

30. The Book of Psalms 20:1-9

The Battle Belongs To The Lord

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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Psalms 20 was written by King David as the nation of Israel was preparing to go to war.

David as a godly king, before he leads the troops off to battle, gathers the people together for a time of prayer to the God of Israel.

I. The People Pray for their King—verses 1-5

II. The King Reassures His People—verse 6

III. The Nation Trusts in God—verses 7-9

Let's begin our first point:

I. The People Pray for their King—verse 1-5

Psalm 20:1–5 (NKJV)

¹ May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you; ² May He send you help from the sanctuary, And strengthen you out of Zion; ³ May He remember all your offerings, And accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah ⁴ May He grant you according to your heart's *desire*, And fulfill all your purpose. ⁵ We will rejoice in your salvation, And in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

Technically, the first five verses are not a prayer to God so much as words directed to the king himself. Yet I believe they express the prayer the people had already lifted up to God on behalf of their king—that God would be with him, and that His hand of protection and victory would be upon him.

We are commanded in Scripture to pray for our leaders—

1 Timothy 2:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

“For kings and all who are in authority”—verse 2

Paul says that Christians are to pray for public officials—especially in the local church setting (as we do in our corporate prayer time before the service begins).

Today because of our hyper-partisan bitter political environment where Democrats and Republicans are constantly at each other's throats—even Christians don't want to pray for their leaders if they're a member of the other side.

Others feel that our leaders have become so corrupt why bother praying?

➤ “Why bother praying for our leaders?”

Because first of all, God commands us to pray for our leaders—but secondly because saved leaders will lead in the fear of God! And really this was the main point that Paul intended when he commanded us to pray for our leaders—he had their salvation in mind:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Notice that Paul makes the point that by praying for our leaders to be saved, it will cause them to lead in the fear of God—and that will be a blessing to all of us under their authority! As Paul said, it will enable us to live “*quiet and peaceable lives.*”

We need to pray faithfully for our leaders starting with the President, the members of Congress and the Supreme Court down to the state and local levels. Many Christians today are using all their energies to *fight* the government and our elected officials—but how many are fervently *praying* for them?

Now that doesn't mean we stop fighting unjust laws and corrupt legislation, it's just that we need to remember that—“*We don't fight against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers...*”

Furthermore, let's not forget who was the leader of the known world at this time—Emperor Caesar Nero! Yet Peter exhorted believers in his day (Nero's reign) to:

1 Peter 2:13-17 (NKJV)

¹³ Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance [governmental institution] of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- ¹⁶ as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. ¹⁷ Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

King Nebuchadnezzar was a despot, but Daniel honored him, I believed prayed for him, and took care of him when God struck him with madness for seven years for his pride. It was Daniel's obedience to God in that he honored the king that led to Nebuchadnezzar's salvation. (read Daniel 4)

It doesn't matter what you think about President Donald Trump or how you feel about the war in Iran, whether you feel it is justified or not. The Bible commands us to honor our leaders and to pray for them that they would be saved and that God will lead them as they lead our nation.

II. The King Reassures His People—verse 6

Psalm 20:6 (NKJV)

⁶ **Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand.**

The first thing we need to understand from this verse is that the king himself is a man of prayer who is leading the people in prayer to God for this battle. I think that most people in America still take comfort in knowing that our leaders are praying for the wisdom and guidance of God as they lead our country—especially in times of war.

One of the images from the Revolutionary War that was commemorated in the now famous painting, by artist Arnold Friberg in 1975, is that of General George Washington kneeling beside his horse in prayer at Valley Forge.

So, David is pictured here as a man of *prayer*, but he also comes off as a man of *faith* in that he had faith that God was with “His anointed” (David) and would answer his prayer for victory over the enemies of the Lord.

Now upon hearing the calm confident trust in God David expressed in verse 6—the people were energized in their faith by the faith of their king and responded—

Psalm 20:7–9 (NKJV)

⁷ Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God. ⁸ They have bowed down and fallen; But we have risen and stand upright. ⁹ Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call.

III. The Nation Trusts in God—verses 7-9

I’ve named this message—“*The Battle Belongs to the Lord.*”

That concept was first uttered by David when he was only a teenager as he faced a 9 ½ ft. Philistine warrior named Goliath—

1 Samuel 17:47 (NKJV)

⁴⁷ Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands.”

