

BREAKTHROUGH AROUND ME — “When Praise Goes First”

Sunday, January 11, 2026

Text: 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 (NIV)

1) STORY OPENING — “My Reflex to Fight”

Church, I've learned something about myself.

When pressure hits, I don't just feel it... I react.

Some people freeze. Some people flee. But my default is to **fight**—to solve, control, strategize, respond, fix.

And on the outside, it can look responsible. It can look like leadership. It can look like maturity.

But sometimes... it's just fear dressed up as productivity.

Because striving is often what we do when we don't know how to be still.

(pause)

And fasting has a way of exposing that reflex. When you remove the comforts, and the coping, and the noise— you realize how quickly your soul reaches for control.

So here's the question for week two of this fast:

What if your breakthrough around you won't come by trying harder... but by putting praise first?

(pause)

BIG IDEA: When we seek God first, He fights our battles.

2) SCRIPTURE READING — NIV (sets the message up)

Church, before we go any further, I want us to hear the Word of the Lord in full.

Because this story doesn't just teach us what to do—it shows us who God is.

If you're able, would you stand for the reading of Scripture?

This is **2 Chronicles 20**, and I'm reading from the **NIV**.

(Read with pace; emphasize bold lines. You can lift your voice slightly on the bold lines.)

2 Chronicles 20:1-22 (NIV)

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. **2** Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead 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. **5** Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the **Lord** in the front of the new courtyard **6** and said: "Lord, the God of our ancestors, 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** 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? **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** 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 on you." **13**

All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the **Lord**. **14** Then the Spirit of the **Lord** came on Jahaziel

son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of

Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the

assembly. **15** 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. **16** 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. **17** You will not have to fight this battle.

Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the **Lord** will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Go out to face them tomorrow, and the **Lord** will be with you." **18**

Jehoshaphat bowed down 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 a very loud voice. **20** Early in

the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out,

Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of

Jerusalem! Have faith in the **LORD** your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." **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." **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.

("We'll come back and finish the story in a few moments.")

This is the Word of the Lord. *(Thanks be to God.)*

(pause — let the room breathe)

3) BRIDGE — What Just Happened?

Church, did you hear the order?

The fast came before the strategy.

The prayer came before the breakthrough.

And the praise went before the victory.

So today, I want to show you three moves that bring **breakthrough around you:**

- 1. Fix your eyes on God**
- 2. Position yourself for victory**
- 3. Stand still and watch God fight**

KEY POINT 1 — FIX YOUR EYES ON GOD

Fasting shifts focus from fear to faith.

Verse 3 says Jehoshaphat is **alarmed**—he's afraid And the very next phrase is: **"He resolved to inquire of the LORD."** (20:3)

Fear showed up... and he didn't pretend it wasn't there. He **re-aimed** his life toward God.

That's fasting.

Not denial. **Direction.** Not pretending the battle isn't real. Choosing where you'll look first.

Then Jehoshaphat prays one of the most honest prayers in the Bible:

"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (20:12)

That sentence is the goal of your fast.

Because fear fixes your eyes on the size of the problem. Faith fixes your eyes on the nature of God.

Jehoshaphat does three things in his prayer:

A) He remembers who God is

"You rule over all the kingdoms..." (20:6)

Some of you need that reminder today.

Your situation feels loud—God is still sovereign.

B) He remembers what God has done

He's not just praying emotions—he's praying history.

He's saying, "God, You've been faithful before."

C) He admits his limits without shame

"We have no power... we don't know what to do..."

That's not weakness—that's worship.

And church, this is a holiness moment: Not sin-management—heart dependence. Not “I’ve got this.” But “God, You’ve got me.”

Line to preach: Fasting doesn’t make your battle smaller. It makes your God **bigger in your vision.**

(pause)

KEY POINT 2 — POSITION YOURSELF FOR VICTORY

Worship becomes your weapon.

Then God answers through Jahaziel: **“Do not be afraid... for the battle is not yours, but God’s.”** (20:15)

And then God gives them an instruction that doesn’t make sense in human logic: **Send the singers first.**

Verse 21: Jehoshaphat appoints men to sing and praise.

Verse 22: **“As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes...”** (20:22)

Don’t miss this: **Praise didn’t follow the victory. Praise went first.**

That’s the whole sermon title. That’s the breakthrough key.

