

Ambushing Satan With Song

by John Piper

God's people can ambush Satan with song, using it as a means of grace, a weapon against Satan, and a way to banish Satan.

Duration: 31:04

Scripture: Acts 16:22

Topics: "Singing"

Description

In this sermon, John Piper emphasizes the importance of using spiritual songs as a weapon against Satan. He shares the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16, where they were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi for preaching the word of God. Despite their suffering, they chose to sing praises to God, which resulted in a miraculous deliverance. Piper encourages the congregation to give heed to the word of God and sing with all their hearts, reminding them that everyone can sing, regardless of their ability.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org I invite you to turn with me to 2nd Chronicles, chapter 20. 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles.

2nd Chronicles, chapter 20. There are three ways that the Lord protects his people from danger. One way is to allow it to rise up and then to give us strength to meet it and conquer it and defeat it.

Go on in life. And the third way is to allow danger to rise and kill us and be protected from unbelief and cowardice and fear. If you go back just three chapters with me to chapter 17 of this book and look at verse 6, you'll see that there was a king named Jehoshaphat.

We're going to learn about him in chapter 20. And he was a good king. It says, his heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord.

And then look down at verse 10 of that chapter 17. It tells us that the Lord protected him in the first way. The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around about Judah and they made no war against Jehoshaphat.

So they didn't even come against him. But now go with me to chapter 20. In chapter 20, and there might be some connection between what happened in chapter 19, I'll leave that for you to read.

In chapter 20, God releases his sovereign grip upon these nations slightly and they do come against Jehoshaphat. Verse 1, after this, the Moabites and the Ammonites and with them some of the Meumites came against Jehoshaphat for battle. So God has ceased to protect Jehoshaphat in way number one.

Now it's time for him to discover the way the Lord works to protect in way number two. What should we do when God stops protecting us by not allowing our enemies to rise, allows them to arise, attack? How do we respond? Well, I think he develops here or he shows us a pattern. Look at verse 3. Then Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord and proclaim the fast throughout all Judah.

And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord from all the cities of Judah. They came to seek the Lord. So when you're threatened, when your life is threatened or your faith is threatened or your marriage is threatened or your morality is threatened or your children are threatened or the fire of your worship is threatened or the orthodoxy of your seminary is threatened.

Anytime Satan threatens, if we follow Jehoshaphat, we seek the Lord in fasting and prayer. And then he prays. And what a prayer it is.

Let's read it and learn from it. Verse 6, he begins by ascribing sovereign power to God. Oh, Lord, God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? Dost thou not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? In thy hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand thee.

Now, picture this. Jehoshaphat is terrified. He's surrounded by Moabites and Ammonites and people from Mount Seir.

He's scared and he goes to prayer. And the first thing he does is exalt the sovereignty of God. Let's learn to pray from Jehoshaphat.

Even when you are so frightened, your insides are falling apart. Your whole life seems to be unraveling like strings and you go to prayer and you fall on your face. Let the first thing you do be to say, oh, God, are you not God in heaven? Are not all power and authority in your hand so that none can resist you? And when you begin praying like that, even in desperation, a power comes into your life and into the rest of your praying.

And you're able to lay hold on God for his promises. Then in verse seven, he recounts some historical underpinnings for his confidence in God's sovereignty. Didst thou not, oh, our God, drive out the inhabitants of the land before thy people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham, thy friend? In other words, let's mingle into our prayers, exalting in what God's done, whether it's in biblical history or your history.

Did you not give me a sermon three weeks ago? You will give me one again. You got to pray like that when you're desperate sometimes. Recall the things that the Lord has done in the past.

And then in verses eight and nine, he remembers that the people had once built a house for the Lord. They had dedicated to the name of God. They had said whenever they meet there, God would hear them and answer them.

And then in verses 10 to 11, he describes their plight. Lord, we're surrounded. Moab, Abban, Mount Seir, they're coming against us.

And then here comes this beautiful, childlike, helpless plea from this great king. Verse 12. Oh, our God, wilt thou not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us.

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon thee. Isn't that last line beautiful? You ever prayed like that? I pray like that all the time. I go to the long-range planning committee, try to figure out how to handle growth here, and whether we should build, whether we should multiply services, whether we should move.

And I just say to the Lord, Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you. And then the rest of this chapter becomes a great affirmation of encouragement for people who pray like that, because the Holy Spirit falls on a prophet named Jehaziel. And Jehaziel comes to Jehoshaphat with the word of the Lord.

