

2 Chronicles 20.1-22

How to react to a crisis? You have undoubtedly seen that all around us there are many ways of reacting. On social media, we see a lot. We see responses that make us smile, as in Italy, people who go out on their balconies to sing, make music with their neighbors. We see other responses that make you cry. I am thinking in particular of the United Kingdom, of an exhausted nurse who leaves the hospital to go shopping and finds that there is nothing left in the supermarket. And as Christians, we want, in all things, to glorify our Heavenly Father by our way of life. But how can we glorify God in the circumstances such as we are in today? How do we respond to the coronavirus crisis in a way that gives glory to God, that shows the world around us that our God is glorious, that our God is worthy of trust and worship. How can we show our loved ones, our neighbors, our colleagues that God is great, that God is good, that God is to be feared? The world has its eyes fixed on the virus. How do we help people look away from the virus to God? How to react as a Christian to the coronavirus crisis? I am sure the answer to this question is in the chapter before us this morning.

The Fear

This episode takes place during the reign of King Jehoshaphat. No king in the history of Israel or Judah was perfect. But overall, Jehoshaphat was a good king. We read in chapter 17.2 that "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of David." V4: "He sought the God of his father and followed his commandments." He dismantled and destroyed the altars dedicated to false gods and organized a program for teaching the law of God throughout his Kingdom. He is a king who seeks to honor his God. But the desire to serve God, the desire to honor him does not mean that one is safe from danger and threats. And this is the case for Jehoshaphat. In chapter 20 he faces a real threat: "After this the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, and with them other Ammonites came to fight Jehoshaphat."

And we see the intensity of the threat in verses 2, 12 and 15. There is a phrase that is found in these three verses: "A great multitude." It's not a small army coming against him. Danger is near the door of Josaphat. Death, his death is a real possibility. His enemies are coming and they want his blood. And faced with this crisis, this threat, how does the man of God react? Verse 3: "Jehoshaphat was afraid" Josaphat realizes that, humanly speaking, the situation is hopeless. In verse 9 he speaks of the "distress" of the people. In verse 11 he sees the real possibility that God's people will be "driven out" from the land. There is a terrible little sentence in verse 12. The king of the people of God, a man of faith, a man whose life is consecrated to God, he says: "We do not know what to do". Do you hear the fear in his voice? Do you see fear? He is afraid because his life is in danger. He is afraid because there are three armies that are about to kick down the door of his palace. He is afraid because he does not have the resources to resist, to protect himself. He has no control over the situation.

It's a feeling that we know well, isn't it? A feeling of uncertainty. What will happen to us? Will I be safe? Will my loved ones be safe? I see the danger all around me. I am living in a situation that I am unable to manage on my own. The enemy is near. I am afraid for myself, for my family, for today, for tomorrow, for the future. And I know it's not just the coronavirus that scares us. The list of things and situations that scare us is very long.

But when we read our Bible, if one thing is clear, it is that God does not want his people to be afraid or his people to be in fear. A few weeks ago we studied God's words to Abram in Genesis 15.1: "Do not fear, Abram". This is the most repeated command in the Bible. "Do not be afraid." And if these words are found everywhere in the Bible, it is because fearful situations regularly occur in the lives of everyone, including God's people.

The Prayer.

The question before us this morning is not: Am I going to go through trials that will frighten me? We just saw that it happens to all of us. The question is rather, how am I going to react? To what or to whom will I turn?

And Jehoshaphat gives us the answer to verse 3: "Jehoshaphat was afraid and decided to seek the Lord." His reflex, when fear arises in him, is prayer, it is to seek the Lord. Before doing anything, he seeks the face of God. There is no panic. He does not call on his Generals to ask them to find a military solution. He is not looking for a political solution, an agreement with the advancing armies. He turns to God. And that's not all. He asks others around him to do so too. V3 and 4: "He proclaimed a fast for all Judah. Judah gathered to seek the Lord, and people came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord."

You've probably been following the news for the past few days. You have seen the speeches by the President and the Prime Minister, by the mayor in Nantes, perhaps also by the leaders of your country of origin. They seek to comfort. They seek to lead well. We applaud their courage and commitment. We wouldn't like to be in their place. We pray for them as the Bible tells us to do. But what is missing in their speeches? What is missing? God is missing. Prayer is missing. A call to humble oneself before God, a call to fast, to pray. Did you hear it?

