

“Jehoshaphat: Weird Battle Plan!”

Catherine Marshall was the wife of Peter Marshall, a well-known Scottish-American preacher, author, and Chaplain of the U.S. Senate back in the 1940's and 1950's. Catherine herself was an inspiring speaker and author. One vacation I took along one of her books, *Something More*. Usually on vacations, I like to read novels or other non-religious, non-churchy type books, but I had wanted to read her book for some time. So I took it along. Well, I only read a few chapters that vacation, but what I read hit a nerve, and touched a need in my life. In the chapters I read Catherine wrote mainly about **praise** – praising God as a *way of life*...praising God in *every* circumstance (even the bad things). At that time, I was struggling with a minor health problem, and Nancy and I were under some financial pressure because our accountant had underestimated what we would owe in our income taxes. So I was in sort of a foul mood, doing a lot of worrying and complaining.

It was during that time that I was re-introduced to the story of **Jehoshaphat**, found in the book of 2 Chronicles. Do you know the story? The armies of the Moabites and Ammonites and some others were coming against King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. The enemy was great in number. 2 Chronicles 20 verse 2 says, “Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, ‘A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; already they are at Hazazon-tamar’ (that is, Engedi).” *Picture it...try to get the feel of it: Jehoshaphat gets word that a great horde of enemy troops are closing in. Every passing minute they are getting closer!*

Jehoshaphat does what many do when they're in a real pinch: he turns to God! “Jehoshaphat was afraid; he set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2 Chronicles 20:3). In fact, en masse, all the people of Judah come together and turn to the Lord: “Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the towns of Judah they came to seek the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:4).

Now fast forward to the end of the story. There is a tremendous victory for Jehoshaphat! The tiny country of Judah defeats the powerhouse armies of the Moabites and Ammonites!

But what comes between Jehoshaphat's turning to God in a panic, and his decisive rout of the enemy, is a prescription for winning battles that we face in life! We face enemies just as real as the Moabites and Ammonites who threatened Judah. We face battles in life – things that would make us fear, or worry, or want to give up. It might be financial struggles, or family issues (with our marriage, or with parents, or children, or other family members. The “wars” we face might be dealing with sorrow, or depression, or low self-esteem. Some of us may be worried about our jobs, our health, or our future. The story of Jehoshaphat represents a different way of responding to trouble or adversity. Let's look more closely at this Old Testament story!

The key elements in Jehoshaphat's victory seem to hinge on two things: relinquishment, and praise. Check out what happens. Enemy troops are approaching. Jehoshaphat is desperate, and scared. He prays an honest prayer, openly expressing his feelings of fear, anger, doubt, and a sense of how unfair the situation is. *That's important.* It's a preliminary step to getting God's help: *be honest with God, and tell God what we're really thinking and feeling!*

Then Jehoshaphat closes his prayer this way: “Our God... 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” (verse 12).

This is relinquishment. *We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on You!* Jehoshaphat gives up trying to control the situation. Rather than scurrying around and trying to do everything himself he surrenders the situation, and himself, to the Lord. *And God moves into action!* God uses a person named Jahaziel to tell the king what to do. “Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the middle of the assembly. He said, ‘Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you: “Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them; they will come up by the ascent of Ziz; you will find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.” Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you.’ (verses 14-17). Jahaziel is saying: This is God’s battle, not yours. Take up your positions. Stand still. God will be with you. ***God is in this!***

Do you believe God is in every situation? I referred earlier to Catherine Marshall’s book *Something More*. In this book she tells of reading Hannah Smith’s classic, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*. She says she reacted against the chapter where Hannah Smith said God is in everything – every happening. Think about that. Can God be in it if I have a stroke? Or a car accident? Or if I lose my job?

Now, let’s be careful here! I am *not* saying God *causes or wills* everything that happens. God doesn’t. A lot of stuff happens that God doesn’t will. God gets blamed for zillions of things He doesn’t cause nor want! But since God is *almighty* and in *ultimate control* of all creation, nothing does happen unless God *allows* it. Hannah Smith spoke of God’s “loving allowance”, and that God wants to work out His purposes for good even in the worst of situations. *Hannah Smith said unless we can accept God as being present in every situation, we will not know contentment.*

So, from the little irritations to the major crises, can we see God “in it”? And if God is in it, can we relinquish it all to Him? Here again, I am not saying that we do absolutely nothing – that we don’t do our best to live responsibly and try to work out the sticky problems of life. But you know, don’t you, how we can get so caught up in a situation that we worry and fret and rush around trying to control everything! The Lord says to Jehoshaphat, “*Don’t just do something; stand there!* It’s My battle, not yours! Take your hands off the situation and you will see My victory!”

Relinquishment! But there is another step to victory for Jehoshaphat, and this is where God’s battle plan really is different from the way we normally react to adversity. It is ***praise!*** When God says, “Don’t be afraid or discouraged, it’s my battle, I’ll fight for you” Jehoshaphat and all the people begin to praise the Lord. “Then Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord worshipping the Lord.

And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice” (verses 18-19).

The next morning, they all got up early, and Jehoshaphat tells the people to believe in the Lord and trust Him (verse 20). Look at what else: “When he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy splendor, as they went before the army, saying, ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever’” (verse 21).

