

CONQUERING THROUGH PRAYER
2 Chronicles 20:15-17 NIV

Good morning, brothers and sisters and friends! God is good, all the time! I'm so glad and excited to be in this beautiful place. And to be with some wonderful new friends. We are Filipinos and Americans and Fil-Ams here but despite our differences in color, appearance and height, all of us share a common bond. There is just one blood that covers us all, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen? But not only that because Filipinos and Americans have shared a long history. It was 110 years ago when Filipinos and Americans established a civilian government in the Philippines after Spanish rule. That cooperation and mutual understanding continued through the years in the areas of education, infrastructure, and even religion, and we fought alongside each other through two world wars. It culminated in the US granting autonomy to the Philippines on July 4, 1946, which is now celebrated in our home country as Filipino-American Friendship Day. That friendship continues to be strong and vibrant. So, this morning, our holding a joint worship service is a testament to that friendship, first as citizens of our countries and second, as citizens of heaven, Amen?

I'd like to thank Pastor Lynn and every one of you at GBC for inviting us to your church. Thank you for graciously accommodating us and allowing us to be a part of this morning's celebration. Thank you for being flexible such that you have given to us the privilege of conducting practically every part of this morning's worship service and permitting us to move some furniture around. As the saying goes, "Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken."

Earlier I mentioned how Filipinos and Americans fought alongside each other during two world wars in order to defend justice, preserve liberty, and protect freedom in the world. We're all proud of that.

We're all glad and thankful that there are people who sacrificed their lives. Many are gone but many are here who continue to fight for us. So, this morning, I'd like us to honor these men and women in uniform. Let us watch this short video to honor them.

VIDEO

Today, in this church, we have some veterans. If you are a veteran, whether you're active or retired, young or old, Filipino or American, please stand because we want to acknowledge you and we want to thank you for the very valuable service you've given to this country. (Ask people to look at them and say "Thank You for your service.") We won't enjoy freedom were it not for you. Your resolve, your perseverance, your fighting against all odds are qualities that are worth emulating. And these are qualities which I would like to talk about in today's message. Shall we pray for our veterans?

Dear Lord, Today we honor our veterans, worthy men and women who gave their best when they were called upon to serve and protect their country. We pray that you will bless them, Lord, for their unselfish service in the continual struggle to preserve our freedoms, our safety, and our country's heritage, for all of us. Bless them abundantly for the hardships they faced, for the sacrifices they made, for their many different contributions to America's victories over tyranny and oppression. We respect them, we thank them, we honor them, we are proud of them, and we pray that you will watch over these special people and bless them with peace and happiness. In Jesus' name we pray; Amen.

As I look at the crowd this morning, I see many of you are veteran Christians. You may have lost your hair but you haven't lost your first love. And your hair may have turned grey like mine, although they're invisible at the moment, but you haven't turned away from the Lord. Now, some of you are not yet veterans but just starting in the service, so to speak.

And some of you may not be sure yet whether you'd like to enter the service. Let me tell you, it will be a joyful and challenging one.

This morning I'd like to talk about how to conquer through prayer. I've entitled this message, "Conquering through Prayer." To all our friends at GBC, I've been going through a message series in our church about prayer entitled "Try Prayer." This is the fifth and last part of the series.

In the past few weeks I talked about the four purposes of prayer, the four conditions of answered prayer, then how to receive a word from God about your problem, and last week, how to receive an answer from God.

If you've become really serious about prayer since we started this series, or you've made prayer a priority in life ever since you became a Christian, I'll call you a veteran prayer warrior. But, I know, even the most seasoned warrior can be fearful about something. Today, this message is about conquering our fears by turning to your friends. No, by turning to the Lord.

Now, I'm sure there's at least one thing we're fearful about. The recent events in the past, like the hurricanes, the forest fire in California, and the shootings in Las Vegas and Texas somehow validate our fears. But there are other fears that are more close to home like we're afraid of losing our jobs, afraid of being hurt by other people, afraid of our wives (just kidding), afraid of being robbed, of flying, of swimming, of death, and so on.

