

## INTRODUCTION

I want to focus on taking worship out of the sanctuary and worshipping privately and personally with your family. I strongly believe that when you practice worship six days a week in your quiet time and among your family, when you come and gather with God's people in God's house on God's day, your worship will be greatly enhanced. I want to show you some of the positive benefits of real praise and worship. One of my favorite movies is *The Sound of Music*. I think about one song in that musical where Mother Superior in the convent was singing a song about Maria, who was played of course by Julie Andrews. And in that song, they ask a question, "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" And then there's a phrase in the song that caught my attention that says, "How do you hold a moon beam in your hand?" And that's like, worship. There is something that is elusive about worship that you can't even grab hold of it. You can't even teach about it. It's like trying to hold a moon beam. You can't do it. The only thing you can do with a moon beam is just to let it shine. And that's what worship is. I love the way to Scottish Christians say it: "Some things are better felt than telt." Some things you have to just more or less experience for yourself. And I think praise and worship is like that.

I want us to study about that in the life of a man named King Jehoshaphat when he was told some enemies were ready to make war on him in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. He was alarmed and Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord. And he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord from every town in Judah.

All was fine, and then one day the king received very disturbing and distressing news that threw his life into a frenzy. Has that ever happened to you? Does it seem like things have been going along fairly smoothly, and then suddenly somebody calls you on the telephone with news that knocks your feet out from under you? Perhaps you get a letter, or somebody tells you something, and suddenly your world is turned upside down. It's like somebody has just punched you in the solar plexus, making a big hole in the center of who you are. That's how quickly things can turn around in your life. Things are going well until you learn about something, and it can destroy you emotionally.

That happened to Jehoshaphat. A vast army of several nations formed a coalition to attack and destroy him and the children of God. Now Jehoshaphat could have done

several things. He could have turned and run. He could have gone to war. Instead, he sought the Lord. There are many of you who right now are going through a difficult crisis. It may not be an army that's gathered against you. It may be the fact that your marriage is at a point where it's just hanging together with a tiny thread. And it seems like you and your spouse just are missing each other. You're on different wavelengths. You cannot communicate. And several times you have thought about walking out and ending it with a divorce. Some of you are experiencing real health crises. You've learned that you have cancer. There's a malignancy. Some of you have children or grandchildren, and they're causing you such distress. And it's an emotional drain every time you think about it.

Others of you are facing relational problems. You have some friends who had betrayed you, and they've done some things to you or said some things about you that has just cut your feet out from under you. You fill in the blank. What is the crisis that you're facing right now? If you are not facing a crisis, hang on; one's right around the corner. Jesus said, "In this world, you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer for I have overcome the world."

From the life of Jehoshaphat, I want to extract four principles that build on each other and that I think will help you experience victory through praise over your problem.

### **I. ADMIT YOU ARE UNABLE TO COPE WITH YOUR CRISIS (10-12)**

Jehoshaphat went to the Lord, and he prayed. But in his prayer he points out that some of the enemies attacking him were tribes God did not allow Israel to attack earlier. In other words, he's almost blaming God. He's saying that if we had taken care of those guys back when we took care of the other ones, they wouldn't be bothering us now. Have you ever thought, "Lord, I've tried to be faithful to you. I've tried to do everything you wanted me to do, but look what kind of mess I'm in..."? But notice what he went on to say in verse 12. "Oh our God, will you not judge them? [This is the key.] For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

What was the first thing they did? They admitted that they were unable to cope with their crisis. Some people say it's a sign of weakness to admit you can't handle a situation. Oh no. In fact, it is a sign of absolute dependence on God when you just admit to God, "God, I can't handle this." Did you notice what he said? He said, "We don't have the power to face this problem. We don't know what to do." If you're at a point of crisis and you're saying, "Lord, I don't know what to do. I can't handle this..." you're right where God wants you.

When you face a crisis, there are two mistakes you can make. One mistake you can make is you can just deny it. Just ignore it. Do you remember the movie *Gone with the Wind*?

*the Wind?* That was what Scarlett O'Hara always did whenever she had a problem. What would she say? "I'll just think about that tomorrow." People just want to ignore and deny their problems. Why do we think as Americans and Christians that it is a sign of weakness to admit that we have hurts and pain? Sunday after Sunday, you see people in the halls in your Sunday school classes, and you ask how they're doing. They smile say, "I'm fine." But they're not doing fine. And you're not doing fine. You're hurting. You have some pain, but we just deny it.

