

2 Chronicles 20

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[0 : 0 0] Have you ever been in a situation where you had no idea what to do? Maybe you're in such a situation now, no idea what to do. Maybe you faced a problem that was just way too big for you to solve. Have you ever felt this small when you were facing giants this big? Again, maybe that's something that you can relate to, not only as you think back in your life experience, but maybe it's something that rings true in your current circumstances. I wonder if the words, I just don't know what to do are words that have maybe often crossed your lips or describe your reality.

I just don't know what to do. What do you do when you don't know what to do? That sounds a bit of a riddle, but that's what we want to think about this evening. What do you do when you don't know what to do? I want you to meet somebody. I want us to meet together somebody who can help, somebody who can point you in the right direction. And his name, he has a great name. His name is Jehoshaphat.

We want to think about Jehoshaphat this evening as somebody who can help us to know what to do when we don't know what to do. Listen to his closing words in the prayer that he directs to God as we read them there in verse 12 of chapter 20, the second half of the verse, his final words, the closing words of the prayer, with a disarming honesty. What does he say? We do not know what to do.

But our eyes are upon you. We do not know what to do. But our eyes are upon you. This is a man that I warm to. He lived nearly 3,000 years ago. But I think we can all warm to him. We can connect with him. It's so real, the manner in which he speaks and the honesty with which he recognizes his circumstances. We do not know what to do. But our eyes are upon you.

In this verse, and we'll expand from the verse, but in this verse, we see how Jehoshaphat looks in three directions. He's looking in three directions. He looks out to see the trouble that he is facing. He also looks around to see the resources that are available to him to face this big trouble that he faces. And he also looks up to the one that he can trust to help him. And as we discover what Jehoshaphat sees as he looks in these three directions, I want you to take note, to be challenged, but especially to be encouraged in the midst of the problems that you may well be facing.

[3 : 33] In fact, this whole book, the book of Chronicles, we have it divided into 1 and 2 Chronicles, but it's really one book. And the whole book was written, it was compiled by the chronicler with that precise purpose to encourage God's people. It was compiled hundreds of years after the events described for the exiles who had returned from Babylon, and they were discouraged. You know, we spent some time in the neighborhood fellowships looking at Zechariah, and you may remember a little bit about the circumstances of the returning exiles. Things were not looking good. And the chronicler writes this book to encourage a discouraged people. That was its purpose, and that remains its purpose for us today. So, let's think about Jehoshaphat and the directions in which he is looking. But before we do that, let's just very briefly introduce ourselves to the man himself. Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, that is the southern kingdom of the divided kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital, and his reign extended from 872 to 848 BC. He was a good king. He was a devout king. We read a summary of his kingship, of his character at the very beginning of the chronicler's account of his reign in chapter 17. And perhaps it would be useful for us just to read the first few verses of that chapter to have a feel for the man who prays the prayer that he prays that we are thinking about. So, 2 Chronicles chapter 17, it's the very beginning of the account of his life, and it gives us a summary, a helpful summary of his person and reign. Chapter 17 from the beginning, Jehoshaphat, his son, succeeded him as king and strengthened himself against Israel, that is, against the northern kingdom. He stationed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah and put garrisons in Judah and the towns of Ephraim that his father Asa had captured. Now listen to what is said about him.

The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways that his father David had followed. He did not consult the Baals, but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel. The Lord established the kingdom under his control, and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat so that he had great wealth and honor. And then very especially listen to what is said, his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord. Furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah. But especially that phrase that describes him in verse 6, his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord. His heart was in the right place.

He wasn't perfect. There's a hint of that even in those verses when it speaks of his early years, suggesting that things weren't always as they ought to have been. But even though there were times when he fell short, very particularly when he aligned himself with Israel, with the northern kingdom, very unwisely, with Ahab, remember King Ahab, not a nice man. Well, Jehoshaphat aligned himself with Ahab, and it all ended in tears. That's not our concern this evening. But even in those circumstances, there are words of commendation for Ahab, sorry, for Jehoshaphat. And then listen to what is said of him at the very end of his reign. If there's a suggestion there at the beginning that things weren't always as they ought to have been, nonetheless, there is the encouragement of seeing what is said of him at the very end. Indeed, that's in our very chapter, verses that we didn't read from verse 31 of chapter 20. You'll notice there that that section's entitled, The End of Jehoshaphat's Reign.

So Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi.

And then notice what it said. This is at the very end. He walked in the ways of his father Asa, and did not stray from them. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. So this is the man that we are dealing with. But back to his prayer there in chapter 20. We suggested that in that final part, in those final words, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you. In that verse, we have Jehoshaphat looking in three directions, or in any case, the words that he pronounces are the product of him looking in these different directions. And the first direction that we're suggesting is that he looks out. He looks out to see the trouble that is before him. And indeed, that is what he sees. Trouble, trouble, and nothing but trouble. The problem that he was facing, that Judah was facing was a vast army that were encamped nearby. In the chapter, the language of a vast army is used on repeated occasions as if it's the intention of the chronicler to just emphasize just how big a problem Jehoshaphat was facing. There, the first time we encounter it is in verse 2, some men came and told Jehoshaphat, a vast army is coming against you from Edom. So, what does he see as he looks out? Well, he sees big trouble. Well, we can maybe dig a little deeper and think about the trouble that he faces. It's big, but also, and this is maybe what was most difficult for Jehoshaphat to accept, is that it was in some sense, and I'll explain what I mean by this, undeserved. First of all, notice how big the trouble was. It was indeed a vast army comprised of this unholy alliance of enemies, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Munites. Not altogether clear who they were, but whoever they were, they'd aligned themselves with these other peoples to oppose Judah. And it's clear from the geographic references that were given that this army was closing in fast. Notice there in verse 2, it speaks of how they are from the other side of the sea, that's the Dead Sea, and that now they were camped at En Gedi. This is on the western side of the Dead Sea. So, they've already crossed over, and the calculation is that En Gedi would have been about 25 miles southeast of Jerusalem, where, of course, Jehoshaphat was. 25 miles, and not a great distance at all, even for a marching army.

[10:55] I don't know. In a couple of days, they could have been there at the gates of Jerusalem. So, we have this vast army. It's closing in fast on Jehoshaphat. This is a big trouble that he is facing before we even go any further. The circumstances maybe seem so alien to us, talk of vast armies and closing in on Jerusalem, but we can maybe apply it, and I hope we can apply it, to our own circumstances when we face big trouble, a vast army, a problem that is just so big that we don't know where to start in confronting it. Maybe a multiplicity of problems, lots of little problems that have just combined to make one big, complicated mess in front of us. And far from going away, far from dissipating, the problem is edging ever closer. Just like this army was edging ever closer, closer to Jerusalem, this vast army. So, it's a big problem, but as I say, perhaps most poignantly, and perhaps most difficult for Jehoshaphat is that the problem or the trouble he was facing was, in a sense, undeserved. What do I mean by that? Let me say why I call it undeserved in the following way.

In two senses in which, or in two regards, in which we might call the trouble that he faces being undeserved. In the first place, as he makes clear in his prayer, the enemies that have combined to form this vast army, they have no reason to attack Judah, indeed quite the reverse. Notice what Jehoshaphat says in the prayer as he really recounts the history of the people of God taking possession of the promised land. There from verse 10, But now here are men from Ammon, from Moab, from Mount Seir, whose territory, and listen carefully to what Jehoshaphat says here, remembering something that had happened long, long before, 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. So, the people of God, as they came from Egypt, they didn't touch Moab, they didn't touch Ammon, they didn't destroy them, they let them be, because God had said, leave them be. And so,

Jehoshaphat understandably expresses his surprise, his disappointment, his sense of injustice there in verse 11. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. This is how they repay us. We treated them well, and yet they come, and they're coming to take away our inheritance. So, in that sense, undeserved, the trouble that Jehoshaphat was facing, but perhaps much more significantly in terms of Jehoshaphat himself, is the fact that he was a devout king. You know, we're used to the pattern, aren't we, in the Old Testament of God's people. They rebel against God, they chase after idols, they abandon their loyalty to God, to the Lord, and then trouble comes. Enemies come, and you can say, well, there's a sense of justice in that. You know, God using the enemies to exact just judgment on a rebellious people, but this is not the case here. Jehoshaphat is a devout king. He is described in these very warm and even glowing terms by the chronicler, and yet he finds himself facing this big trouble. It just doesn't seem fair. It just doesn't seem just that he would have to face such a big problem. Ought God not to protect him, given his loyalty to God?

