

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: The Battle Belongs

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Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:1-15

¹After 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.

⁷Our 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?

⁸They have lived in it 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.'

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."

¹³ 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.'

Transcript:

So, Heavenly Father, we pray that you would use these moments. We are just so grateful to be in this place, to worship you, to do it together in community. And Holy Spirit, we pray that you just have your way. Use my words, use this time together. Would you speak what you want spoken? Would you shape our hearts and minds? You make us different people. And we just pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, it is great to be with all of you. And again, welcome to those of you who are online.

The first mission trip that I ever led here at BelPres was to the mountain villages of Guatemala. And a little shout out to Clark Hoffman, to Tom Elvisoccer, to Pat Byers, who were with me on that trip. And when we arrived in Guatemala City, we were met by some of the staff, the organization that we were working with. And they picked us up, loaded us up into a couple of vans, and we started driving out of the city. And I was in the van that was following the first van. Well, within a few minutes, our van had to stop at a red light, and the other van just kept going, and we never found them. Like, we lost them.

And that is when it sunk in. We had no map. We had no directions. We had no cell phone because there weren't cell phones back then. That is how long I've been here at this church. And all of our Spanish speakers were in the other van. And did I mention to you that there was this little travel advisory that was going on at the time? And so, US citizens were warned and cautioned against traveling in Guatemala City because of increased kidnapping and gang activity that was going on. So, it was kind of a mess. Don't you think?

So, the first thing we did was pray, and then we started driving. And I know a little bit of Spanish, [foreign language 00:02:01] , enough to sort of find a restaurant or a bathroom or a bank, whichever seems most important at the time. So when we spotted some people alongside the road, we pulled over and I said, in my best possible Spanish, [foreign language 00:02:14] Because Antigua

was the name of the city that our hotel was in. Well, they were eager to help us, and they gave us the best possible directions ever. I'm absolutely sure of it. It's just I couldn't understand a single word they were saying. So, but as they spoke, they pointed. So we drove in that direction until we ran into some other people. So we pulled over, [foreign language 00:02:44] Same result. Couldn't understand a single word they said. But they pointed, so we drove in that direction. And so on, and so on.

And that is how we made it to Antigua. Well, that started off pretty bleak and desperate. No map, no debt, no directions, no cell phones, none of us able to speak the language of the country that we're in. All we could do was pray and use the little Spanish that we spoke. [foreign language 00:02:01] And God led us to Antigua.

Now, have you ever been in a situation like that? Where suddenly you're in a mess where it seems like everything is going against you rather than for you? Where the outcome looks pretty bleak?

We are going through the sermon series on But, God. And this is a phrase we find throughout the Scriptures. It's a phrase that gives us hope because it shows us that God always, always, always has another plan, another purpose, another way, another move. And I just want to start off by telling you that my message today is about seeking God first. It's about trusting God to take care of the things that are going on in our lives. Because our natural tendency in the midst of a battle is to try and fix it ourselves, to rely on our own resources and strength.

But, we have a God who is for us, a God who fights for us, a God who is with us, a God who loves us, a God who knows our struggle. A God who even gives us joy in situations where there shouldn't be any joy. Your battle belongs to the Lord. Now the passage that I just read begins with this announcement that there's this vast army of Moabites and Ammonites and Meunites and other sorts of "ites" all coming down on Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. And this is bad news for Jehoshaphat. He's not facing one army, not two armies, he's facing three different armies.

So, he proclaims a national fast, and people from all over Judah come to Jerusalem to the temple there. And Jehoshaphat leads them in this magnificent prayer before God. And then they all stand in silence, waiting to hear from God. The prophet Jahaziel speaks up, and he says this in verse 15. This is what the Lord says. "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army, for the battle is not yours, but God's."

See, whatever your struggle, whatever your mess, whether it's raising your kids, trying to get into the college that you want, a relationship, your job, your health, or some other COVID-related thing. Whatever you are facing, your battle belongs to the Lord.

Now, there's a bunch of things that we need to know about our battles. And the first one is this, that we need to know this about our battle. That God has something that he wants to reveal to himself about us. Now, as Pastor Tony Evans says, "When God wants to reveal something about himself that we've never seen, he usually does it in the middle of a mess or a problem." Isn't that great news?

