

JHOSHAPHAT'S FOUR STEPS TO VICTORY

Overcoming Besetting Sins

2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Introduction

1. Every *sincere* believer is engaged in the spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:12):
 - a. It is a daily warfare (Luke 9:23) that requires exercising daily discipline (1 Corinthians 9:27). Our survival depends on renewing the inward man day-by-day (2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:10; Romans 12:2).
 - b. God has not left us to fight this spiritual war on our own: (i) He has promised to be with us (Hebrews 13:5; Psalms 23:4; Isaiah 43:1-2), (ii) He has provided access to His throne of grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16), (iii) He has provided spiritual armor and a spiritual weapon (Ephesians 6:10-17; Romans 13:12), (iv) He has put a limit on Satan's power (1 Corinthians 10:13; James 4:7), (v) He has provided other *sincere* believers to encourage us: "Exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13), (vi) He provides a perspective to help us endure (Hebrews 12:4; 1 Peter 5:8-9), (vii) He assures us of victory (Matthew 4:3-11; James 4:7; Revelation 12:9-11; 1 John 5:4).
2. Every *sincere* believer that is pursuing holiness (Hebrews 12:14; 2 Corinthians 7:1) and striving against sin (Galatians 5:17) will find there is one or more besetting sins¹ with which he particularly struggles: of the heart, of the flesh, of the tongue, etc.
 - a. Every sincere Christian that has put off the old man (Colossians 3:8-11) and is pursuing holiness (Hebrews 12:14) will be able to identify with this passage:

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:14-25).
 - b. It is comforting to know that even the great apostle Paul struggled with sin, but we must not allow that feeling to breed complacency²; it is essential to conquer *all* sin in our lives (1 John 3:9; 5:18).
3. Surely we all know the feeling that Paul expresses and the despair of trying to overcome a particular sin. Surely we have all cried out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Is there an answer? Indeed! "I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The answer, of course, is elliptical, but there is no doubt about what he is saying, that God through Jesus Christ will deliver him.
4. How does God, through Jesus Christ, accomplish the victory? The account of Jehoshaphat's victory over the people of Ammon, Moab, and Edom that came against him provides an answer. There are four steps we need to take if we want to have victory over our enemy, sin.

Jehoshaphat, king (c. 873–c. 849 BC) of Judah during the reigns in Israel of Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram, with whom he maintained close political and economic alliances. Jehoshaphat aided Ahab in his unsuccessful attempt to recapture the city of Ramoth-gilead, joined Ahaziah in extending maritime trade, helped Jehoram in his battle with Moab, and married his son and successor, Jehoram, to Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab. In Judah he reorganized the army and attempted to centralize political power through a series of religious and legal reforms.

¹ A sin with which we particular wrestle and have great difficulty in putting off; it is what we might refer to as "My weakness".

² "A feeling of quiet pleasure or security, often while unaware of some potential danger, defect, or the like; self-satisfaction or smug satisfaction with an existing situation, condition, etc." (Dictionary.com).

STEP #1: ADMIT YOU ARE POWERLESS

1. Jehoshaphat cut through the peripheral issues and simply stated the truth: "For we have no power against this great multitude" (20:12). Judah was powerless against such a mighty army. Jehoshaphat went on to say, "Nor do we know what to do" (20:12). While actually verbally expressed here, it was unsaid earlier (see 20:3).
2. Jehoshaphat didn't say that he did not have enough power, and he did not ask for a little help - He admitted that they were powerless. They had no power, no might against their enemy. All the strength and might they could muster would amount to nothing against such a formidable enemy.
3. Isn't this true in our struggle against besetting sins? We are fighting an enemy so strong that every bit of strength we might muster would amount to nothing. In verse three of the song "Stand Up! Stand Up For Jesus", we sing: "Stand up! stand up for Jesus! Stand in His strength alone; The arm of flesh will fail you; Ye dare not trust your own." Your struggle against sin is proof that you have not been defeated.
4. Let us examine ourselves carefully: true, there are some sins that we may have conquered, but what about those we haven't? It is those sins that we are tempted to justify or simply ignore, but we must conquer them or they will conquer us. "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Genesis 4:4).

"Thus says Jehovah: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from Jehovah'".

STEP #2: BELIEVE GOD CAN GIVE YOU VICTORY

1. Admitting you are powerless doesn't mean the battle is over and that you might as well just give up and surrender to the enemy. Jehoshaphat admitted he was powerless, but he did not surrender to Ammon, Moab, and Edom - He turned to God (20:3-4). Jehoshaphat wanted to defeat the enemy. He knew that Judah was powerless, but he also knew that God is powerful: "In Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You" (20:6). Jehoshaphat believed that God would hear and save them, that God will be victorious (20:9).
2. We, too, must believe that we can be victorious through Christ our Savior. As John says, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith" (1 John 5:4). Building up our faith in God as victor leads to victory (cp. Romans 10:17). Remember, God has already conquered sin and death through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) and "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).
3. We will, then, be victorious through faith in God. As Jehoshaphat exhorted the people: "Believe in Jehovah your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (20:20). He told the people to believe in the message God gave through His prophets and they would be victorious. Note: He did not encourage them to believe in their weapons or prowess, but to believe in the Lord God. Faith in the right One is the victory.

