

THE REST OF WAR

“The Battle is the Lord’s”

**based on
Asa’s Prayer and
Jehoshaphat’s Prayer**



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ASA'S PRAYER

"And Asa cried unto THE LORD HIS GOD, and said, LORD, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power, HELP ME O LORD, OUR GOD, FOR WE REST ON THEE, AND IN THY NAME we go against this multitude, O LORD, THOU ART OUR GOD, let not man prevail against Thee,"
2 Chronicles 14:11.

King Asa, Rehoboam's grandson had had a long reign of peace, which the writer of the book of Chronicles traces to the fact that he had rooted out idolatry from Judah.

"The land had rest, and he has no war... because the Lord had given him rest." But there came a time when the war cloud began to roll threateningly over the land, and a great army, the number of which, from their immense magnitude, came up against him. Like a wise man he made his military dispositions first, and prayed next. He set his troops in order, and he fell down on his knees, and spoke to the Lord.

Now in this prayer there is contained the very essence of what ought to be our attitude as Christians in reference to all the conditions and threatening dangers and conflicts of life, which we are facing today in our country in the twentieth century.

So as we study it I will try to bring out some points, and principles of that which ought to be our disposition in the calamity we find ourselves in today.

First I want you to recognize that Asa recognized his own impotence. It did not take much to convince Asa that he had no power. His army, according to the numbers given of the two hosts, was outnumbered two to one, and so it did not require much reflection to say, **we have no might!**

And this same principle is true with us today as far as our domestic policies are concerned and our foreign policies are concerned, and it is true in our every day lives

as Christians here in Houston, in the face of our duties, in our tasks, our dangers, and the possibilities of life and its certainties. Therefore the more we recognize our own weakness, the more wisely we shall think about the Lord, and the more truly we shall estimate ourselves.

The world says, and sells, "self-reliance is the conquering virtue," but Jesus Christ says, "self distrust is the condition of all victory." And that does not mean any mere shuffling off of responsibility from our own shoulders, but it means looking the facts of our lives, and of our own characters, in the face.

If we will do this, however apparently easy may be our course, and however richly endowed in mind, body, or estate we may be, if we all do that honestly, we shall find that we each are like "the man with 10 thousand that has to meet the king that comes against him with twenty thousand," and we shall not desire conditions of peace with our enemies, for that is not what in this case we have to do. But we shall look about us, and not keep our eyes on the horizon, and on the levels of Earth, but look up to see if there is not there an "Ally" that can bring into the field to redress the balance, and to make our ten as strong as the opposing twenty.

Zerah the Ethiopian, who was coming down on Asa, is said to have had a million fighting men at his back. Asa had only half the number, so he said, what can I do? And what could he do? He did the only thing possible. He grasped at God's skirts, and prayed.

"And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand, and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand, all these here mighty men of valor." "And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand and thousand, and three

hundred chariots, and came unto Mareshah.”
“Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the Valley of Zephathan at Mareshah.”

“And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power, help us, O Lord, our God, for we rest on Thee, and in the Name we go against this multitude. Oh Lord, Thou art our God, let not man prevail against Thee,” verse 8-10.

Now all that is true about the disproportion between the foes we have to face and fight and our own strength. It is eminently true about us as Christians, if we are doing any work for the Lord. You hear people say, “look at the small number of Christians in this country, as compared with the number on the other side. What is the use of trying to convert the world? Now if we as Christians, a mere handful, had to undertake to Christianize the whole world by our own strength, we might as well despair of success and stop right now. But “we have no might.”

The disproportion both numerically and in all things that the world estimates as strength is so great that we are in a worse case than Asa was. It is not two to one, it is twenty to one, or even greater disproportion. But we are not only numerically weak. A multitude of non-effectives, mere camp followers, loosely attached, nominal Christians have to be deducted from the muster rook and the few who are left are so feeble as well as so few that dreaming of charging the wide stretching lines of the enemy. So a profound self-distrust is our wisdom.

But that should not paralyze us, but lead to something better, as it led Asa.