God does most of his revelation during a mess. Like, can't God do it some other way? But our messes, our struggles, our hardships, our battles, are places where God gets our attention, where God interrupts us from the things that are going on in our lives. And once he's got our attention, then he can reveal things about himself that he wants us to know.

The second thing we need to know about our battle is that our battles shape us. See, battles reveal our true character and our true nature. Battles show us things that God wants to heal. Things like anger, or pride, or not being able to trust anyone. Battles show us unhealthy ways that we've adopted in order to cope with the hard things of life. God uses our battles to shape our character, to make us more and more like Jesus, where we more and more spontaneously think like and act like Jesus.

And we're not born that way, we're made that way. Our battles shape us. And the third thing that we need to know about our battles is that our battles leave us better, or they leave us bitter. Battles are a certainty of life. They come in different shapes and sizes. And some of us... Some of us seem to get more than our fair share of battles. And I don't have a very good theological reason for that. I don't. But it's in the battle where God reveals himself. It's in the battle that we learn to love, to trust, to forgive, to more and more choose the way of joy. Battles leave us better, or they can leave us bitter. Mad at other people, mad at God, mad at the church.

And if you're in a place like that today, we would love to help you. Especially if you're watching online, you can reach out to the host there, and they will pray with you. But for the rest of us, for all of us, we can reach out to a Christian friend and talk with them, or to a deacon or an elder or a pastor, but to get some help, to have some people to walk through it with us, because your anger is your battle.

Now, the battle belongs to the Lord, but God isn't going to fight the battle without us. There are some things that we can do. We have a role that we can play in the midst of all this. And that's what Jehoshaphat shows us in this text. And the first thing, the first role that we have is this. To get in the right position. That's the first thing that Jehoshaphat does when he hears this news of an approaching army. He gets everyone in the right position for the battle. He calls for this national fast, and everybody comes to Jerusalem, and there he leads the people in prayer.

He doesn't try and fix the problem. He doesn't quickly go out and strike a deal with the approaching armies to somehow earn, get some peace agreement. And he doesn't quickly go make an alliance with another king so he can secure the military might that he needs in order to defend Judah. Jehoshaphat doesn't do that. What he does is, he has learned the right position for the battles we face. The right position for the battles we face is on our knees. See, nothing improves our prayer life like the news of an approaching army, right? Am I right?

Nothing says, "pray" more than a bad situation or a mess, the battles we face. But if we're really, really honest, many times what our prayers become in the midst of a battle are these urgent pleas for God to show up, to help us, to fix this situation or fix that situation. But Jehoshaphat's prayer doesn't start with him and his problem. His prayer starts with God. Verse six, "Oh Lord God of our fathers. 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."

Jehoshaphat is basically praying, "Father, you know our circumstances. You see us and you know us. But, God most high, you are bigger and you are stronger than any vast army. Those guys don't stand a chance against you." That's a big, bold prayer, right? There's a lot of faith in that kind of a prayer.

And Jehoshaphat is using two of God's names in this prayer. The first one is the name Jehovah, which is translated in our texts as LORD in capital letters. And this is the name of God that reveals to us that God is personal, God is intimate. And the second name that Jehoshaphat uses in this prayer is the name Elohim. This is translated in our text as God. And it's the name of God which reveals God is bigger and stronger. He rules over heaven and earth. See, knowing God's names help us focus on God's character and nature. It takes us off our circumstances and puts us on who God is. And we learned that in our last sermon series, right? We went through the sermon series on the names of God and I'd encourage you to listen to that again. It was a great series.

But what's important to know here, is that by focusing on the character and the nature of God, it radically changes our prayer life because it changes our

relationship with God. When we focus on the character and the nature of God, we realize that God is who God says he is. And that God does what he says that he will do. Focusing on God's character and the nature helps us to pray personally and intimately, like talking to a loving father, because God is. And focusing on the character and the nature of God helps us to pray big, bold, courageous prayers, because we are talking with the God who rules over all, preexisted before it all, is present throughout it all, and exceedingly, abundantly, can change anything at all. God will come as intimately close to you as possible if you will ask him, if you will seek him with all your heart. The right position for our battle is on our knees.