But it's too easy to criticize others. What about us? Where do we turn in distress, when we are afraid? According to an article in Le Parisien this week, a large number of French people are turning to alcohol to manage the crisis? Is this really a solution? It's easy to criticize, but is it our reflex to bow down to God? Is it to humble ourselves before Him, to repent? Jehoshaphat hears the bad news and immediately gets on his knees and seeks the face of God. And for you, for me? For us as a church? Is prayer a first reflex, or rather a last resort, when we cannot find our own solution?

And what is he praying for? Let's look at the contents of his prayer to see how to pray in situations of distress, of fear. His prayer is based first on what he knows about God and then what he knows about himself and his people. In this prayer we see a man who knows his God, who trusts his God. We see a humble man who recognizes his helplessness and his need. Have you noticed that it is only at the end of the prayer that he asks God to deliver his people by judging their enemies. There are 7 verses to this prayer and just 1 single request, 10 words in English. So what does he say in this prayer?

Look with me at verses 6 and 7. Before asking anything, Jehoshaphat spends the first half of his prayer remembering the character of God, the exploits of God from the past, God's faithfulness to his Covenant with Abraham, the power and strength of God. Not a single request. Josaphat knows his God. He knows he is sovereign. He knows he is faithful to his

covenant. He knows he is all powerful. Here are the truths about God on which his prayer is based. He knows his God. He has confidence in Him.

And then I said that his prayer is based on what he knows about himself and his people. He talks about the past commitment of the people of God. The people had committed to call for help (v9): "If a misfortune happens to us, the sword, judgment, pestilence or famine, we will stand before this house and before you, because your name is in this house. We will call you to help from the midst of our distress." God's people had promised before God to turn to Him in all difficult circumstances, to ask them to come to help, to ask God to save.

And in verse 12 we still see a truth, a reality, a confession which prompts the king to pray. Verse 12, the last sentence: "We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you." One commentator says of this phrase that it is "one of the finest expressions of humility and trust in God that can be found in the Bible." "We don't know what to do. Our eyes are on you". We have no doubt prayed this prayer these past few days, faced with this virus which is ravaging the whole world. We don't know what to do Lord. We have no solutions, no answers. But our eyes are on you. We prayed that on Thursday when we learned that Sonia's husband had been admitted to hospital.

And this prayer should be ours, a prayer is based on what we know about God and what we know about ourselves. It is ours at the very beginning of Christian life and then throughout Christian life too. At the beginning of Christian life we pray this from the heart of our distress! Conscious of our spiritual distress, aware of our spiritual helplessness, of the enormous debt of our sin, of the coming judgment, we call for help. "God, save me, otherwise I die. I do not know what to do. My eyes are on you. Come to my rescue. Save me. God have mercy on me a sinner. Isn't this the beginning of our Christian life? And God listens and God saves. And we pray to God knowing that he is a God of grace, forgiveness and love but also a God who judges sin and who will judge our sin if we do not turn from it.

Those who cry out to him, God takes them out of the mud of their sin. He brings them out from death, from judgment and gives them life in Christ, he delivers them from the grip of Satan, from death, from judgment. It's the beginning of Christian life. We're here this morning to talk about how we have to respond to a crisis, but this is the biggest crisis we have to respond to. The crisis of God's judgment against our sin? Have you ever cried out to God like that? Conscious of the character of God, of his brilliant holiness, of his grace and his forgiveness, aware of your own misery, your own need, your helplessness, have you ever cried "Save me" to God? This is by far the biggest crisis for all of us.

But this prayer is also the prayer of the Christian throughout his life because misfortune, the sword, judgment, pestilence and famine are part of the life of the Christian here on earth. But the more we know our God, the more we will cry out to Him. The more we recognize our helplessness, our total dependence on God, the more we will bow down to Him. What do our children do when they are in distress? They shout "Mum! Dad!" They shout "Mommy, Daddy" because they know "Mommy and Daddy" love them. They run to the arms of their parents. Let us do the same. Let us run to the arms of our Almighty Father, our compassionate father. Let us cry "Abba, father"? Prayer

The Word

How does God answer Jehoshaphat's prayer? the answer is found in verse 14: " And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel" V15 "And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you,"

In the distress of his people, God sends his Word. And said to his people, "Listen! Thus says the Lord to you."

