

A God Who Upholds the Cause of His People

2Chronicles 6:34-35 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 20 June 2010 00:00

2 Chronicles 6:34-35 *No God Like You: A God Who Upholds the Cause of His People* **Wh ***en the Floor Drops Out Beneath You*****

A week ago last Thursday, while we were doing the closing session for Vacation Bible School, my cell phone buzzed. I checked the caller i.d. and saw it was my Mom, so I decided to answer it.

Earlier in the week, my Dad was admitted to the hospital. He had congestive heart failure—a lot of fluid built up in his body and his heart was out of rhythm. It was scary—Dad's not had a big history of heart problems—but neither he nor my Mom were all that concerned. They were finding him some medicine to get his heart back in rhythm and then they were going to send him home.

In fact, before I answered the phone, that's what I assumed Mom was calling about—to tell me they were on their way home. But as soon as I heard her voice, I knew it was something serious. She said: "Russ (she calls me Russ, but she's my Mom, so she can get away with it) Russ, can you come to the hospital? They think he has cancer."

I felt like I was standing in an elevator and somebody had just cut the cable. My stomach got tight and my knees got weak. It certainly wasn't something anybody in our family was expecting to learn.

Over the course of the last weekend the doctors ran some more tests and found he has lung cancer that has spread to his liver. Thankfully, they have found no evidence of it spreading anywhere else—not in his bones or his brain—and while it is a rapidly growing cancer they also feel like chemotherapy can be pretty effective against it. Dad started chemo on Tuesday and has a great attitude about it—he's going to fight it as hard as possible.

Now, I know many of you have gone through something like this with your own parents. Some of you have experienced cancer or some other chronic illness yourselves. Others have known the crushing loss of a child or the brutal pain of a failed relationship. Some of you have suddenly lost jobs or found yourselves in financial desperation because of somebody else's bad choices.

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And I imagine that when those things happened you were asking the same questions I was asking when I learned about my Dad: “Why? Why is this happening to him? Where’s God? How could God let this happen?”

When Your People Go to War...

I’ve really had to wrestle with these questions this week because of the title of this week’s sermon. “A God who Upholds the Cause of His People.” That’s not something I decided to preach after I found out about Dad’s cancer. I’ve had that on the schedule for months.

You see, we’re in a series of sermons based on 2 Chronicles 6—the prayer King Solomon prayed on the day of dedication for the temple. It’s a prayer that begins with Solomon saying: “O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth.” And then Solomon goes on to make requests that highlight the incomparable nature of God. So we’ve been using the prayer to learn about God. To understand Him better.

And the next part of the prayer—the verses we’re scheduled to look at today—are

2 Chronicles

6:34

-35

. Here’s what they say:

34

“When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to you toward this city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name,

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then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause.

□

The thing that stood out to me about these verses is the idea that God takes a special interest in the needs of His people.

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Two weeks ago we saw that God is not a tribal God. While Solomon is the King of Israel, he is very aware that people from distant lands would be praying in this temple. He knows that God's desire is for the fame of His name to spread to all the peoples of the earth. God is a global God.

And yet, Solomon also sees a special relationship between God and His chosen people Israel. He can pray—with apparent confidence—that if Israel goes to war God will answer their prayers for help. God has a love for all people, but He has a special saving, preserving love for those who belong to Him.

And so, my idea was to talk about what it means for God to be on our side. I wanted to do a message on how God is in the corner of those who belong to Him.

But the events of the last couple of weeks have made this pretty personal for me. It's gone from an interesting idea on the pages of scripture to a crucial piece of theology for my family. What does it mean to say that God is on our side? What does it mean for God to uphold the cause of His people?

A Comic Book Script?

This idea—that God upholds the cause of his people—put me in mind of another passage where the promise of God to be on our side is even more sweeping.

Romans 8:31

, which says:

31

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

If God is for us—if God is on our side—then who can be against us? The implied answer to this question is obvious: nothing and no one. With God in our corner, absolutely nothing can stand against us.

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That's a pretty big, breathtaking promise.

