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When They Began to Sing and to Praise

183-A

Series: Miscellaneous Messages



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When They Began to Sing and to Praise

It was a cold, damp day. The sky had a dreary, ominous look about it. If you could read what life had in store by the texture of the heavens, you would stay inside and huddle by the fire, and never go outside.

That wasn't an option, however, for the Drake family. It was time for the kids to go to school, for Dad to go to work, and for Mom to go to the church for that missions planning session. Life goes on, snow, sleet, or wind.

Mom and the kids were halfway downtown when it happened. A big truck carrying lumber from the old mill down the road was making a turn onto Cypress Lane when it went out of control. As the massive machine went careening across the roadway, Jenny Drake and her two children were on a collision course with tragedy.

The impact was etched forever in their minds. Fortunately, they had their seat belts on, and the air bags worked the way they were supposed to. The car was a total wreck. Both kids had cuts and were bleeding, and Mom was very nearly in a state of shock. She was waiting for the children to begin crying and screaming, but she was too numb to say anything.

Suddenly, little Amy Drake spoke up. Her voice trembled a little, but the words came through loud and clear. "Mommy, it's time to sing and to praise!" Pretty strange words from a seven year old who had just had a brush with death. But Amy remembered. Oh, how she remembered the Bible story her family had been studying all week. It was in II Chronicles, chapter 20, and she had apparently not only heard the story, she had caught the meaning of it.

In case you aren't familiar with it, turn to II Chronicles, chapter 20 in your Bible. It is the fourteenth book of the Bible, and this chapter has really only two key characters, one is named Jehoshaphat and the other is Jehovah God. There is, to be sure, a large supporting cast, but if you only remember those two and the relationship between them, you'll have the main thrust of the message. It begins:

It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat.

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Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, “A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar” (which is En Gedi)

(II Chronicles 20:1,2 NKJV)

“It happened after this, that...” After what? If you journey back to chapter 19, you’ll see that it came to pass after a time of great spiritual revival.

So Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the LORD God of their fathers.

Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, (II Chronicles 19:4,5 NKJV)

And he commanded them, saying, “Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart:

(II Chronicles 19:9 NKJV)

It was a time of spiritual awakening; a return to the God of their fathers. It was a time of peace and spiritual blessing. The people were in love with their God and committed to serving Him with all their hearts. *Then*, it happened. Warfare. Beloved, warfare does not mean you are out of the will of God. When the word is going forth, when the victories are mounting, when the joy of the Lord is contagious in your midst, *expect the enemy to appear on the horizon*. Satan does not sit still when God is being glorified. That will be true in your life, as well.

Jehoshaphat got the news: The enemy is coming! A great multitude is coming! And the next verse records his response. It was three-fold:

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

(II Chronicles 20:3 NKJV)

His first response was fear. He was driving down the highway of life, minding his own business, taking the kids to school when this great big satanic truck veered onto the pavement right in front of him. His heart made an emergency trip to his throat and back. He feared.

We can all relate so far. But that wasn’t where he stopped. As a leader, he dealt with his own heart first, and then he challenged his followers to do the same. He set himself to seek the Lord. That word “set” means to “put something in its proper place”. How do you respond when life hands you a “Go to jail, do not pass go” card in

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the game of life? When the phone rings and the voice on the other end says, “Dear, I hate to tell you this, but...” When the doorbell rings, it’s someone with news you thought you would never hear. When you are driving down one of life’s fast highways, minding your own business and some vehicle of satanic testing veers into your path. Fear. That’s a natural first response. Stark fear. Maybe your hands tremble, your heart races, your thoughts race to the worst-case scenario, and the fear heightens.

How long before you set yourself to seek the Lord? After you have wallowed in self-pity for a while? After you have screamed at God and at anyone else who would listen? After you have wept and wept until your eyes can cry no more? Or is your heart tuned to *immediately, as a response of faith, use that moment to seek the Lord?*

Oh, the wasted moments and wasted motions that capture us between fear and faith. The very response of fear *immediately* caused his heart to seek the Lord. Once he had set his face to the heavens, he called on his countrymen to do the same. Listen to what he did next. Would you like to know how to pray when the sky is falling?

So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, and said: “O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?

Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?

And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying,

‘If disaster comes upon us—sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine—we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.

And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them—

here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your

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possession which You have given us to inherit.

