

THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

2 Chronicles 17-20

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We live in an hour of human history that is experiencing a significant *crisis of decline*. All around us we are witnessing an ever-increasing full-frontal assault on the things of God and his natural order for creation. We experience this in our time as cultural and societal revolutions that have been at work within our society for several generations are coming to maturity.
- B. Our moment is marked by the widespread decay of public morality, the intentional destruction of institutions, and the growing celebration of immorality and deception on a global scale.
- C. Many feel the effects of this dramatic and seismic transitional period of history. For many years the normative experience has been unrest and uncertainty at every level: cultural, societal, political, economic, and relational.
- D. At the same time, we are experiencing one of the fastest and most comprehensive transitions within the church as people are leaving, deconstructing, and even walking away from Jesus at an unprecedented rate. Over the next decade, the church will only experience an increase to the difficulties we face and the need to understand how to live as witnesses to Christ in the midst of the new world we live in.
- E. The Scriptures warn of days when a society casts off the ways of God and exchanges truth for wholesale evil.

²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ³“Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” (Ps 2.2-3)

¹²And because lawlessness is increased, the love of many will grow cold. (Matt 24.12)

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared (1 Tim 4.1-2)

- F. The question facing the people of God in this moment is *what do we do?* Many are recognizing the changing season and realizing that what has worked in the past season can no longer work now. Yet, many are uncertain of the way forward.
- G. As we have preached through Chronicles (specifically 2 Chronicles), we have seen that God has given his people a pattern for pursuing renewal as they walk through seasons of hardship, opposition, and even chastening.

¹⁴if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chr 7.14)

- H. God desires that his people return to him, seek his face, and orient the whole of their lives around true worship and obedience to his commandments.

¹⁶Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ ¹⁷I set watchmen over you, saying, ‘Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not pay attention.’ (Jer 6.16-17)

- I. The story of Jehoshaphat gives us a portrait of two temptations that come against God’s people when faced with the pressure of difficulty and spiritual warfare and give us a portrait of the weapons that God gives us to stand and wage war in the battle — which ultimately belongs to the Lord.

II. THE TWO TEMPTATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT

- A. The story of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17-20) provides a helpful picture of how to engage in seasons of increased uncertainty and pressure. At these times, the people of God are often faced with the temptations of *activism* and *quietism*.
- B. *Activism* is the temptation that Christians face to get out and forge change in the world in the name Jesus apart from the means that he has ordained to expand his kingdom.
- C. In 2 Chronicles 18, we see the dire result of Jehoshaphat's attempt to bring peace and unity according to his own means.

¹Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. ²After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. And Ahab killed an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilthead. ³Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilthead?" He answered him, "I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war." (2 Chr 18.1-3)

1. Jehoshaphat seeks unity with Israel (a people in rebellion against God, cf. 2 Chr. 13.6-7) through a marriage alliance between his son Jehoram and Ahab's daughter Athaliah. This marriage alliance becomes a stain on the house of David that nearly causes it to be completely destroyed a generation later (read 2 Chronicles 21-22).
2. The pursuit of peace with Israel leads Jehoshaphat to participate in a sacrificial worship service — likely to the Canaanite god Ba'al.
3. Jehoshaphat joins himself to Ahab and his people rather than remaining joined to the Lord and requiring the people of Israel to return to him.
4. The spirit of activism *seeks godly ends through self-determined means and always ends in compromise*.
5. Paul warned the Corinthian church that light cannot have fellowship with darkness.

¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God (2 Cor 6.14-16)

- D. *Quietism* is the temptation that Christians face to overcorrect and do nothing, falsely assuming that because the battle belongs to the Lord, there is nothing for us to do.
- E. In 2 Chronicles 20, we see Jehoshaphat respond differently to the next crisis. He acknowledges his uncertainty, waits upon the Lord, gathers the people for a fast, and sets out to obey the Lord's command.

³Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴And all Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord... ¹²"O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." ...¹⁴And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel... ¹⁶Tomorrow go down against them... ¹⁷You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you." (2 Chr 20.3-4, 12, 14, 16-17)

- F. To combat the temptations of both activism and quietism requires that we *receive the means that God has granted* his people to partner with him in seeking renewal as he works to expand and establish his kingdom through his church.

III. THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

- A. The difficulty with faithfully pursuing the means that God has given his church to wage war against the kingdom of darkness and see the kingdom of heaven expand is that it *requires faith to believe that these means will accomplish God's ends*.
- B. We struggle to understand how "spiritual means" will work to accomplish "earthly" or "tangible" ends, and so we regularly exchange God's means for "earthly" means.
- C. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to rightly assess the war before them and employ the means that are given by God to further his purpose.

⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Cor 10.4-6)

- D. Jesus told many stories to shape our understanding of the unexpected way his kingdom would advance in and throughout this world.

³¹He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³²It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." ³³He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." (Matt 13.31-33)

- E. We must ask God, in his grace, to give us faith and courage to pursue the ways of transformation and renewal that he has outlined for us in his word. To run after godly ends without pursuing the means that he has given us will end in futility, compromise, and greater dilution of God's truth. However, when God's people pursue God's means in a spirit of faith and obedience, the gates of hell cannot withstand as he drives back darkness, brings people into his kingdom, and releases his power through his church.

¹⁸on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt 16.18)

IV. THE WORD OF GOD (TEACHING & JUDGING)

- A. Jehoshaphat's reign was marked by moments of sincerity and obedience. At the beginning of his reign he sent out officials, Levites, and priests to go throughout the land and instruct the people in the book of God's Law.

⁷In the third year of his reign he sent his officials... ⁸and with them Levites... and with these Levitees, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the Lord with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. (2 Chr 17.7-9)

- B. Later, after the near disastrous alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat further ordered the people around God's word by establishing judges and Levites to administer obedience to God's word among God's people.

⁵He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city... ⁸Moreover, in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the Lord and to decide disputed cases. (2 Chr 19.5, 8)

- C. The first, and primary weapon of our warfare is the word of God. In order to stand firm in the spiritual battle that we are fighting requires that we *grow in our knowledge of God* and that *our lives are conformed in accordance with his ways*.
- D. The only way this happens is through being *instructed* in God's word (teaching) and allowing God's word to *evaluate our beliefs, desires, and actions* (judgment).

- E. The majority of the NT letters deal with Christians needing to align their beliefs with the truth that God has revealed and align their lives in order to live as citizens of his kingdom while sojourning in this world.
- F. The NT epistles invite believers to pursue transformation by standing firm in the knowledge of God and seeking to apply the truth of God's word (the gospel, his kingdom reign) to every part of our lives.

V. WORSHIP (SINGING & PRAYER)

- A. In the face of hardship, difficulty, and severe opposition, Jehoshaphat gathers the people to seek the Lord and call upon his name.

³Then Jehoshaphat... set his face to seek the Lord... ⁴And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord... ¹³Meanwhile all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. (2 Chr 20.3-4, 13)

- B. In this particular battle, Jehoshaphat stationed singers at the head of the people to give thanks and praise to the Lord. The singing of God's people was their 'part' in fighting the Lord's battle.

²¹And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, "Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever."

²²And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. (2 Chr 20.21-22)

- C. The Lord promises that he will be enthroned upon the praises of his people.

³Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel (Ps 22.3)

- D. God invites his people to call upon his name as he waits for us to ask him. He promises to bring speedy justice (release of his kingdom) in response to the petitions of his people.

¹⁸Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him... ¹⁹He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. (Isa 30.18-19)

⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. (Luke 18.7-8)

- E. In Revelation we see the prayers of the saints arise to God like a fragrant incense and are instrumental in releasing his purposes upon the earth.

³another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God... ⁵Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake (Rev 8.3-4)

VI. THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT (PROPHECY)

- A. Throughout this narrative we are shown the need of God's people to receive the spirit of prophecy to rightly see and understand how God is at work in our world.

¹⁸And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left." (2 Chr 18.18)

- B. To rightly understand how we are to respond in our moment requires that our imaginations are trained to see God's sovereignty, the nature of the world, and the ways that he is at work in the world in accordance with God's evaluation. The spirit of prophecy builds the church to stand firm in the midst of this present evil age, as we give testimony to Jesus as the king overall and seek to order out lives as his people.