Why is it that this man, this pious, devout king, is facing such trouble? I wonder if you can relate to that. When the trouble that you face seems to you, and maybe with good cause, seems to you undeserved, those who are opposing you, you might well imagine, well, far from opposing me, they should be helping me, given how I've treated them in the past, how I've sought to help them, and this is the way they repay me. This is what Jehoshaphat is struggling with. Why would they do this to me? Why would they do this to us? We've done them no harm, and yet see how they treat us. And then maybe to God, why?

Why don't you protect me? I've sought to follow you faithfully, and yet this is what is happening to me. It's hard to bear when the trouble that we face doesn't seem to have any explanation. It seems so undeserved. So, Jehoshaphat looks out to see the trouble that is before him, but also he looks around, and he looks around to determine what resources he has available to face this vast army. And what does he see as he looks around to see what he can lay hold of to defend himself and to defend the nation?

[16 : 21] What does he find? Well, he finds nothing, and not to put too fine a point on it. He finds nothing. What does he say? He recognizes that he has no power. Well, presumably it wasn't the case that he had no power, but in the light of how vast the army was that was coming and edging towards Jerusalem, to all intents and purposes, he could rightly say, I have no power. The power that I have is so minuscule in comparison that it's as good as nothing. I have no power. No power to face this vast army. That's what he says there in verse 12. For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. No power. And there's a commendable combination of frank realism and necessary humility in Jehoshaphat's assessment of his power, of Judah's power. He appreciates just how big the problem is, and of course that's important to have a realistic view of the scale of the trouble that is confronting us. In his case, to recognize that effectively he did not have the resources he would have needed to defend Judah. No power, but also no answers. Of course, the two go together, but he very explicitly recognizes that he has no answers. We do not know what to do. We do not know what to do.

Again, I ask you if you can relate to that. We really asked that question at the very beginning. But having thought a little bit about the example of Jehoshaphat, can you relate to his predicament?

We do not know what to do. We simply don't know what to do. Now, this is not a very promising scenario, and yet, and this is the way of God in his dealings with us, it is Jehoshaphat's very powerlessness that helps him to look in the next direction. And what is the next direction that he looks in?

Well, he looks up. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you. Where does Jehoshaphat turn for help? He's no power, got no answers. Where does he turn for help?

Does he turn to the northern kingdom, to Israel? Could they maybe help him out, as he had tried to help them foolishly on previous occasions? Does he seek to secure other potential allies that might be able to reinforce his limited resources? Does he look to his own fighting men or military gurus?

[19 : 13] Well, there would be no point. He's already established that they're simply not up to the task. Or maybe what he could do would be to just resign himself and his people to their inevitable fate.

There's a vast army. We have no power. Well, what's to be done? Just wait for the dreadful day when they arrive at Jerusalem and destroy us and dispossess us of our inheritance. What more can we do? What more can we do? We have nothing else to do. But what does he do? He looks to the Lord.

The language that he uses, it's both beautiful and revealing. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. That word, but, such an inconspicuous little word, but so often in Scripture so full of potential and possibilities. We do not know what to do, but, but our eyes are upon you. And what do the words reveal? Our eyes are on you. In essence, they reveal that Jehoshaphat is trusting in the Lord. And we can briefly explore two aspects of this trust of Jehoshaphat revealed in these words, these beautiful words, simple words, but very revealing words. They reveal something of the nature of Jehoshaphat's trust, but also the grounds for it, or certainly the prayer that precedes these closing words, identifies the grounds upon which Jehoshaphat builds this trust in the Lord.