When you realize you have no strength for battle, then you follow by summoning God into the field of battle. Asa uses a remarkable expression, which is, maybe scarcely reproduced adequately in our authorized version. “It is nothing with Thee to help.” “Whether with many or with them that have no power.” It is a strange phrase, but it seems most probable that the suggested rendering in the revised version is nearer the writer’s mean-

ing, which says, “Lord, there is none beside Thee to help between the mighty and them that have no power,” which to our ears is a somewhat cumbrous way of saying that God, and God only, can adjust the difference between the mighty and the weak. He can regress the balance. And by the laying of His hand upon the feeble hand can make it strong as the mailed first to which it is opposed. **If we know ourselves to be hopelessly out numbered, and send to God for reinforcement, He will clash His sword into the scale and make it go down.** Asa turned to God and said, “Thou only canst trim the scales and make the lighter of the two the heavier one by casting Thy might into it.” “So help us, O Lord our God.”

One man with God at his back is always in the majority. And no matter how many there may be on the other side, “there are more that be with us than they that be with them.”

There is therefore encouragement for people who have to fight unpopular causes in the world, who have been accustomed to be in minorities all their days in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. Never mind about the numbers, bring God into the field and the little band, which is compared in another place in these historical books, to “two flocks of kids,” fronting the enemy that had flowed all over the land, is in the majority. “God with us, Immanuel, then we are strong.”

The consciousness of weakness may unnerve a man, and that is why people in this world are always patting each other on the back and saying, “be of good cheer, rely upon yourself, you can do it. I can do it myself. Have a nice day now.”

But the self-distrust that turns to the Lord becomes the parent of a far more reliable self-reliance than that which trusts to men. **My consciousness of need is my opening door for the Lord to come in.** Just as you always find the lakes in the hollows, so you will always find the GRACE of God coming into our lives to strengthen us and make us victorious,

When there has been the preparation of the lowered estimate of one's self, hollow out your heart as it were, by self-distrust, and God will fill it with the flashing waters of His strength bestowed.

The more I feel that I am weak, the more I am meant not to fold my hands and say, I never can do that thing, it is of no use my trying to attempt it, I may as well give up. But to say, "Lord, Lord, there is none beside Thee that can set the balance right between the mighty and that which hath no strength," "Help me, O Lord my God."

Just as those little hermit crabs that you see upon the seashore, with soft bodies unprotected, make for the first empty shell they can find, and house in that and make it their fortress, our exposed natures, our enarmoured characters, our sense of weakness, ought to drive us to the Lord. As the unarmed population of a land invaded by the enemy pack their goods and hurry to the nearest fortified place, so when I say to myself I have no strength, let me say, "Thou art my Rock, my Strength, my Fortress, and my Deliverer, my God, in whom I trust, my Buckler, and the Horn of my salvation, and my High Tower."

There is another principle here that we should consider and that is the way in which we summon God into the field of battle. Asa prays, "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee." The word that he uses for "rest" is not used very frequently. It carries with it a very striking picture. Let me see if I can illustrate it by a reference to another case where it is used.

It is used in that tragic story of the death of Saul, when the man that saw the last of him came to David and drew in a sentence the pathetic picture of the wearied, wounded, broken-hearted, discrowned, desperate monarch, "Leaning on his spear."

You can understand how hard he leaned, with what a grip he held it, and how heavily his whole languid, powerless weight pressed upon it. And that is the very word that is used here, "We lean on Thee," as the wounded

Saul leaned on his spear. **Now is that a picture of your faith? Do you lean upon the Lord like that, laying your hand on Him till every vein on your hand stands out with the force and tension of the grasp? Or do you lean lightly, as a man that does not feel much the need of a support?**

Lean hard if you want God to come quickly. "We rest in Thee, Help us, O Lord." Courageous advances always follow self-distrust and always summon God by faith. It is well when self-distrust leans to confidence, when I am weak, but confident in self-despair. But even that is not all.

It is better when self-distrust and confidence in God lead to courage, and as Asa goes on, "Help us, for we rely on Thee, AND IN THY NAME WE GO AGAINST THE MULTITUDE." It doesn't matter if it is two to one. What does that matter? Prudence and calculation are well enough, but there is a great deal of very rank cowardice and want of faith in Christians, both in regard to their own lives and in regard to Christian service in this world, which goes masquerading under much too respectable a name, and calls itself, "judicious caution," and "prudence."

