

Helpless but Strong

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon highlights the necessity of recognizing our helplessness and the power of prayer and praise in seeking God's intervention.

Duration: 27:01

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:12-26

Topics: "Strength"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts the story of a battle in which the people of Judah and Jerusalem were facing a formidable enemy. Before the battle, Joseph encouraged the people to put their trust in the Lord and believe in the words of the prophets. The king then ordered musicians to march ahead of the army, singing praises to the Lord. As they began to sing, the Lord caused confusion among the enemy armies, leading them to attack and destroy each other. The speaker emphasizes the power of praising God before seeing the victory and encourages the congregation to bring their burdens to God, praising Him and trusting in His strength.

Transcript

Because of the way my wife and I went into the ministry and because of the situations we faced, I realized that I had to learn how to pray and that prayer would have to be the key to securing what we needed. The blessing of God, the Holy Spirit, seeing souls saved, learning more from the Word of God. You got to pray so the Holy Spirit will teach you.

Finances, both for the church, for my own family, that was a touch and go situation. For a while at the very beginning, we had so little money that my wife, who never learned really to sew, took up sewing and made all the clothes for my two daughters when they were little and they have never forgiven her to this very day for the dresses that she sewed for them. When they see pictures now, they look back.

But you got to let it go. How many say amen? So I began to study in the Bible and study church history and what is it that is the key to prayers that are answered by God? Now, there's the sovereignty of God in a lot of our praying. We don't get what we always ask for at the moment we ask for it.

We know there's a mystery in prayer, but there's all kinds of encouragements to pray that God answers prayer. But then it's not just praying. The Pharisees prayed.

They prayed on street corners to be seen. So the Bible has all kinds of commands and teachings about how to pray effectively. So I got every book you could imagine when I first, even before I went in the ministry, on prevailing prayer, praying in the spirit, the secrets of prayer, books about prayer by Andrew Murray, by Ian Bounds, by Charles Finney, by a lot of great writers.

But of course, the best way to learn to pray is by studying the scripture and by praying. So I want to give you in this one story, some really powerful moments. I don't know how God brings us to these moments.

I just know as you'll see it, and I've had it happen in my life, when I reach a certain place in life, God comes so quickly and so strong. And I want you to understand that we could learn more about it. A few weeks ago, I talked about King Asa, who was one of the better kings in the southern kingdom of Judah.

When he died, and he didn't die in a good way at the end, as we learned, he went away from God. He was succeeded by his son, Jehoshaphat. And Jehoshaphat was a strange guy, godly guy in many ways.

And there's good things written about him, but then he had this blind spot. You remember that story that he couldn't discern what was up with people, and he got involved with people he should have never gotten near. Like in the northern tribe, King Ahab was going to go to battle, and King Ahab was the wickedest king, and his lovely wife Jezebel, they were like just evil incarnate.

And they contact King Jehoshaphat, who's godly, and they say, will you join with us and fight with us against this enemy? And Jehoshaphat goes along with it. He asked for a prophet to come and tell him what to do, but he goes into battle. And this godly guy, King Ahab says to him, well look, when we go into battle, I'm going to wear a disguise, but you put on a big, bright king's outfit with a crown, and put a big bullseye probably right on your chest, and then we go into battle.

And guess what? Jehoshaphat did it, and he almost got killed. Which goes to show you the godliest people can have a blind spot, and that goes for you and me. As a man of what God told me in Argentina decades ago, he said, Jim, always remember, everyone has something that's not convenient, using the Spanish word for convenient, which means you can be strong in certain areas in your life, and then have a blind spot or a weak area.

One of the best men of God that Pastor Delina and I have known for much of his life, he was fearless, would preach, would do all kinds of things for God. He wouldn't get on an airplane, scared to death. He'd say, how could you do what you do and have that blind spot? It is what it is.

I know another great woman of God. She'd believe God for anything, but she won't go in an elevator. Not getting in an elevator.

No, no, no. She's going to walk those stairs. These are the way we're all made different.

So Jehoshaphat gets through all of that. God preserves him, but the prophet warns him, like, what's up with you? Don't you know that the righteous shouldn't be working together here with the wicked? And then he's reigning and he's doing what's right, and suddenly three different armies come against him. The Ammonites and the Moabites and some people from Mount Seir, the Edomites.

The Bible says this. They brought a messenger came to him and said, three humongous armies, outnumbering what he had, have come against us. And the Bible says, when he heard it, he became afraid.