Fears can make you anxious. Fears can be discouraging. Fears can even paralyze you. The good news is, fears can be conquered. In our text this morning, there is this one guy, a King, who became fearful and discouraged. It was because he was faced with a great army that was ready to pounce on his people. Please turn to 2 Chronicles 20:15-17 and just follow along as I read these verses. Let me read to you from the NIV.

“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. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.”””

Let me share with you a story of heroism. A joyous party was being held aboard a ship. Speeches were being made by the captain, the crew, and the guests enjoying the week-long voyage. Sitting at the head table was a thirty-year-old man who, somewhat embarrassed, was doing his best to accept the praise being poured on him.

Earlier that morning a young woman had apparently fallen overboard, and within seconds this young gentleman was in the cold, dark waters at her side. The woman was rescued and the man became an instant hero. When the time finally came for the brave passenger to speak, the stateroom fell into a hush as he rose from his chair. He went to the microphone and, in what was probably the shortest "hero's speech" ever offered, spoke these stirring words: "I just want to know one thing--who pushed me?"

We all laugh at this funny story. But you know, there are a couple of lessons we can learn from this story. First, we see that the man had real courage. I mean, it took real courage for that man to admit that he was not really a hero. Second, having been pushed into a crisis situation against his will, still he acted the part of a hero and rescued the woman.

How many of us will be honest enough to admit our shortcomings? How many of us will be brave enough to face crisis situations?

In this message, I want us to look at a passage that will address the issue of conquering our fears when it really matters.

Let me first give you a background of our passage this morning.

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was in a precarious situation. He and his people were under the threat of being wiped out by the combined armies of the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Meunites. He became alarmed together with all the people of Judah. They knew that they were no match for the vast army that was arrayed against them.

And so, they fasted and came to the Lord in prayer. Their prayer is recorded in verses 6-12 of chapter 20. You can read this prayer in your own time but what I want you to notice now is the last sentence of the prayer in verse 12 wherein Jehoshaphat says, *"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."* (2 Chron. 20:12c)

Here was a man, powerful and influential, suddenly finding himself helpless and seemingly hopeless. Who did he turn to? To God! He didn't rely on himself. He didn't turn to other kings and asked for their help. In his hour of trouble, Jehoshaphat looked on God to deliver him and his people.

In response to the King's prayer, God assures him of three things he will do for him. Three things to help him to be courageous in the midst of difficulty. I want to share with you these three things this morning to encourage you to be courageous, too, and not be fearful in your time of great difficulty.

So, let me begin by saying that you can be courageous in your time of difficulty because first,

I. God Will Defend You.

The last part of verse 15 tells us, *"Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's."*

King Jehoshaphat's biggest problem was the vast army that was poised to attack Judah. But God told him to not be discouraged. God was going to fight for him.

What is your biggest problem? I'm sure it's not a vast army. And yet, whatever your biggest problem is, I'm sure you're feeling like you're facing a vast army. The situation may be different, the cast of characters may be different, but the feeling is the same. At the moment, you may feel small because of the problems that are confronting you.

In the Bible, there's the story of God instructing Moses to choose twelve able-bodied men to spy on the land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve came back saying that they felt like grasshoppers in a land of giants. Of course, that wasn't true. There were no giants in Canaan and certainly those spies were no grasshoppers. But you know, we act and feel the same way when faced with a serious problem. We exaggerate. We lose perspective of the whole situation. We blow things out of proportion.

Like King Jehoshaphat, we should set our eyes upon God, not upon our problems. When we don't know what to do, let's look to God because he knows what to do. And when we do that, we see that God is bigger than our biggest problems. Moreover, we begin to realize that it is God himself who deals with our problems.

Our verse says, "*For the battle is not yours, but God's.*" The problem with some of us is that we don't trust God enough to come through for us. When things are bad, they get worse because we try to handle them ourselves. A philosopher once said, "I have discovered two things about life. First, there is a God. Second, it's not me."

