised. God caused this event to happen not only to rescue the Jews, and to teach them the importance of surrender to the Lord and trust in Him, but also, I believe, to teach and encourage us.

The Battles of Life

I want to close by talking briefly about the realities of struggle and stress in this life. For those of you who are enjoying a life of health and wealth and unbroken success right now this might not be as immediately meaningful to you. But listen anyway, and store it away in your minds, because you might need to remember this tomorrow.

The great story of God fighting the battle for His people in 2 Chronicles is a wonderful and exciting one. It was a quick and total victory. But my observation from almost 40 years of pastoral ministry is that sometimes life's battles take a more complicated course. And I believe it is wise for a Christian to enter into any struggle with the following **principles** in mind.

1) Be prepared for the battle to last longer than you expect. Many people are defeated in life simply because they're not prepared for a long drawn-out struggle. Although the victory in 2 Chronicles 20 came quickly, there are many other incidents in scripture when victory came only through perseverance and diligence, hanging in there and not quitting. So be prepared for a long struggle, not a short one; train to run a marathon, not a sprint.

When Joshua Chamberlain and his troops of the 20th Maine defeated the first attack of the rebels on Little Round Top at Gettysburg, they cheered and congratulated one another. And then the southerners

attacked again, and again. With their ammunition running low, they were tempted to turn and run away. But Chamberlain their commander was prepared for a long struggle, and his iron will kept them going. That's the kind of courage we need in our battles. When you think the problem has been solved for good, and it comes back again, you'll be tempted to want to give up or run away. Hang in there!

2) Be prepared for the victory God brings to be partial rather than total. If we expect life to be perfect, we'll fail to see the little but significant victories God provides. If you are believing that God is going to make your difficult marriage perfect any day now, and your spouse will magically lose all their annoying habits and personality traits and rough edges, you're expecting something that's unrealistic. Be thankful for any partial victories, any improvements in your relationship that God provides. And if you think that God will give you a perfect 21-year-old's body again, that's unrealistic. I praise the Lord for answering my prayers and bringing me healing through a rotator cuff repair I had a couple years ago. But I know I need to be content with a partial healing: I will never pitch for the Red Sox, but a partial victory is cause enough to rejoice and praise the Lord.

3) Be prepared for God's plan to be different than your wishes. When we truly surrender our entire lives to the Lord and allow Him to fight our battles for us, that means we have to accept the outcome He chooses.

Alex Kendrick, his brother and a small group of volunteers at his church in Georgia produced a film with a strong Christian message. He prayed that God would allow the film to reach other people. Alex knew that independent film makers had little hope of getting their movies into theaters without a major Hollywood studio releasing it. So he flew to Los Angeles and knocked on the doors of many of the film studios. None of them were interested. "Why would we want to release a movie about God? There's no market for that." Alex returned home discouraged. He prayed that if the Lord wanted only the people of his hometown of Albany, Georgia to see the film, then he would accept that.

Just before Alex flew to L.A., he had contacted a Christian music company in Nashville. Provident Music owned the rights to a song they wished to use as background music in their film, so Alex requested the appropriate permission from them. The CEO of Provident asked to view a DVD of the film, and Alex had sent an unfinished version. He had completely forgotten about that contact in his disappointment about not finding a distributor for the movie.

Then he received a call from Provident. The CEO loved the film and had taken the liberty of sending it to the management of their parent company ... who wanted to talk about distributing it nationwide. "Who is your parent company?" Alex asked. "Sony Pictures." Sony went on to distribute several of the Kendrick films, to surprisingly strong box offices. Millions have been touched by the Christian message of those films. Obviously, God had a different plan than Alex's, and God's was better.

Trust the Promise

I pray that our time of studying God's Word today has been a help and encouragement to you. Whether or not you can pronounce or spell the name Jehoshaphat, he was a man just like you and me who found himself in a tough and stressful spot, facing a battle he seemingly couldn't win. And he shows us by his example how to take that need to the Lord and surrender to Him.

Will you surrender yourself, and all the battles you're facing, to your Heavenly Father? Trust His promise: that "the battle is not yours, but God's." ■