Two hundred years later, when Jehosophat was king of Judah, 3 powerful enemy nations (Ammon, Moab, and Edom) came out against them.

King Jehosophat called for a national day of prayer since they were hopelessly ‘*outmanned and outgunned.*’ As the people finished their prayer and were waiting on God to answer—the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the prophet and he said—

2 Chronicles 20:15 (NLT)

¹⁵ ...“Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid! Don’t be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.

Don’t ever forget that in the battles you face for the Lord (physical, financial, marital etc.), you don’t fight alone, **He fights for you—you don’t fight for Him!**

A great example of this comes out of Joshua Chapter 5—

Joshua 5:13 (NKJV)

¹³ And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”

The children of Israel are encamped in Gilgal with the city of Jericho before them in the distance. Joshua, their leader, had not yet received any direction or instructions from the Lord as to how they were to fight this battle the next day. He was probably a little restless as we tend to get when we’re facing a big challenge and haven’t yet received any direction from the Lord.

So, it appears that Joshua went for a little walk, possibly to pray and/or to meditate on the Law of God which God promised would cause him to remain strong and courageous in the face of this tremendous test of his faith. (Joshua 1:8)

He was apparently looking down at the ground as we tend to do when we’re deep in thought pondering a difficult situation—when suddenly he lifts his head and is confronted by a man he had never seen before standing several yards in front of him.

What’s more the Man had a drawn sword in His hand—an aggressive posture denoting readiness to either fight *for* or *against* you.

Now, Joshua was probably a little startled as this stranger caught him off guard and so as any general commanding an army would have done, he said to the stranger (no doubt in his most authoritative voice he could muster)—“Are You for us or for our adversaries?” (verse 13)

In other words—“Declare your allegiance, what side are you on—are you for us or against us?” To which the stranger responded in verse 14—

Joshua 5:14a (NKJV)

¹⁴ “No, but *as* Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come...”

The term “*army of the Lord*” refers to God’s angelic army. Whoever this person is He is the Commanding Officer of the angelic armies of God which means—**He is no mere man.**

- Could He be a powerful angel like Michael or Gabriel?
- **The answer is ‘no’** because of how Joshua responds to this Stranger when He identifies Himself to Joshua—

Joshua 5:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ “No, but *as* Commander of the Army of the Lord I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped...

We know this was no angel because when Joshua falls down to worship Him—He doesn’t refuse Joshua’s worship.

In the Book of Revelation when an angel was showing John the apostle some amazing visions of the future, twice (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-11) John was so overwhelmed that he fell down at the angel’s feet and tried to worship him—and both times the angel forbid it and said, “*I am your fellow servant—worship God!*”

The good angels, who belong to God’s army in heaven, never, ever accept worship because worship only belongs to God.

So, if this isn’t an angel, then who is this Stranger who calls Himself the “*Commander of the Lord’s army?*” Well, by what this Stranger commands Joshua to do—we know He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, second Person of the Trinity, making a preincarnate appearance!

We know it because not only does He receive Joshua’s worship but says to Him in verse 15—

Joshua 5:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ ... “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

Those are the same words God spoke to Moses, Joshua’s predecessor, when he stood in the presence of God at the burning bush in Exodus 3:5—“*Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.*”

In my mind this confirms that Joshua was standing in the presence of God. Furthermore, I believe, as Joshua had been reading and meditating on the Book of the Law (as he had been commanded by God to do so— Jos.1:8), he no doubt had read what Moses had said to the Lord 40 years earlier—

Exodus 33:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ ..."If Your Presence does not go *with us*, do not bring us up from here.

And God had responded by going with Moses and the children of Israel from Mt. Sinai in their journey toward the Promised Land. But then in Joshua Chapter 1 God had said to Joshua—

Joshua 1:5 (NKJV)

⁵ No man shall *be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.*

So, God is making good on His promise to be with Joshua as He had been with Moses. I believe that the Lord Jesus Himself had come with the armies of heaven to encircle the camp of Israel and lead God’s people into battle.