So, let God be God. Let him be the one to solve your problems. Not you. Not anybody else. Your wisdom, your skills, your abilities are not enough to deal with your difficulties. Call on God in times of trouble for only he has a full grasp of the situation. Only he has a good handle of your circumstances.

Turning over your problems to God means to not worry about them anymore. Many of us worry unnecessarily. How many of you worry? Raise your hands. How many of you worry a lot? Raise both hands. No problem was ever solved by worrying. On the contrary, it could even compound the problem as too much worrying can destroy your health. Do you know that 99% of our worries never actually happen? Do you know also that worrying is a sin? When you worry, you're acting like you don't have faith in God.

Let God fight your battles. Let God defend you against the assaults of the enemy.

Now, the second reason why you can be courageous is because

II. God Will Deliver You.

The first part of verse 17 tells us: *"You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem."*

In this verse, God reminds King Jehoshaphat that he doesn't need to lift a finger to defeat his enemies. All God wanted him to do was to take his position and stand firm. In short, to be still. And what was God's promise? God promised him that he would see God's deliverance for Judah and Jerusalem. Which actually happened.

My friends, let us believe God's promise that he will deliver us. His deliverance will come, it certainly will come. Because God is faithful and he says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Sometimes, it may seem long in coming but his deliverance will surely come. He is a God who is neither early nor late. He comes just at the right time. He comes just at the time when you need him the most.

In his book ‘Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire,’ Jim Cymbala of Brooklyn Tabernacle recounts how God came through for him and the church when they needed him the most. There came a point when the church he was pastoring was growing so fast that they needed to transfer to a bigger facility. They found out that a large, 1400-seat theater was available for only \$150,000 and so they decided to sell the run-down building where they were meeting.

Several pastors took a look at their building. A few got interested and agreed on a price but none of the deals ever pushed through. This went on for some time until the church became pretty desperate because they were in danger of losing their option on the theater.

And so, on their Tuesday night prayer meeting, they wept and pleaded to God for some kind of a rescue. BTW, as an aside, the attendance in their prayer meetings is more than their attendance in their Sunday services. Anyway, in the afternoon of the next day, a well-dressed gentleman came to Jim Cymbala’s office. He was a Kuwaiti businessman who wanted to look at the building. Pastor Jim was nervous as he showed him around because of the building’s dilapidated condition. In the end, however, the man told him that he was going to buy the building in cold cash. Just like that. No questions asked.

This is just one of the countless stories we hear about God’s faithfulness. Should we ever then doubt that God will deliver us in times of trouble?

Matthew 19:26 tells us, “*With God all things are possible.*” When God told Abraham one day that Sarah was going to have a child despite her old age, Sarah who was eavesdropping, laughed. God rebuked her and said, “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” (Genesis 18:14) Sure enough, the following year, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

My friends, brothers and sisters, nothing is impossible with God. He is almighty and powerful to deliver us from all our troubles. All we need to do is to stand firm and see him work for our deliverance.

He says in **Psalm 46:10**, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* Let me share with you a song that means so much to me. It’s a song that I wrote because three times the Lord gave me the verse “Be still and know that I am God” in three different days during the time I was going through a rough time.

Let me tell you another story. One morning as I was driving on an errand I heard on 91.9 the story of a man who was looking for a job. He was laid off for some time and his resources were running low. He had to feed a family and they were already behind in their bill payments. He didn’t know what to do. All his applications for a job were rejected. So, one night he asked his prayer group to pray for him. They prayed. And then, right after they said “Amen”, his cellphone rang.

The man who called was a professor from a university. Months before when he had still a job, the man applied at this university as a computer instructor but was not considered for the job. Now, they were looking again and suddenly the professor thought of him at that very moment which led to the call. Coincidence? I’ll call that God-incidence. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord! Amen? So, just be still.