And listen to what he says. Verse 15. Hearken, all Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat.

Thus says the Lord to you, fear not, be not dismayed at this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Verse 17. You will not need to fight in this battle.

Take your position. Stand still. See the victory of the Lord on your behalf.

Oh, Judah and Jerusalem, fear not and be not dismayed. Tomorrow, go out against them. The Lord will be with you.

So Jehoshaphat had cried, I don't know what to do, but I look to you. And God had answered, I'll take it. It's my battle.

And my guess is that you face problems every day and you've just given up on knowing how to pray. Don't know how to pray. But you say that to God.

I don't know how to pray, but my eyes are steadfastly fixed on you. God will hear that and he'll say, the battle's mine. Relax, don't fear.

Now, here comes the response to this great promise of God. Verse 18. Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground.

And all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. And then something very strange and different happens. Some group stands up.

Everybody else is on their face. This group stands up. Starts praising God with a loud voice.

Verse 19. The Levites of the Kohathites and the Korites stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. Now, who were these people? Well, let's go back.

If you want to find out for yourself, turn with me to 1 Chronicles 6, verse 31. And we'll find out who they were and why they just stood up and started praising the Lord. 1 Chronicles 6, verse 31.

The writer is listing for us the families of the tribe of Levi. Remember, Levi was one of the twelve tribes and he had sons. Kohath was one of them.

And there were different assignments in the temple ministry to these different sons. Verse 31 of 1 Chronicles says, These are the men whom David put in charge of the services song in the house of the

Lord after the ark rested there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem and they performed their service in due order.

These are the men who served and their sons of the sons of the Kohathites. And then he lists the descendants of Kohath, the sons of Levi. In other words, the people who stood up in 2 Chronicles 20, verse 19, weren't merely a group of spontaneous people rising to give praise to the Lord.

Although I hope we'll always have people like that around. They were the choir of Israel appointed by King David long ago. They're a group who ever since David's time and even earlier at the tabernacle had led in the ministry of song.

Now, we're not done with these people. The worship time is over. They get ready to meet the enemy the next morning, says they rise early.

And then the king, he is a great king. Look what he does in verse 20. Picture him standing at the gate of the city.

They're marching out in files. All the people. It's a great time.

And he's standing there. Hear me, Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in the Lord your God.

You will be established. Believe his prophets and you will succeed. The king just as the ranks go by.

This king shouts exhortation and encouragement to the people as they go by. That's what a pastor ought to do every Sunday. Believe God.

Believe the prophets and you will be established. Trust the promises of God. That's what we ought to be doing to each other.

If you want a verse to put on your mirror alongside that prayer that the word run and be glorified, wouldn't that be a great one? Believe in the Lord your God and you will be established. So simple. So powerful.

Then he appoints frontline troops and they aren't charioteers and they aren't swordsmen. They are singers. Jehoshaphat aims to conquer Moab with a choir.

God had said the battle is mine to fight. And Joshua says, well, let's put the choir at the front. Verse 21.

And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy array as they went before the army and say, give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever. In other words, shouts of victory before the battle commences because God had promised it. I think the writer of this book wants us to learn from verse 22 that even though victory belongs to God, the singing of the choir is the occasion for the victory.

Verse 22. When they began to sing, underline it. When they began to sing in praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who came against Judah so that they were routed.

I don't know how he did this, but he's done it before in redemptive history. First of all, Moab and Ammon turn on Mount Seir, wipe them out. Then they turn on each other and wipe each other out.

And the defeat is so great that it takes three days for Josaphat and people of Judah to gather the booty. They didn't raise a finger. They just sang to the Lord.

Now, here is the exhortation for us that I draw out of this story. Spiritual worship and spiritual warfare should be carried out with singing. Verse 19.

When they all fell down the worship, the choir stood up to sing. Verse 21. When they all went out to fight, the choir was at the head of the troops.

Even more than that, I think this writer wants us to learn from verse 22 that the enemies of God are thrown into confusion by the songs of the saints. The enemies of God are thrown into confusion by the songs of the saints. Or, to put it one more way, God has appointed the use of spiritual songs as an effective weapon against Satan, his archenemy.

Now, let me try to confirm these lessons with a story from the New Testament. You know this story by heart. It's in Acts 16.