We will look at what the Lord says later, but let me highlight an important lesson here. When we find ourselves in the most difficult and frightening situations, God's response is always to tell us, "Listen to my word. Hear my word. It is through my word that I will give you comfort. I will use my Word to support you, to strengthen you, to guide you. Pay attention to it."

And if you're a Christian, this has been your experience, right, not only in the last few days, but from the day God started working in your heart. Time and time again, God has touched your heart with His Word. God uses his word first to convince you of your sin, of your need for him to save, and then, by his word, he directs you to Jesus. And then he continues to use it to strengthen you, to correct you, to console you. Dear friends, God speaks to us. Let's be listen to what he tells us. His Word consoles. His Word gives life. It shows us the way to God.

And look again at verse 15 to see exactly the Word given by God through the mouth of Yahaziel: "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde" God first tells His people not to fear, while recognizing that the threat is very real. He says it again in verse 17: "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed." And then he says why they should not fear. V15: "For this is not your battle, but God's" In verse 17 God says, "You will see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf." He says, if you come out of this crisis, it will be thanks to me. It will be I who will act in your favor. It will be I who will save you. It will be I who will give you the victory.

He gives a promise of his presence, v17: "The Lord will be with you!" Is it possible to think of more appropriate words in this situation? Is it possible to think of more reassuring words? God promises to act to save. God promises his presence. God exhorts his people not to fear. Yes, the enemy is real. The danger is very real. The threat is there, but God is there, with his people, and He will work for his people. He will act so that the world can see the glory and power of God. And that's how God has always acted and that's how God will act forever. He acts for his people, for their good, for their salvation. He acts to make known his faithfulness, his greatness, his power, his salvation. And God will also act in these days. He will act to manifest his power. He will act to show his salvation. He will act despite our weakness. He will act for the ultimate good of his people and for the advancement of his Kingdom. And he asks us not to fear. He will act in his own time and in his own way to accomplish his will. Be comforted by these words and these promises. Be comforted by the promise of God's presence with you. Be comforted by the promise of his manifest salvation. It is not your fight but God's.

The Praise

How do we react when God speaks to us as he speaks to his people here? How do we react when God reveals Himself in this way, when his powerful word comes with all his strength, when God promises his presence, his peace, his salvation? How are we to react? Jehoshaphat gives us the answer to verse 18: "Jehoshaphat bowed, his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord to bow down to him." They bow down before the Lord. They

bow down to worship him, to praise him. Verse 19 tells us that the Levites "arose to praise the Lord God of Israel with a very loud voice." In verse 20, Jehoshaphat encourages the people to stand firm in their trust in God, in their trust in their word given by the prophets. In verse 21 we read: "They said "Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever" and while the people worship God, God is defeating the armies that advance against Judah . God's people, in extremely difficult circumstances, faced with a very threatening and very real danger, they place their trust in God. They bow before God. They praise God before they even see God's salvation, before they even see God at work.

Dear friends, this passage does not tell us that during our worship this morning, God will miraculously eradicate the coronavirus, that he will cure all those who are affected by it. And this is the challenge for us. Can we praise the Lord God even before we see his salvation, even before he intervenes to save? Can we bow down to God if we have not seen Him working to save? The people bow down before seeing the salvation of God. Can we do it? The answer is "yes", we can praise him, we can worship him, bow down to him, and we do it because in fact we have already seen his salvation. We have already seen him at work to save. We have already seen his healing. We've already seen him give life. We saw it when his Son Jesus died on the cross to save us, to cure us of a disease much more serious than the coronavirus. We worship God because we have seen him give life, eternal life, life with him forever. We worship God because God saw a suffering world, a world with the disease of sin and God sent his son Jesus into this world to end the suffering. God has already shown compassion, grace, mercy, and that's why we pray, we bow down, and put our lives in his hands. And that's what we're doing this morning. We confess our fear. Conscious of the character of God, of our own helplessness, we pray. Our eyes are on Him. He comforts us with his word, with his promises. We cry to God and bow down to him to worship him and await the salvation of our God. May God help us to respond to all crisis in a way that will bring glory to him.