Finally, the third reason you can be courageous is that

III. God Will Never Desert You.

The last part of verse 17 says, *“Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.”*

I think one of God’s most favorite sayings to his people who are in great trouble is the phrase *“Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”* The first time it occurs is in **Genesis 15:1** where God says to Abraham,

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Then, he also said those words to Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Daniel, Ezekiel, the apostles and others more. In the whole Bible, this phrase occurs more than 70 times.

Another version of this phrase are the words “Be strong and courageous.” When Joshua took over the leadership of Israel and they were ready to enter the promised land, the Lord encouraged Joshua with these words “Be strong and courageous” and also “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” eight times in various occasions. Joshua must have been so nervous that God had to encourage him that much.

Why am I saying all this? Firstly, to let us know that it’s normal to be afraid when faced with a daunting task or a difficult situation. Great men of God in the past felt the same way. Secondly, to help us see that we really need not be afraid when confronted with challenges. Our great God is always with us no matter what.

What God wants us to do is to tackle our problems or responsibilities head on, with no reservations, because God will be with us. God wants us to just “Go out and face them” as what he said to King Jehoshaphat.

One of the stories in the Bible that has encouraged me greatly in my early walk as a Christian is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These were young intelligent Jewish men who were made administrators over the province of Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. One day, the king made a huge image of gold which he set up somewhere in Babylon and ordered all people to bow down before it at the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and the like. The three young men, however, didn’t bow down because they believed it was idolatry. Upon hearing of this, the king got angry and ordered them burned in a blazing furnace. He even commanded his soldiers to increase the heat seven times. So, after tying them, the soldiers threw the three men into the furnace.

The king and his soldiers, however, were astonished to see the young men walking around the furnace unbound and unharmed and a fourth man was with them. One of the soldiers said that he looked like a son of the gods. Immediately, the king asked the three young men to come out and then he acknowledged that the God of the Jews rescued them.

In this story we see that as many Bible commentators believe, Jesus himself was with the three young men as they went through the fire. Jesus never left their side while death stared directly at their face.

This story has encouraged my heart several times in the past when I was going through some fiery trials in my own life. I have taken comfort in the fact that God would always be there, interested in what was going in my life and ready to give me his grace and peace in the midst of difficulties. In Isaiah 43:1-2, this is God's promise,

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

Friend, Jesus will never leave your side. He will be with you through the fire. He is as real as the person sitting next to you. If he is not real to you, I urge you to have a personal relationship with him. The way to begin that is to believe in what he has done for you. The Bible says that he died for you. You see, all of us are sinners. The Bible says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The punishment for sin is death, not only physical death, but spiritual death, meaning, eternal separation from God. But God loves us so much he sent his Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross. But on the third day he rose again and declared victory over sin and death. Friend, you too can overcome sin and death. If you would put your trust in Jesus.

Not in your good works, not in your abilities, or intelligence or connections or even religion. Just repent of your sins and acknowledge that Jesus is your Lord and Savior and he will receive you, he will give you the gift of eternal life. Jesus says in John 5:24, *“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”* Later on, I’ll give you a chance to commit your life to Jesus.

Going back to the story of the Jewish young men, what is significant also is the way they responded to King Nebuchadnezzar upon knowing that they were going to be thrown into the furnace. In Daniel 3:16-18 this is what we read:

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

These verses sum up nicely what I’ve been telling you this morning. These three young men knew that it was God who would fight for them that’s why they could say that they need not defend themselves. They were certain also that God was going to rescue them which is why they were able to stand firm in their convictions. And they had such strong faith in God who they knew would always be with them that they could defy the wishes of the king.

When Joshua was feeling afraid, God said to him, *“No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Joshua 1:5)

Folks, we need to keep these principles in mind and etch them in our hearts if we want to conquer our fears and overcome our dire circumstances.

And the way to conquer is to remember that we just need to come to God in prayer just like what King Jehoshaphat did. Don't take control of your situation. Let God handle it. He is God, not you. He knows what he is doing. In the meantime, just rest in his love and care.

For, no matter how bleak your situation is, God will defend you, he will deliver you, and he will never desert you. You can run to him any time. He is your hiding place. Your refuge and your strength. An ever-present help in trouble.