What can we say of the nature of his trust? Well, the language that he uses, I think, does allow us to speak of it as a trust that is focused and exclusive. His eyes are on the Lord, on no one else, on no other power or kingdom or God. They are on the Lord. It's the trust. It's deep. It's genuine.

It's childlike and humble. This is the king. This is the king. And he's, he's in a public forum in front of the whole nation. And the king declares, we don't know what to do. Now, I don't think in many leadership manuals you'd have that, that the leader should stand up in front of everybody and say, I have no idea what to do. I have no answers to confront this situation. You would say, what kind a leader is that? But here, this man humbly before God says, I don't know what to do.

[21 : 44] His trust in God is humble and childlike. It's deep. It's genuine. I wonder if we trust in the Lord in that way. In the midst of your trouble and pain, are your eyes on the Lord? Where do your eyes rest?

Trust. But this quality of trust, if we can speak in those terms, isn't something that's just appeared out of nothing. It's grounded. And the prayer reveals the grounds of Jehoshaphat's trust.

And in the prayer, we see that the grounds of his trust in the Lord are God's power, God's commitment, God's track record, and God's Word. We could maybe put that in other ways, in more active language. The prayer reveals that Jehoshaphat believes that God can help, that God wants to help, that God has helped, and that God will help. Let's just go through that, just very briefly. The grounds of Jehoshaphat's trust, that genuine, sincere, deep trust, God's power. God can help. Notice the beginning of the 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. God can help. God's power is such that He can help. God reigns from heaven over all the kingdoms. Very appropriate for Jehoshaphat to remind himself of this truth. He's facing nations. He's facing the Moabites and the Ammonites, this vast army. And he says, but just a moment. My God has power over all the nations of the world. No one can withstand my God. And so, the trust that He has that's deep, and it is of high quality. It's because of His conviction concerning the power of His God. He has good reason to trust in such a God. God can help. If Jehoshaphat had doubted God's power, do you think his eyes would have been on the Lord? No, his eyes would have been scurrying in other directions. But because he was persuaded of God's power, his eyes rest on this powerful God, do you believe that God can help you in the trouble that you face? Do you believe that God has the power to help you? So, God's power grounds His trust, but also God's commitment. If you want, God wants to help. In verse 6, the prayer begins with Jehoshaphat addressing the Lord as the God of our fathers. He goes on to speak of Abraham,

God's friend. We were thinking a little bit about that last week. Jehoshaphat identifies the Lord as the God of our fathers. There is a historic commitment on the part of God to His people. God is committed to His people. He loves His own people. He wants to help His people. You don't need to twist God's arm in order to secure His help. No, His commitment to you as His own, as His son and His daughter, is a proven one. He wants to help you. You don't need to persuade Him. You don't need to prod Him and convince Him. He wants to help. He can help, and He wants to help. He is committed to you.

[25 : 23] He wants to help. He wants to help people who, like Abraham, are His friends. God's power, God's commitment, but also the prayer reveals how Jehoshaphat's trust is grounded in what he knows of God's track record. Or to put it in other ways, God has helped. Then in verse 7, he reminds God, or he makes reference to the manner in which God had in times past brought His people from Egypt to take possession of the promised land and how He had opened the way for them at that time. God had helped in the past. He reminds the Lord, perhaps reminds Himself of what God has already done, and He focuses on that which is particularly relevant to His current trouble. He grounds His trust in God's track record what God has already done. And of course, we must do the same. God has proven Himself time and time again. We look back not only to the Exodus, though we certainly can look to the Exodus as a ground for noting what God has done in the past, but we look back to Calvary also and to what God has done there on our behalf. We look to our own experience of God's help. And as we do that, we have reason to trust in Him. But then finally, the foundation, the grounds of this trust that Jehoshaphat has that is revealed in these words, but our eyes are upon you, is grounded in God's Word. God will help. Notice what he says there in verses 8 and 9. We don't have time to explore this more in depth, but it's very interesting what Jehoshaphat really is doing here. He's drawing from Solomon's prayer when Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple. Indeed, I think some Bibles, the one I'm looking at here doesn't, but some Bibles make a reference there to 1 Kings 8 and verse 37. We won't look there now, but if you want to, you can do so at some other point. And you read there Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple. And the language that Jehoshaphat uses here is language that is drawn almost word for word from Solomon's prayer.