STEP #3: SEEK THE LORD IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE

1. When Jehoshaphat acknowledged his powerlessness and recognized that God alone possessed the power and might to win the victory (20:6), he "set his face to seek the Lord" along with all Judah (20:3). When we recognize our powerlessness in the face of a besetting sin and acknowledge that God alone has all power and might, then we realise that our victory over sin demands that we seek the Lord with all our hearts.
2. How did Jehoshaphat and Judah seek the Lord? They fasted (20:3), gathered at the temple to worship (20:5), and prayed (20:6). We, too, must seek the Lord: we can spend time in God's word (Psalm 1:1-2; 119:9-16), pray (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), fast (Matthew 6:16-18), and assemble with the saints (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:46-47). The key, though, is not in these actions themselves - after all, how many times have we told ourselves if we just spend more time reading the Bible, praying, and attending services regularly, we could overcome some sin and failed? - the key is our motivation - to seek God.

"Seek Jehovah while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

"Seek Jehovah and His strength" (1 Chronicles 16:11).

"If you seek Him, He will be found by you" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

3. We must be aware of pride. (i) Have you ever made a mistake, corrected it, and only then confessed to your brethren that you messed up and put it right? Isn't this boasting in your own might? Do we want to do the same thing with God: defeat a besetting sin and only then go to God to boast of our victory? Many fail to overcome a besetting sin because of pride. Seeking God is the proof of humility.

STEP #4: DO WHATEVER GOD SAYS

1. Someone might express a concern: "You say we must admit we are powerless to overcome a besetting sin, but won't it encourage people to do nothing?!" I understand the concern, but I believe it is unwarranted. Admitting that "I am powerless" is not a statement of surrender, it is a plea to the Almighty God for help; a plea for guidance and instruction. When someone admits their own powerlessness, comes to believe in God's power, and seeks the Lord, they will not think they just have to sit down and do nothing. In fact, they will pursue quite the opposite course.
2. Notice what happened with Jehoshaphat: speaking through the prophet Jahaziel, God told Jehoshaphat and all of Judea not to be afraid; instead they were instructed to go out against the enemy the next day. God told them where to go and what to do. He told them not to fight; instead, He instructed them to simply stand firm and hold their position (20:13-17). What did Jehoshaphat and Judah do? They did exactly what God told them to do. Think for a moment about how hard it was to do that. Can you imagine walking out to face an enemy that you know can destroy you and simply doing nothing? But they did do something! They surrendered to the will of God.
3. If we want victory over our enemy, we do not think, "I won't do anything, God will do everything." Rather, because we know He has all power and might (20:6), we do whatever He instructs us to do; even if we can't understand how it will bring victory. When we do what God instructs, we are surrendering our will to His will; He is the power; we are not. We have tried to conquer some besetting sin by our own power but failed again and again, but then we realise that we are powerless and we turn to God. Jehoshaphat prayed, "...nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are you" (20:12). Rather than thinking of doing absolutely nothing, he sought God's will.

Seeking victories our own way fails, but God's way works. For instance, Joshua was instructed to march around the city of Jericho thirteen times over a period of seven days and then watch the walls fall (Joshua 6:1-20). Gideon was instructed to whittle his army down to three-hundred and then watch the Lord bring them victory (Judges 7:1-25). Whatever God says, just do it. He is the power; we are not.

Conclusion

1. Every *sincere* Christian is engaged in a spiritual warfare; we battle every day against the fiery darts that Satan fires at us. By our own power and might we will not survive on the battle-field; the enemy will surely wound us and kill us. If, however, we look to God, then He will provide all that we need to be victorious.
2. While there are sins that we find easy to put off, there are other sins that are very difficult to overcome; sins that may be quite obvious to everyone or that are only known to ourselves (of course, God is aware of all our sins). These besetting sins cause us great distress and we are further distressed when we fail to defeat them time-after-time-after-time. There comes a point when we cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" The answer is Jesus Christ – He will deliver us.
3. The account we have studied today shows how Jehoshaphat and Judea were victorious over an enemy that they knew they were unable to defeat. Yet they defeated their enemies by the power and might of God. In this lesson we noted four steps that led to their victory, and these are steps that we can apply in defeating the Goliaths in our own lives:
 - a. Admit that you are powerless.
 - b. Believe that God can give you the victory.
 - c. Seek the Lord in every possible way.
 - d. Do whatever God says is necessary to defeat your sin. What God requires us to do to defeat a besetting sin can only be known by studying the scriptures.