Have you ever heard of the old Greek philosophy called stoicism? The stoic said you never register any weakness. You never show your feelings. The classic story for the Stoics was the young man who went on some private property and poached a Fox. He hid it under his tunic. And he just so happened to see the owner of the land as he was leaving. The owner of the land walked up to him to talk, and the boy didn't want him to know he'd stolen one of his foxes, so the Stoic just stood there. And the whole time he was talking to this man, that fox was clawing and eating his stomach, but he never registered any pain. He never registered any emotion. When the owner of the property walked off, the boy fell down dead. But to the Stoics, he was a hero because he never showed his pain. That's Stoicism, not Christianity. We're here to help you through your problem. That's why God says you must come to the point where you admit you cannot cope with your crisis.

The last few years I have been very interested in what is called a 12-step process for recovery. If you're familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous, they use these 12 steps. God can be found in each of those 12 steps. The first step in the 12-step recovery process is: "I admit that I am powerless over alcohol, and my life has become unmanageable." Nothing can be done about your problem until you come to the point where you admit: "I can do nothing about it in my own power. My life is unmanageable." And then say like Jehoshaphat, "I cannot handle it on my own. I don't know what to do."

## **II. PUT YOUR EYES ON GOD RATHER THAN YOUR PROBLEM (12-15)**

Jehoshaphat said, "We do not know to do, but our eyes are upon you." If you say, "I don't know what to do," is that hopeless? No, you need to say what Jehoshaphat also said: "My eye is upon you, oh God." There are some of you who are right in the thick of it. Right now, you are hurting and suffering.

What you need to do is take your eyes off your problem and put your eyes on God, because God is a lot bigger than your problem. What is the focus of your attention? Do you lie in bed at night, worrying about that problem? Thinking, "How am I going to solve it? How am I going to deal with it?" Or do you put your eyes on God and ask him for advice? In the 12-step process, someone admits: "I came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity." Once you

admit you can't handle a problem on your own, you recognize that there is another power who can restore you to sanity. And we as Christians know who that power is, don't we? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. And through his supernatural power, he can help us.

Sometimes we look at the wrong things. We look at our problem and our enemy, instead of our solution. As I was thinking about this, I was reminded of the time I was in the eighth grade playing softball. I was running to third base, and the ball arrived just as I slid into the base. Of course it was just play and we didn't really have any umpires, but the kid on third base said I was out. I stood up and told him I was safe. The problem was this guy was in the eighth grade, but he probably should have been a freshman in college. He was six-foot-four and weighed at least 200 pounds. We called him Herman Munster. He threw his glove down. I threw my glove down, and he said, "Put 'em up."

Now y'all know what it's like to be an eighth-grade guy. You have mixed emotions. Number one, you don't want to lose face among all your friends who've gathered around saying, "Fight! Fight!" On the other hand, you don't want to have the stuffing beat out of you either. I sized him up, and out of the corner of my eye I saw Coach Prestwood walking up the sidewalk. My brilliant brain put a plan together quickly and I thought, "Hey, no problem. I can jump onto this guy before he can really hurt me badly. Then Coach is going to be here to break up the fight. I won't get hurt too badly. And I won't lose face among my friends." So I tore into him, and he tore into me. Before long, he was just pounding me, and I was keeping him off as best I could. Coach Prestwood has meanwhile turned his back on us, talking to another teacher! Finally, he heard all the hollering and screaming and walked over to us and broke up the fight. It wasn't too bad, but Coach come didn't come to the rescue in time!

God's always on time. Aren't you glad? But you see what I did. I looked at that problem, this big ugly guy, and then I looked beyond it and saw there's hope. And that's what you need to do. Instead of looking at your problem, you need to look beyond the problem and put your eyes on God. Now, Coach was late, but God is never late. He's always on time. You think he's late. But his timing isn't the same as your time.