I love the Bible because it's honest. Even men and women of God are tested at times, and we can get afraid. We can get anxious.

Come on, am I right or not? And even people who act like they're never afraid, they're really lying. Everybody has to deal with anxiety, fear, timidity. Amen? But that's not the way God wants us to live, but we're tempted by it.

We're attacked by it. So what he does is, because he's a godly guy, he calls the people to Jerusalem, and then he stands up in front of all of them and lifts his voice and prays one of the great prayers in the Old Testament. And he tells God, God, he rehearses with God.

Now, you're the one who chose Abraham. And then you're the one who brought us to this land. And then you gave us this land.

And when you put us in this land, you raised up finally someone who would build a temple for you. And you said that if trouble comes, that if you would go to the temple and call on God, that God would help. So he's preparing God.

He's reasoning with God. He's praising God, reminding God of his faithfulness. And then he gets to just a sentence, which over the years has always just struck me so deep in my heart, because what he says, oh, God, help us to believe this and do this.

So let's just look at that thing of what he said. Let's look. You are our God.

Punish them, for we are helpless in the face of this large army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but we look to you for help. Now, all the men of Judah with their wives and children were standing there at the temple.

Then we're going to go back to this verse after we get through 15. The spirit of the Lord came upon a Levite. This is very odd in the Old Testament.

Usually it's a prophet, but this was of the priestly tribe. The spirit of the Lord came upon a Levite who was present in the crowd. His name was Jehaziel, son of Zechariah.

He was a member of the clan of Asaph and was descended from Asaph through Mataniah, Jael, and Benaiah. And Jehaziel said, Your majesty and all you people of Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord says that you must not be discouraged or be afraid to face this large army. The battle depends on God, not on you.

The other translation says, the battle is the Lord's, not yours. I like what this says here. The battle depends on God, not on you.

Now, notice what he establishes here. I want to say four little things to help us to pray. How many want to learn how to pray better? Lift your hand.

And I mean get answers. I don't want to pray. I don't want to pray just to pray.

I want to pray to secure what God wants to put in my life. I don't want it written about Jim Cymbala, you had not because you asked not. Notice, you are our God.

He establishes relationship with God. This prayer was put in the Bible for a reason. God wants us to learn.

It's like Jesus said, when you pray, how should we start our prayer, did Jesus say? That's another way in the Old Testament way of saying, you are our God. We can say it this way. You are our God.

You are our Father. We're coming to you not like just some fly-by-night person. We have relationship with you.

We're one of your children. You are our God. You're the one who saved us.

You're the one who brought us to the place we are tonight on Tuesday night at the Brooklyn Tabernacle. You are our God. God likes to hear that.

He loves when we just, and it builds our faith. We're not just coming like, I hope this works. We're coming to our Father.

The famous picture when President Kennedy was in the White House before he was assassinated. Nobody could ever go in there unless you got past security and then you had to have an appointment. They had that famous picture of his son who was about three years old.

He would just burst open the door and came in and ran up and jumped on his daddy's lap. Why? Because he was his son. And the security detail, they wouldn't say a word because that's his dad.

And we have a right tonight to pray and say, our Father, which art in heaven. How many are so happy we have a Father in heaven? Come on. We can say you are our God.

Now, here are the two key things though. It's actually in the mindset of people today, it's a negative confession. Christianity is so out of whack today that when we tell the truth, people will stop you.

Don't say that. You're a Christian. Well, Jehoshaphat was a believer, but notice the thing he says here, two things.

We are helpless in the face of this large army. We are helpless. When you come to your Father and you get to a place where you know you're helpless and you cannot do it, God's going to rush in and help you.

You know what the problem most of us is? We don't think we're helpless. We're depending on our IQ. We're depending on our contacts.

We're not helpless. And he confesses to God. Notice how God's going to respond.

We're going to see that in a second. He tells God, I am helpless. That's the best thing.

I preach my best sermons I say for the glory of God. And God's helped me the most. When I have gone into that pulpit saying, God, I am helpless.

I don't care how many times I've done this. I can't speak and be a blessing on my own. I am helpless.

You've got to come and help me. So to confess lack of power is great because that's what brings God's power. Faith comes when you know you can't do it, and now you're going to throw the whole thing on God.