It was the army of The Lord and not the army of Israel that pulled down the walls of Jericho and permitted God’s people to go in and take it for God! Don’t ever forget that in the battles you face in life—the Lord is with you and will fight for you—as long as you don’t run to the world for help, rather than turning to God:

2 Chronicles 16:12 (NLT)

¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a serious foot disease. Yet even with the severity of his disease, he did not seek the Lord’s help but turned only to his physicians.

Isaiah 31:1, 3 (NLT)

¹ What sorrow awaits those who look to Egypt for help [the world], trusting their horses, chariots, and charioteers and depending on the strength of human armies instead of looking to the Lord, the Holy One of Israel...³ For these Egyptians are mere humans, not God! Their horses are puny flesh, not mighty spirits! When the Lord raises his fist against them, those who help will stumble, and those being helped will fall. They will all fall down and die together.

Now with all of that in mind I really want to spend the rest of our time this morning focusing on, what I believe is, the most important truth that God is trying to teach us through this encounter.

When Joshua first saw this man, not knowing who he was, he asked him a simple question—a question about His allegiance—he asked, “*Are you for us or against us?*” The Lord answered, “*No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.*”

If you notice the Lord didn’t really answer the question—“*Are you for us or against us?*”—“*No*”?!!

If this really was the Lord Jesus who had come with the armies of heaven to fight the battle of Jericho on behalf of Joshua and the children of Israel—then why didn’t He say, “*I am for you and Israel.*” Instead, He brushes the question aside by answering “*No!*”

Now we know that Jesus was for Joshua and Israel in their battle against Jericho and the conquest of the Promised Land—even as the Lord is for us in our battles for Him.

Didn’t Paul tell us that in Romans 8:31 when he said, “*Since God is for us, who can be against us?*”

So then, why the evasiveness on the part of the Lord? Why didn’t the Lord Jesus simply answer Joshua’s question with—“*I am for you of course!*”

The Lord didn’t answer the question because—the question was *fundamentally flawed*.

You see, Joshua asked the question from a position of authority—as a commanding officer looking to recruit another soldier into his cause. But you see it wasn’t Joshua’s place to recruit God for his cause but to line up behind the Lord and be subservient to Him in fighting His battles—because the battle belongs to the Lord!

***When it comes to God’s loyalty to us that is never in question—
He told us He is for us and will never leave us nor forsake us.***

The real question is never, whether He is for us or against us—but whether we are for Him or against Him!

We’re often so busy preparing our strategies and making our plans and then we ask the Lord, “*Are You for me or against me in this Lord? Come on now, I need You on my side, on my team—don’t let me down!*” —when so often those plans are selfish, carnal and go against God’s will for our lives.

God will not let us recruit Him as a foot-soldier into our cause, to fight our battles. The real issue is—Who is in charge of your life, who’s calling the shots—is it you or Him?

As soon as Joshua realized who this Man was, he fell on his face in worship and said, “*What does my Lord say to His servant?*”— Now that is the right question!

The Hebrew could be translated—“*What does my Master say to His slave*”. This is the proper understanding of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ—that of a Master to a slave.

- The Church consists of slaves who are subject to the total control of their Master and King—Jesus Christ.
- Christianity isn’t a democracy—we don’t get to vote on matters of faith and practice in the Church.
- The Church is a monarchy, and Jesus Christ is its Sovereign King (He is called ‘despotes’ = ‘despite’ in the Greek)

This is what it means to be a Christian—that we live in absolute subjection to our King and Master without which we cannot call ourselves His disciples. (Luke 6:46)

Jesus said, *“No one can be My disciple without denying themselves and taking up their cross to follow Me.”*

In other words, He is now in charge and we follow Him, He doesn't follow behind us, blessing where we want to go and what we want to do in life as if He's our servant. When we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior our life as we have known it and lived it is over—we are now the slaves of Christ.

Jesus doesn't come alongside you to help you fulfill your dreams and bless your desires—He takes over. There is success in surrender—victory in submission to our King.

Without allowing Jesus to lead your life, you will only know confusion, despair and defeat.

Be a Joshua!
Fall on your face and worship Him!
Surrender your life fully to Him each day.

This psalm serves as a powerful call to trust in God's character and submit to His authority over our lives, allowing Him to lead us in the matters that effect our lives—during our own **"day of trouble."** (Psalm 20:1)

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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