Try to imagine the scene! It’s like thousands and thousands of enemy troops are coming in from the southwest. They have made their way through York, and crossed the Susquehanna. Soon they’ll be marching through the streets of Lancaster, heading east, towards us! In fact, in the distance, we can hear them coming! Now under those circumstances, the natural thing would be for Judah’s military leaders to shout last minute instructions, and check their battle plan. “Do we have enough swords and spears and armor?” “Are the horses saddled and ready to go?” “Have all the women and children been evacuated to a safer place?”

But instead, a large choir is being assembled. The choir’s going to sing as they walk in front of the army! We can hear them warming up voices: *ahahahahahahah!* Jehoshaphat yells, “Get the choir ready! Do we have enough tenors? Sopranos, altos, basses ...come on now, everyone in your proper places! Trumpeters, be ready! Those of you with stringed instruments, make sure they’re all tuned? Flutists, get set! We’re soon ready to roll! We’re going to have a praise service and a hymn sing! The enemy is just about here!”

Isn’t that weird! But the enemy troops were routed, and Judah scored a mighty victory! Look at verse 22: “As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.”

That’s a different approach to problems and threats, isn’t it? Praise! There is power in praise! Now it is one thing to praise God when things are going great! “Oh, praise You, Lord, You are so good! Praise be to God!” But what about praising God when things don’t work out as we had hoped? When trouble is brewing? When something we dread is on the horizon? But that’s exactly what the people of Judah did!

There are other places in the Bible where it says we are to praise the Lord *in all circumstances*. Psalm 34:1 says, “I will bless the Lord *at all times*; his praise shall *continually* be in my mouth.” And there are those marvelous words in Habakkuk 3:17-18: “Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

I once heard a black preacher use the phrase, “Praise the Lord anyway.” I like that! Praise the Lord anyway! But how in the world can we praise God when things go against us, or an enemy seems to overwhelm us? Often praising God is the last thing we feel like doing! *Just do it!*

Though our praise may be forced at first, praise will begin to flow if we keep at it. When Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah relinquished the battle to God, and praised Him with all their might, *God routed the enemy!*

Why is it that when we praise God in the middle of adversity, there's a power to turn things around, to change people and circumstances? I really don't know for sure – I've got a lot to learn in developing a lifestyle of praise. But certain things do take place when we praise God even in crummy circumstances!

First of all, we are doing what we've been created to do. We were created to glorify and praise our Maker. And somehow when we praise Him we are touching the very essence of why we're here on earth. You and I have been made to praise God!

Secondly, praising God in adversity gets our focus on God, rather than on the problems we face. That's good! It can turn a situation from negative to positive, from me-centered and problem-centered to *God-centered!*

And, thirdly, praising God even for adversities is a way of tangibly acting out our faith. We are acknowledging God's sovereignty and control even over evil circumstances that He has not caused nor willed.

Many of you know of Corrie ten Boom. She was a Christian with a great testimony. She and her sister were imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp for aiding Jews in Holland. She tells of how she and her sister were put in a new barracks, where they quickly discovered that their straw beds were infested with fleas. Corrie moaned, "How can we live in such a place?" Her sister Betsie began praying, "Show us Lord, show us just how." The Lord helped her remember some verses they had read in their Bible that morning (they kept a Bible hidden), verses from First Thessalonians: "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thess. 5:16-18). "That's it, Corrie," she said, "we're to thank God for everything about the new barracks." "Even the fleas." So they thanked and praised God for fleas crawling all over the place!

As the days went on, they discovered that they had an astonishing amount of freedom in that cell. They could talk to other prisoners about God, read Bible to them, minister to them. One day, a supervisor let it out why they had so much freedom. Some of the women had called through the bars on the door to ask this Nazi supervisor to come and settle a dispute. But the supervisor refused, as did other guards. "That place is crawling with fleas," the supervisor said, "I wouldn't step through the door." Corrie and her sister realized now why they were led to praise God even for fleas! God used fleas for a greater good – to allow them freedom in that cell to impact other prisoners with the gospel!

If you and I want to react to trouble and adversity the way a lot of people do, we have that choice. We can complain, be miserable, worry ourselves half to death, try to take things into our own hands and control everything. But there is a *better way*: (1) Relinquish ourselves and our

situation to God, (2) Praise the Lord!

I served a church in Lancaster County in which there was a lady who loved the Lord, was active in the church, a woman with a great deal of pep and enthusiasm. She had a hard life. Her husband was blind, and had other serious health issues. During our time at that church her husband died at a relatively young age. Yet in the midst of all her difficulties, she'd often say, "Praise the Lord!" It was just a regular thing with her.

After leaving that congregation, Nancy and I were out of this area for a number of years. During that time I had heard that this lady had had a stroke. Word was that this woman was in a nursing home in the Lancaster area. When we came back to Lancaster County I was visiting one day in that nursing home. I checked at the desk and asked whether this lady was a resident. She was. So I asked for her room number. I went into the room, but there was no one in. I began to check in the hallway for my friend and former parishioner. I saw a lady in a wheelchair that kind of looked like her. It was hard to tell, she was wearing some sort of a helmet. So I asked her, "Are you Charlotte?" She indicated that she was, but I still wasn't sure. I tried to explain who I was, but she got a little mixed up. It was all kind of strange, and I wasn't convinced how much she could comprehend in her mind. I still was uncertain if this was the Charlotte I knew...until.... she says, "Praise the Lord!" With that, I knew it was her!

I hope you and I can be known as people who praise the Lord – not just when things going well – but even when we face the enemies of life that threaten to overwhelm us!

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