Now, that brings me to the second thing for us to do in our battle. And the second thing is that we have to show up. And in the passage that we read, the prophet Jahaziel tells Jehoshaphat, "Tomorrow, March down against them. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your position, stand firm, and see the deliverance the Lord will give you." God will deliver them, but he won't do it without them. They have to show up.

Now, there's always a battle, isn't there? And sometimes we may be fighting battles God doesn't want us to fight. We may be picking the wrong battles. And the real battle may be with ourselves, with our own pride, with our own ego. That's why getting into the right position, our knees praying, is so, so important. Ask God for discernment in prayer. God may be leading you, and trying to tell you to let go of this particular battle. He may be trying to redirect you from the battle that you're in.

Well, Jehoshaphat and all of Judah must show up for this battle. And that means relying on God. It means having faith to know that God is... As big as this battle might get, God is bigger still. You see, sometimes the hardest part about a battle is the part about showing up. The part about staying. The part about persevering.

Now, maybe your marriage has been hard and you're sort of looking around for someone or something that's a little better. Or maybe you're raising your family, and that's been a little bit more than you bargained for. And you're tired of sacrificing your time, or your dreams, and you're wondering if maybe there's more to life than this. Or you're trying to maintain your values and do the right thing in the workplace, but it's not getting you any promotions, and it's not earning you any new friends. And you're wondering if maybe this time you can just look past some stuff and maybe cheat on some numbers.

Jehoshaphat could have quit. He could have. He could have packed it up and moved to a different place, changed his identity, but giving up would have meant missing out on the adventure that God had for him. Jehoshaphat got to see God totally destroy this vast army. And then God gave them this surprising amount of loot. Like, it took them three days to pick all this stuff up and take it home. The fear of the Lord spread throughout the whole region, and no army would ever come and attack Jehoshaphat again. And as long as Jehoshaphat was king, Judah remained faithful to God. That's quite a run, isn't it? But if he would have given up...

Some of you here today may be in the midst of a battle that you're considering giving up on. For your grades, or your marriage, your family, a friendship, caring for aging parents, your health, or a dream. Don't you give up. Don't give up on you, on them, on God. As big and as vast as the armies before you seem, the battle, it's not yours. It's God's. So, keep showing up, keep persevering. You may not see it yet, but God is working for your deliverance.

So we have to get in the right position. We need to show up. And the third thing we need to do is just hold on to this promise that changes everything. You see, after the passage that we read, Jahaziel tells Jehoshaphat this one thing that the entire passage hinges on. Like, if this isn't here, this promise isn't here, the whole thing goes bad. It goes bad for Jehoshaphat, it goes bad for Judah. But there's a promise here. Jahaziel says in verse 17, "Go out to face them tomorrow." And here's the promise. "And the Lord will be with you." That's so easy to minimize God in a passage like that. But Judah won't have to march out alone. Judah won't have to show up alone. Judah won't have to get in their positions alone, because the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, creator and sustainer of all, God Almighty, is with them.

Well Jehoshaphat, in this passage, all he can do is fall with his forehead to the ground and worship God, because what else can you do when you grasp the significance of that? "The Lord is with you."

Wherever you are, whatever battle you are facing, the Lord is with you. Now, the Bible never guarantees that we will be protected from all battles, from any battle. But the Bible does guarantee that God will be with us when those things come. And as I've gotten older, I've noticed that God's battle strategy changes. You see, in Jehoshaphat's battle, God destroyed the enemies. Like, Jehoshaphat just had to show up and see God's deliverance.

But God asked more of David. God asked David to use what he had, a stone and a slingshot, to win the battle against Goliath. And God asks even more of

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They used what they had, prayer and faith, and they were still thrown in the fire. But suddenly, this fourth man shows up there in the fire to be with them. A savior. And they are not burned up.