And God loves that. What he doesn't like is when we say, God, I need a little help around the edges, but in case you don't come, I can figure this out, I think. God loves when we get helpless so that he'll get all the glory.

How many say amen? When you're helpless and God answers, then God has to get all the glory. God, I am helpless. That means we have to work through, and his word has to work in us so we get through all our pride and our self-sufficiency and our know-it-all-ness.

And we just get to the place, God, I'm helpless. Jesus was like that. He said, the things I do, I only do what the Father shows me.

Don't condemn me for what I say. I only say what he tells me to say. I'm helpless on my own.

In that helplessness, there's power. Do you get it? How many get it? Say amen. It's when you think you're somebody and, no, the power comes.

Oh, dramatic power comes when you're just helpless. God, I'm helpless. Notice, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

What can you do on your own? Jesus told us, without me, you can do what? He says it's one of the hardest verses to really believe because our pride says, no, I can do something. So he says this negative confession which leads to a positive result. We are not only helpless, we do not know what to do.

When you have no power and you have no idea what to do, that is the territory that God is going to move into because he's our Father. And when you see a helpless child who doesn't know what to do, you're not going to help that child. So notice the two things he said.

Maybe someone is here today facing some time-sensitive problem, and now God's speaking to you as I'm talking, and he's showing you how helpless you are. You've tried a lot of things. It's not working.

This is how it is when you come with wayward children. You got to get helpless. As long as you're kicking, screaming, fighting, trying to do it on your own, many times you miss what God can do.

But when you get helpless and when you tell God, I don't know what to do. Maybe someone's here facing a situation you don't know what to do. Tell God you don't know what to do.

Don't make believe you don't know what to do. You don't know what to do. I've had a thousand times in my life when I don't know what to do, but I have found when I don't know what to do, God comes and he does incredible things.

How many say amen? I sit on the side there and in the other building, and God knows a thousand times I've told him, God, the meeting's going on. I want to be led, but I don't know what to do, and I don't have the power to do it. God, show me.

God is so faithful to come when you confess your weakness, you confess your lack of wisdom, and you say, God, it's you or nothing. It's you or nothing. I've had so many of those situations.

I'm so glad I went through all of that. Sometimes I block it out because it was very painful. Pressure and starting the church and all of that, or coming to a church that was just fragmented and so tiny, but I'm happy forever.

We were talking, Pastor Tim and I, the battles he went through in Detroit. I'm so happy. I had no rich uncle or some organization I could just call and say, send over 500,000.

I'm a little short this year. I'm so happy that I just don't know what to do. How many are happy when you don't know what to do, and you have no strength? Lift your hand if you know God's going to come then.

God's going to come because he listens to the humble. He resists the proud. The people who don't really feel desperate for his help, the people who think they're smart and can figure it out, he says, okay, you go.

Do it then. But when you come and you crash into a wall enough times, maybe you'll get to the place where I can help you. And then finally he says, we do not know what to do, but we look to you for help.

Now the greatest answers to prayer for revival, wayward children, money, and name anything is when you say, God, you are my father. I know you love me. I'm not coming to some strange mean God.

I'm coming to my father. And God, I don't have a clue, and I don't have the ability, the power to do this, but my eyes are on you. I'm putting my trust in you, God.

That moves the heart of God like it would move any father or mother who had a child that would come to them. Now let me give you one other thing about this story, which has become famous, but unfortunately people have tried to make it the rule of this is the only way God answers prayer. But this was a specific direction that happened in this situation.

But I think it's good for us. We're going to do it tonight to receive answers from God and to bring our needs to him. So what happened? They prayed this great prayer, and then they went out because they had to line up to fight the battle, even though God had said the battle is going to be mine.

So they lined up. And in this sense, they never even fought. But people try to make one incident in the scripture the rule, and you can't do that.

A lot of other victories God gave, they had to fight tooth and nail against the enemy. But there's something interesting about this story with Jehoshaphat. As they're lining up for battle, which they're never going to get involved in, early the next morning, the people went out to the wild country near Tekoa.

And as they were starting out, Jehoshaphat addressed them with these words, people of Judah and Jerusalem, put your trust in the Lord, your God, and you will stand your ground. Believe what his prophets tell you, and you will succeed. After consulting with the people, the king ordered some musicians to put on the robes that they wore on sacred occasions, and to march ahead of the army singing, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, his love is eternal, praise the Lord.