And what Solomon was doing then at that time when the temple was being dedicated, he was drawing on God's promise that when His people prayed from this temple that represented God's presence and God's availability and God's willingness to help His people, visibly illustrated in this temple where He would dwell, where His name would dwell. And Solomon prays and he says, when this happens and when the other thing happens and when this calamity or this other calamity happens, your people will pray from this temple and you will hear. And Jehoshaphat draws from that and he prays the same prayer and he draws on these promises of God and he's able to declare in his prayer with such confidence there at the end of verse 9. We will cry out to you in our distress and you will hear us and save us.

Why is he so confident? Because he could draw on God's word, on God's promises, as Solomon had done. And on that basis, he could be confident that God would indeed help him.

Jehoshaphat trusts deeply and he does so because the foundation of his trust is deep and rooted in the very nature of God and the very character of God and the very faithfulness of God. Well, what about us? Do you trust in God in this way? Do you even know this God that Jehoshaphat prays to, to whom you can go in your trouble and your difficulty and your pain, and you can in all honesty with Jehoshaphat say, we don't know what to do. I don't know what to do, but my eyes are upon you.

My eyes are upon you. We can close with a final question. Was Jehoshaphat's trust vindicated? Did God deliver? Well, we've read the chapter, read enough of the chapter to know the answer to that question. But perhaps the words that summarize the reality that God did indeed answer and that his trust, Jehoshaphat's trust, was indeed vindicated are the very stirring words that God addresses to the people through his servant, through Jehaziel. We find there in verse 14, and we can read from verse 15, the message that God brings in response to Jehoshaphat's prayer. And what do we read? He said, God's servant, God's prophet, he said, listen, King Jehoshaphat, and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem, this is what the Lord says to you. You have prayed to him.

[30 : 42] Jehoshaphat prayed. It's very clear that the people joined in and said their amen as it worked to Jehoshaphat's prayer. This is what the Lord says to you. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. And then these very warm and stirring words, for the battle is not yours, but God's. The battle is not yours, but God's. Would that we would take those words for ourself.

And whatever trouble we may be facing, the battle is not yours, but God's. He will fight the battle for you. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do pray that we would be wise, that we would be those who are conscious of our own limitations, conscious of our own lack of power, recognize that so often we don't have answers to the problems and the trouble that we face. But very especially, we pray that with Jehoshaphat, we would be able to say, but our eyes are on you. And we ask that our eyes would ever be on you in good times and bad times, facing small inconveniences and also facing great, monstrous, and gigantic trouble in our lives, that our eyes would be upon you. And help us to so direct our eyes, and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's close our service this evening by singing Psalm 43.

We'll sing the whole of Psalm 43. In Sing Psalms, you'll find that on page 54. Psalm 43, we'll sing the whole of the psalm. We'll sing to the tune, Cresselius. Come, vindicate me, O my God. Against this nation, plead my cause. Deliver me from wicked foes and hypocrites who break your laws. Psalm 43, the whole of the psalm, we'll stand to sing.

Come, vindicate me, O my God. Against this nation, plead my cause.

Deliver me from wicked foes and hypocrites who break your laws. You are my stronghold and my God. Why then have you rejected me? Why must I go above in grief, down-trodden by the enemy?

[33 : 51] Oh, send your light forth and your truth. Let them direct me in your grace. And bring me to your holy hell, into your sacred dwelling place. Then to God's altar I will go, to God my joy and my delight.

And I will praise you with the heart. O God, you are my God of might.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed in me?

Trust God, for I will praise you with the Lord. Trust God, for I will praise you with the Lord. Praise Him yet, my Savior and my God is He.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 47] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.