

“Thank Ahead”

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Giving thanks to God is an act of faith, although we might not realize it at first. Many of you thanked God for people in your life, for His blessings, maybe even some difficult situations where you’ve come to see now as a gift of God’s grace. To say thank you to God for these things is an act of faith because we believe God was and is behind all these things. We believe He is real, that He is active and that He is sovereignly controlling the circumstances of our lives.

But what about future thanksgiving? Do we thank God for the blessings yet to come or answers to prayer that have yet to happen or future provisions from God’s hand? In other words, do we have the kind of faith that believes God is already working to fulfil His promises before they happen?

When you read Heb. 11 we read “by faith” Noah built the ark before it rained, believing God said He would flood the world. Or that Abraham started to sacrifice Isaac to God before God rescued him. Or that Moses instituted the Passover and put the blood of the lambs on the doorposts before the angel of death came. *“Without faith it is impossible to please God because we must believe that He exists and rewards those [in the future] who earnestly seek Him”* (11:6).

This morning we want to look at Jehoshaphat’s example of faith who thanked God for a future victory before it happened. He thanks God for His future work and ongoing presence in his life. So what’s the setting of 2 Chron. 20?

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat.

² Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar” (that is, En Gedi). ³ Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. ⁴ The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

“After this” means what previously just happened in Ch. 18-19. Jehoshaphat was a good and godly king most of his life but also made some bad decisions. When he started his reign in Ch. 17 we read about the ways he restored the Bible as the center of life for Judah, the Southern Kingdom. He reinforced Israel’s defenses, and did great building projects. He prospered and was walking with God. Jehoshaphat’s counterpart, the king of the Northern kingdom was the wicked Ahab (wife Jezebel). Whether Jehoshaphat thought he could bring peace to a reunited Israel, we don’t know but in Ch. 18 he made an alliance with Ahab by allowing his son Jehoram to marry Ahab’s daughter. Then he agreed to help Ahab in a war against an enemy and was almost killed. Ahab was killed. A prophet named Jehu rebukes Jehoshaphat and Jehoshaphat repents. The rest of Ch. 19 focuses on his reorganizing the justice system so that God’s Word is carried out and everyone receives fair justice. So, as we come to Ch. 20 Jehoshaphat is in a very good space spiritually.

So when he is threatened by these 3 neighbouring armies (Ammonites, northeast of Dead Sea, Moabites, east of Dead Sea and Meunites, south and southeast of the Dead Sea), he seeks the Lord and calls on the nation to fast and pray and seek the Lord’s face in this major dilemma. How does he pray?

Prays by Faith for the Future Work of God

(20:1-4)

Praying is a great act of faith. We believe in one God, who created the world, loves the world so much sent His Son Jesus to die for our sin and rose from the dead so that, we who believe in Him can have a relationship with God now. We don't have that until we've confessed our sins and need of a sinless Saviour, Jesus, the God-man. One of the great benefits of a relationship is God praying to Him who knows and orchestrates the future. Prayer is always an act of faith for God to extend future grace towards us. Why does Jehoshaphat – and why do we – pray by faith?

Our prayer life is motivated by our present relationship with God (Ch. 19; v. 1a)

That's why 'after this' is crucial to our understanding of this chapter. Jehoshaphat has made some poor decisions where he didn't depend on God. He relied on an alliance with a wicked king. That almost got him killed. He was rebuked by God's messenger. He repented and strengthened his relationship with God. His first action as a king is not to rally the troops when under a physical attack, but a rally to the people to fast and pray because Jehoshaphat discerns this is not just a physical battle. There is a spiritual reason behind this. Because of his healthy relationship with God, he's reminding himself through the Word of God and prays

Motivated by the past acts of God (vv.1b-4)

He's going to remind God in his prayer about how God has rescued Israel in the past. He calls all Judah together to pray for the same reason. Our God has come to our rescue before and He will again. We believe that by faith, so we ask for that in future faith.

Perhaps it was this incident that motivated Mordecai to tell Esther to call for a national fast and time of prayer when Israel would be threatened by annihilation at the hands of Haman. Answered prayer is a great motivator for future prayer. When God answers our prayers we are invigorated to pray more.

When we have a threat or problem in our life we also act in faith in the future ...

Trusting in the Omnipotence of God **(20:5-13)**

God is all powerful. We see Jehoshaphat believed this by his prayer:

O 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. ⁷ O our 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?

God can do all things but He does them for a reason. He acts powerfully and mightily for His glory. So when we pray for God to act we need to

Believe God can do all things for His glory (vv.5-7)

Jehoshaphat lived at a time when people believed their god was geographical and limited in power. When you defeated another country your god defeated their god. Like when the Philistines

routed the Israelites and put the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of their god Dagon (1 Sam. 5). They woke up and found Dagon's statue knocked over with his head and hands broken off.

Similarly in Daniel 1 Nebuchadnezzar took the temple treasures from Jerusalem and put them in his holy shrine for Marduk. Years later his grandson Belshazzar uses those drinking chalices from the temple and drunkenly makes toasts to any god he thinks of, mocking Israel's God. Then God sent a hand to write a message on the wall that said, 'Tonight you are done.' Belshazzar died that night and Babylon fell.

Jehoshaphat believed Israel's God was the one true God who dwells in heaven and rules over the earth and all nations. He is all powerful. He did it before (bringing Israel out of Egypt) and He can do it again. He prays to God appealing to God's Name and glory as a way of saying, are you going to let these countries make you look bad?