There is very little ever done by that, especially in the Christian way of life, and the old motto of one of the French republicans holds good, "Dare, dare, always dare." We have more on our side than we have against us. And this creeping prudence of calculations is not the temper in which the battle is won. "Dash" is not always precipitate and presumptuous.

If we have the Lord with us, let us be bold to fronting the dangers and the difficulties that beset us, and be absolutely sure that He will help us.

Notice in this prayer of Asa's all powerful plea that God will answer. "Thou art my God, let not man prevail against Thee." Now that prayer conveys and covers two things. You may be quite sure that if God is your God you will not be beaten, and you may be quite sure that if you have made God's cause yours, He will make your cause His, and

again, you will not be beaten. "Thou art our God."

It takes two to make a bargain. It takes two to tango. And God and we have both to act before God is truly ours. He gives Himself to us, but there is an act of ours required also, and you must take God that is given to you, and make Him yours because you make yourselves His.

And when we have taken Him for our own, and not until we do, He is mine, to all intents of strength-giving and blessedness. When I say, "Thou art my God." and it is impossible that He will deny Himself, then nothing can snap that bond, and "Neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," can do it.

But there is a creature that can, and that is I. For I can separate "myself" from the love and the guardianship of God, and He can say to a man, "I am thy God," and the man "not" answer, "Thou art my God."

Then there is another plea here, "Let not man prevail against Thee." What business had Asa to identify his little kingdom and his victory with God's cause and God's conquest? Only this, that he had flung himself into God's arms, and because he had, and was trying to do what God would have him

do, he was quite sure that it was not Asa but Jehovah that the millions of Ethiopians were fighting against. The battle was the Lord's. They are not against David, Asa, or you - they are fighting God in you.

People always warn us against fanaticism of taking for granted that our cause is God's cause. Well, we need the warning sometimes, but we may be quite sure of this, that if we have made His cause ours, He will make our cause His, down to the minutest point in our daily lives.

Then if we say and live accordingly, "There is none other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God." It will be with us as it was with Asa in the text before us, "The enemy fled, and could not recover themselves, for they were destroyed before the Lord and before His hosts."

"Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power. Help us O Lord, our God, for we rest on Thee, and in Thy Name, we go against this multitude, O Lord, Thou art our God, let not man prevail against Thee." 2 Chronicles 14:11.

OUR BATTLE IS THE LORD'S BATTLE
AND THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU
TODAY.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S PRAYER

We are in a very strange battle

"We have no might against this great company that cometh against us. Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee," 2 Chronicles 20:12. A formidable combination of neighboring nations, of which Moah and Ammon, the ancestral enemies of Judah, were the chief, was threatening Judah. Jehoshaphat, the king, was panic-stricken when he heard of the heavy war-cloud that was rolling on, ready to burst in thunder on his little kingdom. His first act was to muster the nation, not as a military levy but as supplicants, "to seek help of the Lord."

The enemy was camping down by the banks of the Dead Sea, almost within striking distance of Jerusalem. It seemed a time for fighting, not for praying, but even at that critical moment, the king and the men, whom it might have appeared that plain duty called to arms, were gathered in the temple, and hampered by the wives and children, were praying. Would they not have done better if they had been sturdily marching through the wilderness of Judah to front their foes?

Now this passage before us is chosen because it is the close and the climax of Jehoshaphat's prayer, and as the event proved, it was the most powerful weapon that could have been employed. The rest of the chapter tells us the strangest story of a campaign that was ever written. **No sword was drawn.** The army was marshaled, but Levites with their instruments of music, not fighters with their spears, led the van, and as, "they began to sing and to praise," sudden panic laid hold on the invading forces, who turned their arms against each other.

So when Judah came to some rising ground, on which stood a watch tower commanding a view over the savage grimness "of the wilderness" it saw a field of corpses, stark and stiff and silent.

Three days were spent in securing the booty, and on the fourth day, Jehoshaphat and his men "assembled themselves in the Valley of Blessing." And thence returned a joyous multitude praising God for the victory which had been won for them without their having struck a blow, without having fired a shot.