### **III. REPLACE WORRY WITH WORSHIP (18-23)**

God sent a prophet to give a message to Jehoshaphat and the people. Let me tell you what happens when you admit you have a problem and then put your eyes on God, not the problem. God will give you a word. And he'll say, "This is what I want you to know." The message God gave to Jehoshaphat is in verse 15. "Do not afraid or discouraged because of this vast army, for the battle is not yours, but

God's." Whatever you're facing today, whatever your crisis, whatever your problem is, I pray that God will say to you what he said to Jehoshaphat in verse 15. Put your eyes on him, listen to his voice. And he will say to you, "Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged, because the battle is not yours but mine." In verse 16, the prophet repeats the message: "Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow. And the Lord will be with you." God gave them a word.

So, Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground. Earlier in this series, we learned the Hebrew word for worship means "to bow down." He bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Then some stood up and praised the Lord with a very loud voice. Every time you face a problem, you can grab it by the handle of fear. Or you can grab it by the handle of faith. Every time you face a problem, you can respond with worry, or you can respond with worship. Worship is our personal response to an encounter with the living God. The Israelites encountered God, and he said, "This is the message I have for you. Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. The battle is mine, not yours." How did they respond? They bowed down and worshiped.

As you face problems in your life, you can respond with worship and praise. Now praise is the doorway that leads into worship. Praise is like a window in a darkened room. It lets the light of God shine in your heart. And when you begin to praise the Lord and worship the Lord, then you begin to experience victory over your problems. Worship is not something you do only at church on Sunday mornings. There are times you face enemies on Tuesday evening. That's when you need to worship. There are times when you face challenges Thursday at noon. That's when you need to worship.

My whole concept of worship has been changing through the years, and I'm still open to God. I want him to teach me more and more about what worship is, but there was a time when I first started preaching that I felt the first part of the service, all the music and everything, was superfluous. It was something you had to do to get everybody ready to preach. And my whole attitude was to get rid of all that stuff and get to the main thing: preaching! I thought, "Hurry up. Sometimes I wouldn't even sing. I would just think, "Let's get to the real thing." But a few years ago, God really convicted my heart and told me how wrong that is. When we gather together, if we don't worship and praise the Lord, then the preaching is worth very little. I need to worship the Lord before I preach. I'm not ready to preach unless I've worshiped. You're not ready to hear unless you have worshiped. And you know what it was that changed my whole attitude about worshiping here in the Body? It was when I began to worship God personally, privately during my quiet time. And I can't even describe to you how wonderful that is. There are many

times that I just take my Bible, and I just kneel before the Lord. I open the Bible, and I speak to him, and he speaks to me. I have an Old King James Bible that I used when I started preaching at 17. It is just falling apart. But the reason I still use it for part of my quiet time is because through the years I've written down guitar chords in the psalms that are meant to be sung. That's what Psalms means. It means "a song book." And I'll just take my guitar...just me and the Lord...and I'll just sing psalms to him. I'll just sing praise songs to him, just me and him. And those are songs that I wouldn't even sing in here to you because they're so precious to me. Some of them have only been sung one time. I say, "Lord, here's my gift to you. Only one time will it ever be sung, but it's yours." I can't tell you how wonderful that is. I can't tell you how much that strengthens me.

O love to come in here with you on Sunday mornings and sing, "To God, be the glory, great things he has done..." or "How great thou art..." But I love to get alone with God and worship him too. Are you doing that? Are you worshiping God privately, personally during the week? I promise if you do that regularly, you'll come in here on Sunday mornings and the words of the hymns will take on new meaning. Every praise chorus will be directed straight to your gut. It'll change your whole attitude, if you'll begin to practice personal praise and personal worship. The Bible says Jehoshaphat bowed down before the Lord and worshiped him. Do you do that during the week?

#### **IV. USE PRAISE AS YOUR BEST WEAPON (v20-30)**

Early in the morning, they left for the desert. Jehoshaphat told Judah and the people of Jerusalem to have faith in the Lord. Now, this is what he did for the battle strategy. "After consulting the people Jehoshaphat appointed men to carry swords." Wait a minute. That's not what the Bible says. He appointed men to sing to the Lord and praise him "for the splendor of his holiness." As they went out ahead of the army, they did so singing a one-line praise chorus: "give thanks to the Lord for his mercy endures forever." Do you see what is amazing about this whole experience? This is the key to giving you victory over your problems. As they faced this problem, they admitted: I can't handle on my own. They put their eyes on God instead of their problem. They began to worship instead of worry. And God says, "I want you to attack this problem with praise." The world says that's crazy. For instance, in the real Desert Storm, imagine if General Norman Schwarzkopf had to the joint chiefs of staff and to the president: "Here's our battle strategy. We have all of these tanks. We have all of these Jeeps and personnel carriers. We have all of these jet bombers, but right out in front of the whole invading army, we're going to put the choir from Green Acres Baptist church. And

we're going to let that choir walk in front of the army as they march into Iraq. And we want them to sing, "Give thanks to the Lord for his mercy endures forever."