It's about Paul and Silas. They were in Philippi. And it says in verses 22 to 24, they were stripped, they were beaten with rods, they were thrown in stocks, they were put in the inner chamber of prison.

Now, to get this clear in your head, I want you to imagine yourself walking down Nicolet Mall one afternoon, handing out leaflets, inviting people to come to, oh, let's say, Gloria. In honor of that little pew sitting there. We're going to have Gloria.

A ministry, an outreach, and everybody's fanning out to give out leaflets to invite people to come here to Gloria. And all of a sudden, two guys stand in front of you and start shoving you back and forth between them. And then here come two or three more.

And they start ripping your clothes off. And then they pull out long billy clubs. And for 20 minutes, they just knock you back and forth.

On the head, on the back, on the legs. And you lie there with broken ribs, hollering for help. And the police watch.

It's like they did in Philippi. And then they come over and they put chains around your legs, around your arms. And they drag you across and drop you down a manhole and let you there at night.

Now, don't picture the county jail, because the county jail is paradise compared to the inner chamber of the Philippian jail. And there you are, and it's nighttime, and you don't know if they're going to hang you, cut off your head, drown you in sewer, or let you go in the morning. It's totally up for grabs, and you're half dead anyway.

What would you do? Well, you'd cry and you'd pray. That's what Paul and Silas did. God, get me out of this.

I'd do anything. Save me. Don't let them come back in here.

But they did something else. They sang hymns to God at midnight, it says. Now, I don't know about you, but when I think of that story, and them sitting there with their hands and their legs in stocks in the middle of the night, having been beaten with rods, stripped, cut off from their traveling mates, not knowing what

the future holds, and singing in the middle of the night.

Why? Why were they singing? I think they were singing because they were desperate for a display of power. And they had learned that singing is not merely a response to grace. Singing is a means of grace.

Singing is power. When you sing, the Holy Spirit comes and does something. We saw it.

Jehoshaphat sang with the choir, and Moab and Ammon and Seir killed themselves. And when Paul and Silas sang, it says, God shook the prison and let them loose. And surely the lesson is, there is power when the people of God sing.

Now, if you have read the book that we've been trying to sell, Dick Eastman's book, *The Hour That Changes the World*, there's a little chapter in there on singing and your personal devotions. And it tells some stories in there. You would have remembered two of them.

One is of Mary Schlosser, who was a missionary to China. And it says that Mary used to say, I sing the doxology and dismiss the devil. And Amy Carmichael, without any connection with Mary Schlosser, as far as I know, used to say, I believe truly that Satan cannot endure it, and so slips out of the room, more or less, when there is a true song.

Then listen to Martin Luther. Music is a fair and lovely gift of God, which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching. Music drives away the devil and makes people gay.

Next, after theology, I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor. I would not change what little I know of music for something great. Experience proves that next to the word of God only, music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart.

We know that to the devil's music is distasteful and insufferable. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues. Just like David did for Saul, remember? Again and again.

It's no wonder that Satan does his best to keep us from being a singing church. Satan does his best to keep you from being a singing person. I don't think these testimonies of Mary Schlosser and Amy Carmichael and Martin Luther, and I could add William Law and Jonathan Edwards, I was collecting a whole bunch of them yesterday.

I don't think they are pious platitudes that sort of mean, well, of course, everybody feels a little better when they sing. It's sort of an emotional pill that you can take to add spice to your worship. I don't think that's what they mean.

I think what they are saying is strictly and terribly true. Satan flees before the spiritual singing of God's people. I'll tell you a story why I'm so convinced of that.

Four years ago, I got a phone call, 10.30 at night, and the person on the other end said, there's a woman in this apartment who is demon possessed, would you come over? Alright, I'll come over. I called Tom Steller on the phone, Tom, would you go with me? Sure, we go, wives stay home and pray. I don't know what we'll find.

What we find is an apartment with about five young Christian women and one young man, who will not let this woman out of this apartment. Glazed eyes, bitter, with a little pen knife in her hand, threatening. For

two hours, I talked to this woman, read scripture, and read prayers of deliverance.

It comes to a head where she starts getting very violent. She knocks the Bible out of my hand, she rips the paper out of my hand, she pounds on my back. About one o'clock in the morning, when the word of God and the force of evil were at their fever pitch, one of those young women started to sing.