And when they began to sing, the Lord threw the evading armies into a panic. And the verses I've left out, they started attacking each other. Everyone was in everyone's grill, attacking, fighting, and they destroyed each other.

And all the people were doing was, praise the Lord, praise the Lord. They won the battle by singing. And down through church history, many people, when they've laid their knee before the Lord, they have found that God answers when you're praising him.

You present your need. You tell God, you're my father. I have no power to do this.

I can't print the money that's needed for these bills. And I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you. And I'm going to start to praise you and see what you will do.

Notice they didn't praise God after the victory. They praised God before the victory. And when they were singing, that's when it says God threw the enemy into confusion.

And this is very true because sometimes when you pray and you're burdened with a need, you can get negative in your spirit. You can get sad and overwhelmed by it. And that's not good.

You always have to mingle petitions with thanksgiving and praise. So let's bring that up to date in the New Testament. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with what? Why thanksgiving? You're bringing your petitions because you never can really stay with God and in his presence without praising him.

Even if you got three requests and your tears are coming down, you got to give him a hallelujah. You are worthy. You are awesome, God.

Come on, let's put our hands together. You brought me to this place. I count my blessings.

I'm going to praise you. That's why when I'm out in the lobby and I go out on Smith Street, I'm always so happy when I see the people of the faces smiling. I don't care if you cry 10,000 tears here, you got to leave happy.

You don't leave God's house sad. The preacher made you so sad that you even go home sad. What kind of meeting was that? I'd rather not go to church.

Help me say amen. I want to go lay my burdens at the Lord and then begin to praise him. Let's give him one more hand clap of praise.

Jesus, we crown you with praise. Close your eyes with me. Anybody got a situation you walked in with and you say, I can't believe this.

You talked about time sensitive. You talked about a mountain that only God can remove. You talked about Jehoshaphat facing superior forces, not knowing what to do, confessing.

We don't have the power to do this and we don't even know what to do, but our eyes are on you, Father. Our eyes are on you, our God. We can say, Father.

So now God, I'm going to bring it to you. I'm going to lay it at your feet and then I'm going to start praising you and I'm going to believe that angels are going to be sent on a mission while I'm praising you. I believe the Holy Spirit's going to go and do something to help me while I'm praising you before I see anything.

I'm going to praise you before I see the girl come back. I'm going to praise you before I get the job. And as I'm praising you, you're putting it in somebody's mind to call me or to look at my application.

That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to praise you. Anybody here with some real heavy duty problems? We all have needs, but if you have a special burden you came in with, get out of your seat and come on, coming down from the balcony, come on up here.

As the band plays it, just talk to God and tell him what you're facing. Just tell him. Don't anybody move.

Just talk to God now. Tell him you're my father. I don't know what to do.

This thing is way too big for me. I don't have the power. Don't have the money.

Don't have the resources. I have nothing but you. But having you, I have everything.

And my eyes are towards you. Tell him my eyes are on you now, God. You gave Jehoshaphat the victory.

Now give me the victory, Lord. Jesus, thank you for our time together tonight, the prayers for the country, Christians, special needs. And now we bring our mountains to you.

You know the story in everyone's life right now, standing in front of me. And you know my mountain. You are our father.

If we can't talk to you, there's no one we can talk to. You love us so much, you gave us your son. How will you not help us now? But we confess to you that we do not have the power in ourselves to do this.

We don't have the resources. We don't have what's needed. And on top of that, we don't know what to do.

So in ourselves, we're hopeless and helpless. But our eyes are on you. Our trust is in you.

Because you like to take things that are nothing and make them into something. You like to take hopeless things and helpless things. For I read somewhere in your word where you said that your strength is made perfect in weakness.

So we bring our weakness. We stop struggling. We stop worrying.

We stop fighting. And we just take a deep breath and we rest in the arms of our God. We love you, Lord.

We praise you, Lord. Just before we dismiss, give God just some vocal praise now. Just open your mouth and give him hallelujah or praise God.

Now, Lord, get us home safely and help us to invite someone to church that needs Jesus or share Jesus with them. Help us to open our mouths and be bold. Share the love of Jesus.

Help us to give our testimony to someone this week, Lord. Open the doors. Give us an opportunity for the good news.

When we lay in our beds tonight, we're going to give you one last thank you, Jesus. One last hallelujah. We dismiss now in your name.

Be with us, we pray in Christ's name. Everyone said amen. No handshaking.

Got to turn around and hug a

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