O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”

(II Chronicles 20:4-12 NKJV)

What an incredible scene. And it never would have happened had it not been for unexpected warfare. God’s people got together and prayed together. What a miracle. What a victory. But what a trauma it took to precipitate such unity. So often the traumas and tragedies we scream at God over are the only way He has to bring us together as believers and as families. Listen to Jehoshaphat’s practical primer on prayer.

He began by extolling the worth of God; the awesomeness of God’s nature. He spoke of His supremacy, of His sovereignty, of His omnipotence. “No one,” he exclaimed, “Is able to withstand thee!” Then, he recalled the works of God. He said, “Aren’t you the same God who drove out the inhabitants of this land and gave it to us in the first place?”

Then He exalts the word of God. He says, “Didn’t you promise us that if evil came upon us and we stand in your presence and cry for help, that you would hear and help? I’m standing on your word, Lord.”

Only then does Jehoshaphat address the issue at hand. He says, “Lord, that time is now. The Ammonites and Moabites are coming around the mountain, Lord, and they aren’t comin’ for a love-feast.” So he has worshipped God for His worth, His works, and His word. Then He has recited the problem as he saw it. A big old truck was coming at him and he wasn’t sure his air bag would work.

Now, having prayed aright, Jehoshaphat prays: “Oh, our God, we don’t have the power to defeat this enemy, and we don’t have the wisdom to know what to do. Our eyes are upon thee.” Surrender is the essence of prayer—worship and surrender. Prayer isn’t a tool for man to use to get an unsupportive deity to cooperate and do his bidding. Prayer is the essence of the heart of man becoming so enraptured with the heart of God that the only thing it desires is to do God’s will. It is spending enough time beholding God that your only desire is for God to hold you in the palm of His hand. When that truck is careening towards you, you may be tempted to think that God has forgotten. Not so. Remember Isaiah 49,

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, And have no

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compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget,
but I will not forget you.

Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;”

(Isaiah 49:15,16a NASB77)

God hasn't forgotten you. But neither has He forgotten that the only way He has to pour His nature into yours is for you to get to the place where you know you are helpless apart from Him. *Any other posture allows us to share God's glory.*

So Jehoshaphat admitted to God that he just couldn't pull this one off. The truck was aimed in his direction and there was no off ramp that he could see, not even a shoulder for him to pull off on. Either God had to do something or it was over. So they gathered the whole nation together, all of their families with them, and this is what happened,

Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.

And he said, “Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.’”

(II Chronicles 20:13-15 NKJV)

The whole nation had gathered together for a prayer meeting, and Jahaziel became God's mouthpiece. The message was simple, but straightforward. God is saying, “I order you not to be afraid. It is a command, not a request. I order you not to be dismayed or perturbed or anxious because of what is facing you. It is a command, so if you fear, or if you worry, it is sin. I know the problem is huge. I know the battle looks hopeless. If you were fighting it, it would be hopeless. But the battle is not yours to fight; the battle belongs to God.”

Oh, beloved, so many times in our lives, the skies turn from sunny to overcast and then suddenly storm clouds cover the horizon and thunder shakes the very ground on which we stand. Our worlds begin to crumble. What we are confronting may not even seem earthshaking to someone else. That's not the point. To us, it is devastating. To us, circumstances are beyond hope. What an incredible verse to have committed to memory at exactly that moment in time.

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Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.'"
(II Chronicles 20:15b NKJV)

In your heart of hearts at that moment, you, like Joshua so long ago, take the shoes from off your feet, for you are on holy ground. Quietly, you take the sword in your hand and you hand it to the captain of the Lord's host. Praise God, *it isn't your battle*. Oh, you don't run home and hide in the closet. You have to face whatever obstacles God has allowed to come into your life. But remember, *as you go*, you don't take or carry the burden for the outcome. The battle isn't yours. But into the battle you must go. Here was Jehoshapat's marching orders:

Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel.

'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you."

And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshiping the LORD.