And what they sang was the little phrase, Hallelujah. And she became vicious, threatened everyone if we wouldn't stop singing. She fell on the ground, screamed for Satan not to leave her, went into convulsions, and then went limp.

And when she came to, she didn't have any idea what had happened. She was willing to take the Bible and read Romans 8 and pray with us. So if you tell Tom and me that battle with Satan in song is a kind of pious pill, we'll say, for us that night, it felt like life and death.

And it has ever since had that quality about it. It ought to have that quality about it in the church. I believe that when God moves us to sing from the Holy Spirit, Satan is frustrated in our midst.

I want to close with two applications of what we've seen. One is, you received in the bulletin, I hope, this little Bible bookmark that Terry Nelson has put together for us coming off of prayer week. There's a big square on the back of it here with 32 worship songs, some more familiar than others, perhaps, that we sing regularly here at Bethlehem.

And the point of this is to have something in your Bible so that when you get alone with God, you can just begin to sing to Him by yourself or use it in your family. I got up at 5 o'clock this morning, lay this in front of me at my place of prayer, and I sang for 10 minutes. I can sing real good, and I don't care.

God doesn't care either, I don't think. But 10 minutes of song at the beginning of a time of prayer banishes Satan. It has great power.

Don't let Satan deceive you out of that power or privilege by saying, I can't sing. Some of you are thinking that right now. I can't sing.

That's not true. You can sing. Everybody in this room can sing.

Not everybody can sing well, and not everybody can lead, and not everybody can perform, and not everybody can stay on the notes. Everybody can sing. If Jim Lindholm can sing, and he can, we are put to shame if we don't sing.

If you've got a four-year-old, I've had four four-year-olds, and they come home from Sunday school, and they say, I've got a song. Can I sing you a song, Daddy? Sure. And what comes out of their mouth is three songs, three tunes, and four sets of lyrics.

All jumbled up. And they stop. What do you feel like? You know what you feel like? There's a song in my son's heart.

That's all you feel. And if somebody comes along and says, that's a lousy song, you would do just what God did to Moab. You'd flatten them.

Or you'd shake the jail. You see, when God hears his children sing, he looks around and says, where's an enemy? You don't have to worry about whether you can sing or not. If you're a daddy and you've ever

heard a four-year-old sing, you'll sing.

And then one last application with regard to the corporate ministry of singing. This text teach that the gifted singers among us are appointed to leadership in the choir, or some form of leadership ministry in music. The Levites, in particular the Kohithites, were appointed by David to do the ministry of song in the temple, to lead the others in song, to hold before the Lord a continual offering of music to the Lord.

And so it is at Bethlehem. This choir that sings with us is not here to turn this service into a nice aesthetic experience for the pleasure of artsy types among us. They are here to do warfare.

Dean Palermo was not called full-time at the beginning of this year to be a kind of musical artist in residence. He has been called as a company commander. His job is to take the leadership of the company of the singers and do battle against Satan, to lead us to God in worship, to lead us to each other in love, and to lead us out down there to those places and plunder the death camps of Satan.

That's his job. I told him a few weeks ago, I said, Dean, I want you to give some thought to something. You figure out and then tell me why the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force all have bands.

And the promise we have as Christians is far greater than the promise that Jahaziel got from the Lord. All authority in heaven and on earth is mine. Go, make disciples.

I will be with you to the end of the age. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live.

And he who lives and believes on me will never die. That's power. So, we put the choir at the front ranks, right up here, and we say, fight every Sunday.

Let me close with one last story. Jim Elliott, you remember? January 8, 1956. Jim Elliott, Nate Saint, and three others.

They were there at the river waiting to see whether the Alcas would come out, the Indians to whom they were going to minister. The last word that the headquarters received from them, according to Elizabeth Elliott in her book, *The Shadow of the Almighty*, was that they sang a hymn before they crossed over. And what they sang was this.

We go in faith our own great weakness feeling, needing more each day thy grace to know, yet from our hearts a song of triumph peeling. We rest on thee and in thy name we go. And they all got killed before 4.30 in the afternoon.

And God protected them. He protected them from unbelief, from cowardice, from fear, from going home and buying a house in the suburbs and saying, somebody else can reach the Alcas. There was victory on that afternoon.

It's reverberated over the last 30 years and it'll continue on into eternity. There are two weapons that we have to fight Satan with in worship, the word of God and song. I beseech you, give heed to the word and sing with all your heart.

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