How do you think they would have responded? They would have told him to get out! But that's exactly what Jehoshaphat did. He put singers out in front of the army, and they used praise as their first advance. That's what you need to do. You need to tack your problem with praise. You need to praise God as you attack that problem. What was the result?

The Bible says in verse 22 that as they began to sing and praise God, the Lord set ambushes against their enemies, and they were defeated. What were these ambushes? We don't know. We believe it could have been angelic armies that God sent. Whatever it was, suddenly these attacking armies found themselves defeated. The Bible says they turned on each other and started fighting each other. And before long, the whole army was destroyed. And here were the Israelites still singing praises to the Lord! Not a drop of blood had been shed, not one sword had been drawn, not one spear had been thrown, but the battle had been won. Verse 30 says Jehoshaphat had "peace on every side."

He started out with a problem, and he ended up with peace and victory. You may be facing a crisis right now. How do you get from your crisis to celebration? How do you get from your problem to peace? You do it by using praise as your secret weapon, your best weapon.

Have you gotten to the point where you can praise God for what you're going through right now? The Bible says it's a good thing to give thanks and praise to the Lord. There are three times you can praise the Lord. One time is good. Another time is better. But another time is best. It's kind of like those old *Sears and Roebuck* catalogs where they listed categories of products as good, better, best.

**1. It's good to praise the Lord for the past.** That's easy though. Isn't it? God, thank you for blessing me this past year, this past week. We ought to do that, that's good. Praise him for that.

**2. It's better to praise him right now in the present.** Lord, I praise you for whatever I'm going through right now. But let's face it. That's harder, right?

**3. The best is to praise him for the future and to use praise as your advance attack against the enemy.**

I don't claim to understand how it works. All I know that is if you'll begin to praise the Lord and worship him in the beauty of holiness privately, he'll give you victory. But it's when you take your eyes off the problem and put them on God, that victory takes place.

## CONCLUSION

Several years ago, I heard the testimony of Charles Stanley. Many of you have heard Charles Stanley preach on television. When he first became pastor of First Baptist church, Atlanta, Georgia, a large number of people didn't want him to be their pastor. And he faced a lot of opposition and a lot of discouragement. One time he was actually in the pulpit and a man came up in the pulpit and literally struck him with his fist. And it got so bad that he was thinking about just quitting, just walking away from it. But Charles Stanley said that a dear, sweet, old lady in his church called him on the phone and said, "Dr. Stanley, come by my house. There's something I want to give." He went by to see her. She was a saint of God. Every church has them. They walk with God, they love Jesus. She said, "I want to give you this picture." And it was a picture of Daniel in the lion's den. And she said to him, "What do you notice about that picture?"

Initially, he was sort of disappointed because he didn't need another picture. And he wasn't really interested when she asked him that question. But he said, "Well, Daniel's standing there among the lions, and they're not hurting him. She said, "No, what else do you notice about it?" And he said, "Well, I notice that it's dark down there in the dungeon. And the light is coming down from above." She nodded and said, "What else do you notice about it?" And she kept asking, and he named as many things as you could. Finally, he gave up and said, "What do you want me to see in the picture?" She said, "Look where Daniel is looking." And suddenly, Dr. Stanley said, it hit him like a ton of bricks. He realized that Daniel was not looking at the lions. He was looking at the Lord.

There are some of you right now in the middle of a bunch of hungry lions. Problems are besetting you from every side. My advice is to take your eyes off the lions and put them on the Lord. Then begin to worship and praise him. And you'll see a difference!

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**II. PUT YOUR EYES ON GOD RATHER THAN YOUR PROBLEM (v12-15)**

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**IV. USE PRAISE AS YOUR BEST WEAPON (v20-30)**

- 1. It's good to praise the Lord for the past.**
- 2. It's better to praise him right now in the present.**
- 3. The best is to praise him for the future and to use praise as your advance attack against the enemy.**

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