See, sometimes God destroys the armies that we are facing, sometimes God asks us to use what we have, and sometimes God asks us to walk through the fire. But he will be with us. And in my early years as a follower of Jesus, it just seemed like all God was asking me to do was lean on him, trust him, and he'd do the rest. Amazing things, surprising things. Totally got my attention. Then, as I got a little bit older, God seemed to be asking me more to use what I had. Like the story I told you about finding our way to Antigua. And these days, God is stepping it up a bit. And it just seems like he's asking me more and more to walk through the fire.

It takes more faith to walk through the fire. And you'd think it would get easier, right? You'd think faith would get easier, the older we get or the more we mature, you'd think it'd get easier. But it doesn't, because life doesn't get easier. But our faith gets bigger. God gets bigger. Our character gets bigger, and we become better. We learn to trust God more, lean on God more, walk in his joy more. The Lord is with you. The Lord is with you.

Now, one of the best ways to experience that is in community with other people. And if you haven't already, I'd encourage you, this is a shameless plug, to sign up for one of our All In groups. Today's the last day. But it is a great way to find a group of people who will be there with you, who will be there for you, pray with you, support you, and walk with you through your battle.

Now, several years ago, a friend of mine graduated from college, got married, and started looking for a bunch of jobs. He wasn't able to get an offer. And after a period of time, he started to feel pretty bad. So he went in, got checked out, and it turned out, he had a form of cancer that required a surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. And then he was told that this treatment could potentially affect his ability to have children. It just went from bad to worse for this couple.

But their church was great. They were in a small group, people who were praying with them and for them. And they started to notice God show up in these little ways that just brought them encouragement and hope. A meal on their doorstep, a card in the mail. And they just found this surprising hope and peace that carried them through this time.

Well, after the treatments were over, my friend returned to the job search, but they needed money. So he had to take a job that was in another field, a job

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that he didn't want, didn't really like, but it paid the bills. Three months went by, six months, a year, two years. My friend just kept trusting. Finally, he got a job offer from a company. It was a great company in another state, and they took it. They moved to that state, got a new church, new group of friends. And today, my friend, he is cancer-free. He's working in a job that he loves, and they have three children.

Now that's a great ending, but what a battle. What a long, arduous battle in the midst of that. It took a long time to get there. Praying and seeking God, he got in the right position. And that helped him believe God was working, even when you couldn't see what God was doing. And applying for one job after another, then finally taking a job in a field that wasn't his, a job he didn't like, he just kept showing up. He just kept hanging in there. He just kept persevering. And knowing God was with him and experiencing it in the community around him, that gave him courage. It gave him hope. And eventually God gave him the victory.

Now, God didn't do it for him, and didn't do it without him. My friend had a role in it. So did his church, his doctors, his nurses, his friends, his wife. Lots of people had a role in it, but the battle was not his. It was God's. And now he has this powerful testimony about God's faithfulness and God's provision and how God gave him victory over the hardest battle of his life.

Whatever place you're in, whatever battle we are facing, our battle, our place, is not the last word about us. Because when Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, he shouted the final word that shakes the gates of hell. "It is finished." Three days later, Jesus walked out of the tomb. He is alive, and he proved that nothing is going to stop God from finishing what God started. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Not trouble, not hardship, not danger, not any battle.

As Apostle Paul says in Romans Chapter 10, "Know, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us. For, I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." When all we see is the battle, God sees the victory. When all we see is a mountain, God sees the mountain moved. When all we see is ashes, God sees beauty. And when all we see is the cross, God sees an empty tomb. Your battle, my battle, our battle, it belongs to the Lord.

So Jesus, we pray that you would fill us with courage today for the battles we face. We pray that you would give us a spirit of perseverance for the battles we face. Would you help us see you? Would you help us know you? Would you help us walk in your power? Would you reveal more of yourself to us? Grow our faith.

Jesus, we need you. We surrender these battles to you. You are God. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Opening Question

- Icebreaker: What's a keepsake you've held on to for a while in your wallet/purse/car and what makes it worth holding on to?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions - Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions

- What is the message of hope in this passage? What must Jehoshaphat do to receive the promise? (Read the rest of Chapter 20).
- What battle are you facing right now or coming out of? How are you dealing with it and what does this passage say to you that you can apply?

Closing Question and Application

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?