He's also worried that they might destroy the temple. We read in v.2 that these countries had already entered the land and were camped on the west side of the Dead Sea. Now, it's all desert around the Dead Sea, except En Gedi. En Gedi is an oasis in the desert. We've been there. You hike through a mix of desert and wilderness and then you start to see green trees and plants and bushes because there is this spring fed waterfall pouring cold clear water down this small valley. En Gedi was only 25 miles from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the place where God chose for His name to dwell. We see this is on his mind and so he prays for this specifically because it represents God's name and glory:

⁸ They 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. ¹¹ See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. ¹² O our 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 upon you."

¹³ All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.

He prays for God to be glorified because he's praying by faith

Believing what God's Word says (vv.8-13)

He uses the Word to guide his prayer. The references to Jerusalem being the place of God's name is found many times in the Old Testament, but he's also referencing Solomon's prayer when the temple was dedicated in 2 Chron. 6:28;

²⁸ "When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when enemies besiege them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, ²⁹ and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel—each one aware of his afflictions and pains, and spreading out his hands toward this temple— ³⁰ then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of men), ³¹ so that they will fear you and walk in your ways all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers.

Jehoshaphat prays the Word because he believes the word of God. 'Lord, your word says this ... so I'm praying this, believing by faith that You will do as You promised.' And he reminds God that

these very people threatened Moses and the Israelites when they left Egypt and God said don't engage them in battle, go around them. You could have wiped them out Lord, but You didn't and this is how they pay you back?

And he acknowledges their human weaknesses and inability to bring this vast army down by closing with,

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 upon you."

What an amazing prayer of faith. He believes God will work. He prays God will work. And then he

Thanks God that He Will Deliver His People **(20:14-30)**

This is very interesting. They pray by faith and God answers and sends a message through a Levite, not a prophet nor a general nor even a direct message to Jehoshaphat. But remember Ch. 19? Jehoshaphat was empowering Levites to go out into the towns and be the judges, teaching and applying God's Word to life's problems. So God sends a message to someone who is spending time with God in His Word consistently.

Then he tells them to go down to the battle which will result in them thinking you're coming to attack. They'll come near to you – but you won't need to fight. Watch the salvation of the Lord. Don't be afraid. Go out and face them!

Does Jehoshaphat believe this is from God, even though it's very unusual? Yes! Believe in prayer and be ready

To praise God however He chooses to work (vv.14-19)

Could it be that we sometimes fail to see God's hand and lose an opportunity to praise Him because in our prayers we had our own way we figured God would work? God is not limited by our thinking or lack of resources. Why don't we thank Him beforehand with an open attitude that believes God will answer our prayer and solve our problem in any way He wants? Look at vv.18-19 after they heard the Word from Jahaziel,

¹⁸ Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. ¹⁹ Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with very loud voice.

Had a miracle happened? Had the enemies been defeated? No. You mean they thanked God ahead for what they believed He would do for them? They didn't wait to thank God for how He had delivered them but for how He will deliver them. That's called faith. When we pray for direction or for a need or for a problem do we ever pray,

"Lord, thank you for how you will solve my problem even though I don't know how You will. Thank You Lord for how Yu will meet my need. I look forward to seeing how You will do that. Thank You Lord for how You will guide me in the direction I need. Help me to be sensitive to you to see and hear it properly."

Not only did Jehoshaphat have such great faith in God so did all the people. The Levites stood up to praise the Lord with a very loud voice. All before God had acted. And it also included a very risky plan, to go out and meet the enemy believing what God said – you won't have to fight. And then they

Thank Him before they see the deliverance (vv.20-22)

V. 21 is funny. Who sends out the worship team in front of the army?

²¹ After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever."

A little reminiscent of Jericho. But also when Joshua crossed the Jordan River.

²² As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. ²³ The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

'As they began to sing and praise' by faith in God's future deliverance. God waited to act until they thanked and praised Him for His future deliverance. And then he sends somebody to ambush the Ammonites and Moabites and Meunites who then turn on each other and wipe each other out. They saw all the dead bodies and collected the spoils for 3 days. And when it was finished they

Worshipped Him after He delivered them (vv.24-30)

²⁶ On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Barakah, where they praised the LORD. This is why it is called the Valley of Barakah to this day.

²⁷ Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the LORD had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies. ²⁸ They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the LORD with harps and lutes and trumpets.

²⁹ The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. ³⁰ And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

What are you praying for in your own life? What pressures or problems seem to be surrounding you that you don't know what to do about? What direction are you looking for right now in your life? If you're praying to God about these things you must believe He is capable of answering your prayers, solving our problems, meeting our needs and giving us direction. Why not thank Him by faith for the answers you believe He will give in His time and in His way? Why not praise Him for how He will solve a seemingly unsolvable problem before He does? Won't that change our attitude a little bit to being more expectant and more trusting in God?

Father in heaven, You are all-knowing and all powerful. Paul wrote that you who began a good work in us will complete it; that we our salvation and glorification and conformity to Christ is guaranteed. I thank You Lord for the work that You are and will do in us this week to move us toward Christlikeness.

We pray by faith thanking You that You have not abandoned that child or friend or relative who once walked with You but now seems to have deserted you. We thank You that You will work in their life and draw them back to Yourself.

We thank You that as we read Your Word this week You will speak to us about a sin, a need, a reminder or some-thing praiseworthy that will draw us closer to Yourself.

Father, we thank You by faith for the answer to prayer that will come for those problems we're going through right now. We pray that we will be open to see how You are going to solve it even though we think we can see how You could. Your answer may come through a Jahaziel, someone who we least expect the answer to come from. We thank You that You may tell us to go in the midst of the enemy where only then will we see Your saving hand. So often we too do not know what to do, but help us to keep our eyes on You. In the Name and for the glory of You and Your Son Jesus by Your Holy Spirit, amen.

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