But what does it mean? Is it like the plot of a comic book? Are we like this nerdy bunch of nobodies with all these forces of evil arrayed against us; but when evil attacks, do we simply pull open our shirts to reveal a giant "G" stamped on our chests and a "God cape" on our shoulders and all the evil doers turn and flee? Is that how this works?

If God is for us, does that mean He's like a giant Ironman suit that encases us and prevents anything bad from ever touching us? Is He like the world's largest rabbit's foot?

It's tempting to read Solomon's prayer request that way. If the people go to war, Solomon makes it sound like all they have to do is turn in the right direction and say the right words, and victory is pretty much guaranteed. If they just take God into battle with them, they'll win every time.

But it doesn't work that way. In fact, just a few generations earlier, the Israelites tried carrying the ark of the covenant into battle against the Philistines like some sort of "God force field" and they ended up getting routed and even having the ark taken from them.

My Dad's experience shows that faith in God is no guarantee against tough times. Those of you who have encountered tragedy know that being a Christian does not make us immune to heartache.

God is not promising to be "A God Who Brings Good Luck." He's not "A God Who Grants Wishes Like a Genie in a Bottle."

He's a God Who Upholds the Cause of His People. He's a God who is "For us." But that is not the same as saying that nothing bad will happen.

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No Success

In fact, just a few verses later in Romans 8 we learn that bad things are most likely *going*

to come our way.

Verses 35 and 36:

35

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

36

As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” □ Rather than assuring us that having God on our side will prevent difficulties from coming our way, these verses indicate that we can pretty much count on them. Verse 36 says that we face death all day long. Verse 35 lists 7 terms that pretty much cover the gamut of hard trials. Those who belong to Christ can expect: trouble (or pressure and tribulation); hardship (or illnesses and crises); persecution (or opposition and ridicule); famine (or suffering and scarcity); nakedness (or assault and shame); danger (or peril and threat); or sword (or any injury or violence or death).

There is nothing here that promises Christians a free pass from this stuff. Belonging to God does not guarantee that we'll never get hurt or never taste failure.

But, what then does it mean to say that if God is for us, nothing can stand against us? What does it mean to say that God upholds the cause of his people?

I think it means that nothing or no one can be successfully against us. That, no matter what hardship or trial comes our way, our cause is not neglected by God.

The Inseparable Love of Christ

Let's think for a bit about what it is our enemy wants.

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The design of the devil is not, ultimately, to torment us or frustrate us or even kill us. The devil's goal is, as it says at the beginning of verse 35, to separate us from the love of Christ.

Satan wants nothing more than to keep us out of the kingdom of God. He wants us to doubt God's care for us. He wants us to live as though God is not involved in our world. If Satan can get us to turn away from God, then he wins. As Mark Buchanan writes: "The work [of the devil] is always, everywhere, one thing only in the end: to separate you, me, all of us, from God's love." (

The Holy Wild,

p. 137)

But these verses are here to tell us that Satan cannot—and will not, ultimately--be successful. The love of Christ is so powerfully for us, at all times and in all circumstances, that we can not be separated from it.

In fact,

verse 37

goes on to tell us not only that God will uphold us in these trials—but also that we can be triumphant in them:

37

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

□

The devil and sinful men can make you sick, can steal your car, can sow seeds of strife in your marriage. You can be falsely accused and held up to public ridicule and scorn. You can be persecuted and abused and imprisoned and even killed. And yet, verse 37 tells us you can be more than a conqueror through the love Jesus has for us.

In other word, God is able to take all these evil things and work them for our good (Rom. 8:28). What looks like defeat for us and victory for the devil can actually become triumph in the cause of Christ. John Piper writes:

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If [these things] finally work for your good, the designs of the adversary are thwarted and his aim to be

against

you is turned into a Christ-exalting, soul-sanctifying, faith-deepening, painful benefit. If God is for you, he does not spare you these things. But he designs good where the adversary designs evil (Genesis 50:20; 45:7). The things that are against you he designs to be for you. No one can be successfully against you. ("God Did Not Spare His Own Son", Aug 18, 2002)

□

God-Wrought, Blood-Bought Security

So what is God's design in all of this spectacular truth? Why the promise to be for us and to uphold our cause?