Now this whole story has many, many lessons, which are seasonable at all times. **The first thing I want you to see is confidence and despair.** Jehoshaphat's prayer had stayed itself on God's self-revelation in history, and on God's gift of the land to their fathers, His promise to them. This prayer pleaded that the enemy's hostility was a poor "reward" for Israel's ancient forbearance, and now, with a burst of agony, it casts down before God, as it were, Judah's desperate plight as outnumbered by the swarm of invaders and brought to their last shifts, "We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do."

We are outnumbered and we don't know what to do. Haven't you felt that way yourself at times, even many times? **But the very depth of despair sets them to climb the height of trust.** That is a mighty, "but" which buckles into one sentence two such antitheses as confront us here. "We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee."

Blessed is the desperation which catches at God's hand, firm is the trust which leaps from despair to the Lord. The helplessness is always a fact, though most of us manage to get along for the most part without discovering it. We are all outnumbered and overborne by the claims, duties, hindrances, sorrows, and entanglements of this life. He is not the wisest of men who, facing all that life may bring and take away, all that it must bring and take away, knows no quiver of nameless fear, but jauntily professes himself ready for all that life can inflict.

But there come moments in every life when the false security in which shallow souls strap themselves ignobly is broken up, and then often a paroxysm of terror or misery grips a man, for which he has no anodyne, and his despair is as unreasonable as his security.

The meaning of all circumstances that force our helplessness on us is to open to us Jehoshaphat's refuge in his, "our eyes are upon Thee." **We need to be driven by the crowds of foes and dangers around to look upwards. Our props are struck away that we may cling to God.** The tree has its lateral branches hewed off that it may shoot up heavenward. Sparks fly upward.

When the valley is filled with mist and swathed in evening gloom, it is the time to lift our gaze to the peaks that glow in perpetual sunshine. Wise and happy shall we be if the sense of selflessness begets in us the energy of a desperate faith.

For these two, distrust of self and glad confidence in the Lord, are not opposite, as naked distrust and trust are, but are complementary. He does not turn his eyes to God who has not turned them on himself, and seen there nothing to which to cling, nothing on which to lean.

Astronomers tell us that there are double stars revolving round one axis and forming a unity, of which one is black and the other brilliant. **Self-distrust and trust in God are thus knit together and are really one.** So in this prayer we see the principle of the peaceful assurance of victory that attends on faith.

A flash of inspiration came to one of the Levitical singers who had, no doubt, been deeply moved and had unconsciously fitted himself for receiving it. Divinely breathed confidence illustrated his waiting spirit, and a great message of encouragement poured from his lips. His words heartened the host more than a hundred trumpets braying in their ears. **How much one man has drunk in God's assurance of victory can do to send a thrill to his own courage through**

more timorous hearts. Courage is no less contagious than panic.

This Levite becomes the commander of the army, and Jehoshaphat and his captain "bow their heads," and accept a message from Jehovah. The instructions given and at once accepted are as unlike those of ordinary warfare as is the whole incident, for there is to be no sword drawn nor blow struck, but they are to "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." They are told where to find the enemy and are bid to go forth in order of battle against them, and they are assured, "That the battle is not theirs but God's."

No wonder that the message was hailed as from Heaven, and put new heart into the battle. Or that when the messenger's voice ceased, his brother Levites broke into shrill praise as for a victory already won. With what calm, triumphant hearts the camp would sleep that night.

"Then upon Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation; And He said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude: for the battle is not your's, but God's. Tomorrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by cliff Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you. O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed: tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. And the Levities, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of Korbites, stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high." 2 Chronicles 20:14-19.

Now we can take that inspired Levite's message and apply it to ourselves in the midst of the many conflicts both in the outward life and in the inward life. If we have truly grasped God's hands, and are fighting for what is accordant with His will, we have a right to feel that "the battle is not ours, but God's," and to be sure that therefore we shall also conquer without firing a shot.

Of course, we cannot say to ourselves, God will fight for us, and we need not strike a blow. Jehoshaphat's example does not fit our case in that respect, and we may thank God that it does not. We have a better lot than to "Stand still and see the salvation of God," for we are honored by being allowed to share the stress of conflict and the glow of battle as well as in the shout of victory.