Because praise is not pretending you’re okay. Praise is declaring God is God even when you’re not okay.

Now let me say it clearly:

Praise is not a lever to control God.

Praise is not manipulation. Praise is not superstition.

Praise is alignment.

It puts God back in the center. It dethrones fear. It reminds your soul who's actually in charge.

And this is how week two connects to week one:

Week one: God breaks self-reliance. Week two: God retrains your reflex.

When pressure hits, we don't reach for control first. We reach for worship first.

Line to preach: If worship only happens when you win, worship is just a celebration. But when worship goes first, worship becomes **warfare**.

(pause)

KEY POINT 3 — THE BATTLE BELONGS TO THE LORD

Power is perfected in surrender.

Now look at verse 17: **“You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you.”**

Some of you need to hear this like a personal word today:

Stand firm. Not because the battle is easy. But because the battle is **His**.

And that doesn't mean we do nothing. It means we stop fighting battles in the flesh that God never assigned us.

Because many of us are exhausted not because the enemy is strong—but because we're trying to do God's job.

We're trying to control outcomes. Control people. Control perception. Control timing. Control comfort.

But God says: **"Stand... and see."**

Line to preach: Standing is not passivity. Standing is surrender with trust.

And this is where Paul's word hits us: **"My power is made perfect in weakness."** (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Power is not perfected in striving. Power is perfected in surrender.

4) FINISH THE STORY — God Fights, God Provides, God Gives Peace

Now if you keep reading, the story gets even wilder.

23 The Ammonites and Moabites 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. **24** When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. **25** So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great amount of equipment and clothing[a] and also articles of value—more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it. **26** On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berakah, where they praised the L^{ORD}. This is why it is called the Valley of Berakah[b] 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 lyres and trumpets. **29** The fear of God came on all the surrounding kingdoms 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.

God turns the enemy armies against each other (20:23–24). Judah arrives—and the battle is already won.

And verse 25 says it takes them **three days** to collect the plunder. On the fourth day, they gather in the Valley of Berakah— Berakah means **blessing**—and they praise the Lord (20:26).

Then verse 29 says fear fell on the surrounding kingdoms because they heard: **“The LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel.”**

And verse 30 closes it: **“And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.”**

Some of you came in today needing rest on every side. And God may not change every circumstance instantly... but He can give you what this text promises: **Peace and rest and the confidence that He is fighting for you.**

APPLICATION — Stop Striving; Start Standing

Church, here's the application exactly as simple as it sounds:

Stop striving; start standing. Worship your way to breakthrough.

Three practices for this week:

1) Set your face before you set your plan. (20:3)

Before emails, before decisions, before scrolling—
two minutes: “Lord, my eyes are on You.”

2) Put praise first—out loud. (20:21-22)

Not because you feel it. Because you trust Him.

3) Stand where God told you to stand. (20:17)

Identify one battle you've been fighting in the flesh.
Then release it. “Lord, I release what is not mine to carry.”

ALTAR MOMENT — “When Praise Goes First”

Church, we're going to respond. Some of you came in surrounded:

- by conflict you can't fix
- by anxiety you can't silence
- by pressure you can't solve
- by grief you can't outrun
- by uncertainty that feels like a vast army

And the Word of the Lord is not: “Try harder.”

It's: **“Seek Me first.”**

It's: **“Stand firm.”**

It's: **“Let praise go first.”**

So I want to invite you—if you need breakthrough around you—if you're carrying a battle—if you're tired of striving this altar is open.

(pause; let people move)

Guided Prayer (lead slowly)

Father, we confess our reflex to control. We confess our striving. We confess our fear. Today we set our face to seek You. We do not know what to do—**but our eyes are on You** Jesus, You are Lord over what surrounds us. Holy Spirit, teach us to worship first and stand firm.

We release this battle to You. We choose praise before provision, worship before evidence, trust before relief. The battle belongs to the Lord. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

HAVE PASTOR ISAI LEAD IN THE BAND HERE IN: "SURROUNDED" (Fight my Battles)

BENEDICTION

May the Father anchor you in His love and steady your heart in His sovereignty. May Jesus Christ, our victorious King, teach you to stand firm and trust His name. May the Holy Spirit retrain your reflex—until praise is your first response and peace becomes your guard. And may you stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.