His design is to assure us of eternal security lived for His glory. He wants us to know that whatever comes our way He is forever and always, everywhere and in every circumstance—on our side. In the midst of cancer. In the midst of heartache and loss. In the midst of terror and tribulation. He will not allow us to be separated from His love. He will not stop working things for our good. He will not let the devil win.

A God who upholds the cause of His people does not spare his people from trial, but He does provide the God-wrought, blood-bought security to suffer well.

Piper again:

The point is that the massive power and wisdom and love of God for his people does not promise escape from these things. The power and love and wisdom of God promises triumph in these things.

In the sword that cuts off your head or pierces your heart. In the peril that sweeps away your family and leaves you alone. In the nakedness that shames you in the rape or prison yard. In the famine that leaves you and your bloated children with bones draped in skin. In the persecution that blocks all your professional advances or burns your house. In the distress or calamity that leaves you paraplegic or takes all your life savings. In the tribulation that wrings your soul till you wonder if every drop of faith will be squeezed out of it.

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The design of God...is to give you such a deep, firm, unshakable, God-wrought, blood-bought security in his all-conquering love, that in these seven kinds of sufferings you will not curse him or forsake him or reproach him, but trust him and hold fast to him and be satisfied with him when all else is taken away.

"When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay." Or, as Job said, after he tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21; see 42:11)

(“The All-Conquering Love of Christ”, Sept. 1, 2002)

Or, as the Apostle puts it in

Romans 8:38-39

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38

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

39

neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Still on the Case

So here's what we have learned today: God is on the side of His people. For those who belong to Him, God has a special concern and allegiance.

But that doesn't mean God is giant good luck charm. It doesn't mean cancer is miraculously healed or money falls into our laps. It doesn't mean nothing bad ever happens.

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What it does mean is that when hard stuff comes our way, God promises to always be working in our best interest. It means that He will not let the enemy have success in ripping us away from His love. It means, in the end, we will see that God has taken every evil and worked it for our good.

So, one final question: How does this work? How does God guarantee triumph in the midst of what appears to be defeat? How does God make us more than conquerors in the face of all these evils?

And for the answer, we have to look to the cross.

Romans 8:34,

the verse right before we are told that nothing can separate us from God's love:

34

Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Here is the greatest example of victory in defeat. At the moment when Satan thought he had achieved his greatest success—when the Son Of God hung humiliated and beaten on a wooden stake, with the breath strangled out of Him and the life-blood gushing from His side—God was actually taking evil and turning it on its head. Satan found that his greatest moment was actually his worst as Jesus was raised to life, and now sits at the right of God, seeing to it that the cause of His people is always upheld.

Mark Buchanan tells this story:

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. threatened to sabotage and undermine all the gains of the civil rights movement. The movement was fragile anyhow, fissured and patchy, many of its leaders compromised, its foot soldiers demoralized. King's death brought all that to a head. In some ways, his funeral was more than a burial service for King—it had the potential to be the burial service for the movement.

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There was a large roster of speakers, eulogizers, exhorters. But one stood out: James Bevel. He mounted the podium, stern and heavy, and in a voice like a storm gathering at the far edge of a clear day, he said, "There is a false rumor going around that our leader is dead. Our leader is not dead. Martin Luther King is not our leader." At this he paused and let his words, the implications of his words, sting, stir, taunt, bruise. Was he using this moment to loose a political hornet's nest, to make havoc in the ranks?

"Our leader," Bevel continued, "is the Man who led Moses out of Israel."

"Thass the man!" someone yelled.

"Our leader is the Man who went with Daniel into the lion's den."

"Same man!"

"Our leader is the Man who walked out of the grave on Easter morning. Our leader neither sleeps nor slumbers. He cannot be put in jail. He has never lost a war yet. Our leader is still on the case. Our leader is not dead. One of His prophets died. We will not stop because of that." (p. 137-138)

Difficulties may come our way. Cancer and loss and trouble and hardship. All day long we may face death, like sheep to be slaughtered.

But our leader is not dead.

He's still on the case.

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And if He is for us, then nothing can stand against us.

2Chronicles 6:34-35 (ESV)

34 “If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to you toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, 35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause. (

[ESV](#)

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