But even in the struggles of outward life, and much more in those of our spiritual nature, every man who watches his own career will many a time have to recognize God's hand, unaided by any act of his own, striking for him and giving him victory.

And in the spiritual life every Christian knows that his best moments have come from the initiation of the Holy Spirit who "bloweth where He listeth." How often we have been surprised by God's help, how often we have been quickened by God's in-breathed Spirit, and have been taught that the passivity of faith draws to us greater blessings than the activity of effort.

"They also serve who only stand and wait." And they also conquer who in quietness and confidence keep themselves still and let God work for them and in them.

The first great blessing of trust in God is that **we may be at peace on the eve of battle.** We know that the second is that in every battle it is, in truth, **not we that fight, but God who fights for and in us.** And thereby we learn the best preparation for the conflict.

When the morning dawned, the array was not in order and the march began, and a strange array it was. In the van marched the temple singers singing words that are music to us still. "Give thanks unto the Lord, for His

mercy endureth forever." And then behind them came the ranks of Judah, no doubt swelling the volume of melody, that startled the wild creatures of the wilderness, and perhaps traveled through the still morning as far as the camp of the enemy.

The singers had no armor nor weapons. They were clad in "the beauty of holiness," the priestly dress, and for the sword and spear they carried harps and imbrels. Our best weapons sometimes are like their equipment. **We are most likely to conquer if we lift up the voice of thanks for victory in advance, and go into the battle expecting to triumph, because we trust in God.** The world's expectation of success is too often a dream, a will-of-the-wisps that tempts to bog where the beguiled victim is choked, though even in the world it is often true, "Screw your courage to the sticking point, and we'll not fail." But faith, that is the expectation of success based on God's help, and inspiring to struggles for things dear to his heart, is wont to fulfill itself, and by bringing God into the fray, to secure the victory.

A thankful heart not seldom brings into existence that for which it is thankful. And this leads us to see the victory and the praise for it. The panic that laid hold on the enemy, and turned their swords against each other, was more natural in an undisciplined horde such as those irregular levies of ancient times, than it would be in a modern army. Once started, the infection would spread, so we need not wonder that by the time that Judah arrived on the field, all was over.

How often a like expectation attends us. We quiver with apprehension of troubles that never attack us. We dread some impending battlefield, and when we reach it, Jehoshaphat's surprise is repeated, "And behold there were dead bodies, fallen in the earth." Delivered from foes and fears, Judah's first impulse was to secure the booty for they were keen after wealth, and their "faith" was not very pure or elevating. But their last act was worthier, and fitly ended the strange campaign.

They gathered in some way among the grim cliff of the wilderness of Judah, which broke the dreariness of that savage stretch of country with maybe verdure and a brook, and there they "Blessed the Lord."

The chronicler gives a piece of popular etymology, in deriving the name, the "Valley of Blessing," from that morning's worship. Maybe the name was older than that, and was given from a feeling of the contrast between the waste wilderness, which in its gaunt sterility seemed an accursed land, and the glen which with its trees and stream was indeed a valley of blessing, happiness. If so the name would be doubly appropriate after that day's experience.

Be that as it may. Here we have in vivid form the Truth that all our struggles and fightings may end in a valley of blessing, which will ring with the praise of the God who fights for us.

If we begin our warfare with an appeal to God, and with powerful acknowledgment of our own impotence, we shall end it with thankful acknowledgment that we are "More than conquerors through Him that loved us, and fought for us," and our choral song of praise will echo through the valley of blessing, where no sound of enemies shall ever break the settled stillness and the host of the redeemed, like the army of Judah, shall bear "psalteries and harps and trumpets," and

shall need spear and sword no more at all for ever.

"And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

"And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the Valley of Berachah for there they blessed the Lord, therefore the name of the same place was called, the Valley of Berachah unto this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them to go again to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord, and the fear of God was on all the kingdom of those countries when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the reign of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest round about." 2 Chronicles 20:26-30.

Strange battle we are in Jehoshaphat!

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