(II Chronicles 20:16-18 NKJV)

"Tomorrow, get up and head straight for the problem. In case you're confused, the enemy will be right down there. Go straight ahead. If you run the other way or avoid the battle, *you'll never know what your God can do.*"

God gave them three positions to assume. None of them had anything to do with warfare. They were to:

- 1- Set themselves.
- 2- Stand still
- 3- See the salvation of the Lord

Therein lies the threefold calling of spiritual victory. Victory does not rest in what we do. Victory rests in what God does. And we enter into the victory by positioning ourselves in such a way that we are settled in spirit knowing we can't win; we are willing to remain still and not try to help God, and our eyes remain open, *expecting to see whatever kind of victory God wants to win.*

That victory is not always in the physical realm. Oftentimes the thing we prayed would never happen, does. But through the dark hours, we are not filled with fear. We know God has a purpose. We

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know God has a plan. We know God has won the victory, and the victory may well be a transformation of our souls that could only come *when what we thought we had to have, we have no more.*

Now to Jehoshaphat, the battle was over. Oh, it hadn't started yet, but it was over. That big weight was off his shoulders. That load of fear had vanished into exuberance and expectancy. So they did what anyone ought to do when faced with certain warfare. They had a praise gathering.

And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshiping the LORD.

Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high.

So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."

And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the LORD, for His mercy endures forever."

(II Chronicles 20:18-21 NKJV)

Oh, the incredibly different ways of our God. He sent them out with trumpets and song sheets. He appointed singers to lead the congregation into the battle, singing, "Praise the LORD, for His mercy endureth forever!" And what happened?

Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.

(II Chronicles 20:22 NKJV)

Oh, precious God, what beautiful pictures you paint on the canvas of Scripture for weary warriors. Yes, the battle is real. Yes, the enemy is strong. Yes, that's right: You have no might to go against them, neither know you what to do. So your eyes are on God. And what does God tell you? He tells you to stop worrying and start singing. Transfer the responsibility for the outcome into the hands of the only one who can win the battle, God Himself. Don't be afraid of the enemy. When God is ready, at just the perfect moment in time, He will but whisper and Satan and all his host will go down in defeat.

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In fact, one day very soon, Satan will gather all of his troops together for one giant offensive against the armies of God. He will come out in the open and declare war against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His troops will close in for the kill. Tiny little Israel will be their target. But at just the precise moment that will accrue maximum glory to God, He will descend from heaven with all his saints beside Him, and in the twinkling of an eye, once and for all, the battle will over.

But until then, as the song goes, little battles will break out in your life and in mine. Satan will encompass us with troubles and trials and tests. Look to Armageddon, beloved. It is a portrait of spiritual victory. At the moment God deems best, He will descend into your situation and Satan, who was trying to quench the glory of God, will suddenly come face to face with the King of Glory.

When they began to sing and to praise. Was it the process of singing that did it? No, it was *the attitude of heart that allowed them to sing that demonstrated faith that did it*. Verse 20 is the key remember,

Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."
(II Chronicles 20:20c NKJV)

They had to be willing, when all the odds were against them, to believe that God was who He said He was, and that His word could be trusted no matter how bad things looked. When they came to that mindset, they were ready to sing and to praise. They didn't have to believe in Jehoshaphat. They had to believe in the Lord. Jehoshaphat was a great choir director, not necessarily a noted warrior. He didn't have to be. The real commander-in-chief had never lost a battle. He wasn't about to lose one now.

Now, what about you? That's the key. This story was written for our admonition. It wasn't just about Jehoshaphat. It's about us. It's a portrait, written indelibly on the pages of Scripture by the hand of God Himself, to show us how to respond to life's trucks that suddenly appear out the windshield of our spiritual sedans as we drive the kids to school. I believe there are at least three kinds of attacks the enemy sends our way that ought to cause us to sing and to praise.

The first we have already discussed. It is when those unexpected traumas suddenly appear on the horizon of life, and without any warning the impact of their collision upon our lives causes us to

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reel in disbelief that this is happening. The death of a loved one, the threat of financial disaster, an automobile accident, a call from your mate saying he's leaving you, and all at once everything you have learned spiritually seems inadequate as fear grips you, and you cry out in anguish.

The second kind of attack comes from those things in life that may not be terminal, but seem interminable. They just go on and on. And like water eroding rock, their constant barrage thrusts itself upon you until you just can't take anymore. Let's call them "LCT" "Life's Chronic Traumas". You may be suffering from pain that simply will not go away. You may not be dying from it, but you almost wish you were. It may be a disease that has disabled you, and does not enable you to do the things everyone else does. Maybe it's a handicap that makes doing what others do naturally require you to need supernatural help to do them. It could be a problem marriage where your mate and you almost get it together, then the whole world erupts again, and you're almost afraid to hope for anything better. Maybe it's a rebellious child who goes from one problem to another, and you simply cringe every time the phone rings, wondering what might happen next. Those are trucks, too, but instead of careening towards you out of control, it's almost as though they are at a dead stop blocking the highway in front of you, leaving you at a standstill, with no way to get around them.

The final kind of attack is more insidious. It comes from the day-to-day irritations that do not traumatize you, nor are they ongoing, but they just chip away at your reserves until there's no spiritual fuel left in your tank. It's the day after day grind at the office, or day-after-day crying and sick kids. Day after day of working two jobs to make ends meet. It's the day after day trying to do as a single parent the things that two parents often cannot do. It's the day after day ministering until you feel pulled in every direction and stretched beyond your limits. And your heart begins to grieve. Anger begins to well up within you. You deserve better, you tell yourself. You're serving the Lord.

What do all of these situations have in common? They are times in life when God's children are confronted with an attack of the enemy. Remember, Satan uses physical circumstances to try to weaken us spiritually. Read the book of Job. He attacks family, wealth, possessions, and health. And the key is *how we respond when he does, and how quickly we respond when he does.*

The key, beloved, is to memorize passages from the word of God

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that the Spirit of God can call to your mind when these incidents occur. Maybe you're not much on Scripture memory. That's okay. At least try to memorize II Chronicles 20, verses 3, 12, 17 and 22. Four verses. Then meditate on them day and night. That means they become, as Scripture suggests, "like frontlets before your eyes". Otherwise, the natural responses that have been programmed into your brain for all these years will overtake your desire to respond God's way.

Then pray each day and ask the Holy Spirit to call to your mind those passages *every time Satan fires at you arrows of discouragement, fear, anger, or depression*. And the minute He calls it to your mind, *begin to sing and to praise*. Now if you sing like I do, make melody in your heart. Otherwise, you may be blessed and everyone around depressed. But *the very second*, and that's key, that your spirit begins to react to life's circumstances, begin to sing and to praise. Praise God for who He is. Make a list of His attributes and learn choruses or hymns that praise Him for those things that make Him God. Praise Him for what He's done; what He's done through the word, through your salvation, through His day to day comfort in your life. Praise Him. When you do, *the Lord sets ambushments against the enemy, and he is defeated*.

Does that mean the problem will go away? No, beloved, it might get worse. Satan hates it when we do that. Then what will happen? Two things: they are found in verses 27-30.

Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies.

So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord.

And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.
(II Chronicles 20:27-30 NKJV)

Three things happened. The people experienced real joy (vs 27). They experienced real peace (vs 30). And those who were looking at their lives were able to tell the difference and gave the praise to their God (vs 29).

The promises are spiritual. God will enter into your life and restore calm and give you grace. The truck may still be there. Your face may be bloody, and you may think the car of life has been

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totalled. I do not know. But one thing I do know: like little Amy Drake, you will suddenly see it all in perspective again, and in the light of eternity the one thing you want is for God to magnify Himself through you in and through this situation, whatever it takes.

Try it for one week and then another and then another until your life becomes an anthem of praise to our God. Life will be full of battles, either way. One way you will cower in fear and frustration and live a life of defeat. The other way, you will constantly be aware that the “battle is not yours, it’s God’s”, and you will simply set yourself, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.

If you have never given your heart to Christ and asked Him to forgive your sins and come personally into your heart, just singing and praising is not enough. The sin question has to be dealt with. You have to realize that your sins have separated you from His love and that He paid the total price on Calvary to save you—that is what we Christians have to sing about. But you can have it, too. You can quietly bow your head right now and ask Him to forgive you, to cleanse you, to cover you with His blood. He will. He will make you a new person from the inside out, and you will have something to sing about. Oh, you will have something to sing about!

And what a song we have to sing, a song of praise to our God!

Now, let’s sing a song of victory, and go out into that real world, wrapped in the comfort of God’s love, expecting the enemy to attack, realizing the battle’s not ours, and ready to sing and to praise, and let Him take care of the enemy.

After all, aren’t we just practicing for heaven? Isn’t that what we’ll spend eternity doing? Then maybe God is allowing some of these things in our lives just to give us a little choir practice.

Say it with me, in closing, “The battle is not yours, it’s God’s. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD did the rest.”

Amen.

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