

2 Chronicles 20:12 | “Trusting in the Unknown”
Preached on December 31, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 20:12 today. *[pause]*

I wanted to do a sermon about entering into the New Year, since we are on the verge of 2024. *[pause]*

Can you even believe that?

It feels like just yesterday we were in 2014 or 2018, and now here we are almost in the year 2024. *[pauseeee]*

When you think about a new year, what comes to mind?

For some people, they think about all the fun times they have planned and all of the potential great joys.

But for others, they can't help but wonder what hard times may come because a new year certainly does bring with it a lot of unknowns. *[pause]*

Will you or a family member get really sick?

Will you still have the same job?

Will you still be living in the same sort of situation that you are now?

Will the finances go up or down? *[pause]*

It may just be one new year, but it brings with it thousands of question marks.

And as you go into the new year, it can be like trying to look through thick fog, not knowing where the path leads, but walking forward anyways. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that we can't stand the feeling of not knowing things.

We like to know things before they happen, so we can prepare for them.

We like to have all the answers immediately because we hate the sense of being unequipped for what's to come. *[pause]*

We would rather not be blindsided, but we would like all of our ducks in a row.

But inherent in human life is to live much of life walking into the unknown, *that* we know. *[pauseeee]*

So how are you handling walking into the unknown of 2024?

What will you do when you face circumstances where you have no idea what to do this coming year?

Because you know you will face them. *[pauseeee]*

You can't rely solely on your quick thinking, wisdom, and power because you aren't all-knowing, all-wise, or all-powerful.

There are things beyond your wisdom to figure out and beyond your power to control. *[pauseeee]*

This morning from God's Word, we will look at someone else who didn't know what to do, but what he *did* do teaches us valuable truths as we step into a new year.

And this person was King Jehoshaphat. *[pauseeee]*

King Jehoshaphat was a descendent of David, and he was king of the southern kingdom of Judah during the divided kingdom period. *[pause]*

If you remember, there was Israel in the north, and then Judah in the south during the time when Israel was divided. *[pause]*

Israel in the north was much worse and more evil than Judah in the south, but Judah didn't always have good kings, either.

Judah's kings would typically go back and forth between a good and then bad king.

But overall, Jehoshaphat was a good king. *[pauseeee]*

Like with everyone, he had his sins, weaknesses, and flaws like when he would too readily align himself with wicked Israelite kings...

...But other than that, he did a good job. *[pause]*

He had riches and honor, and the kingdom was firm under his leadership.

He did not seek false gods, but sought to follow the Lord, and even sent teachers to teach the people throughout the kingdom. *[pause]*

He appointed leaders to make right judgments, and even called them to follow what the Lord deemed as right. *[pause]*

So things typically went well in Jehoshaphat's kingdom, for not many enemies wanted to attack him, but here in 2 Chronicles 20, we see what happened when some nations *did* decide to attack.

And Jehoshaphat and the peoples' response to this trial is like a Masterclass on how to handle hardship and uncertainty. *[pause]*

Let's jump right in by **READING** in verse 1 of chapter 20. *[READ VERSES 1-30]*

A great multitude of Moabites, Ammonites, and some Meunites team up and try to topple Judah.

Let me show you where they are located. [*show slide*]

Jehoshaphat was at first fearful, yet he seeks the Lord and leads all of the people to seek the Lord's help. [*pause*]

The king has this spectacular prayer, where he recounts God's character, nature, and covenant relationship with Israel.

He then tells of the current situation and pleads for the saving intervention of the Lord. [*pause*]

Then a Levite prophesies, declaring that there's no need to fear, for the Lord will win the battle, so they only have to go out to the battle and watch. [*pauseeee*]

The only proper response to all of this is faith and worship, which the king and the people do. [*pause*]

When the day comes for the battle, Jehoshaphat once again encourages the people to trust, and he appoints people to praise the Lord, as they go to the battlefield.

And the Lord does a mighty work of salvation! [*pause*]

The enemy is routed, for God causes them to fight amongst themselves and kill each other.

And when Judah arrives at the battleground, it's all over, for not one person is alive. [*pause*]

The victory is so great that it takes 3 days to collect the spoil.

The people return home with joy, and no other nation even dares attack Judah anymore during Jehoshaphat's reign. [*pause*]

As one commentator put it, "The credit is due entirely to God while the army is reduced to the level of spectators."¹ [*pauseeee*]

Throughout this story, the king, the priests, the people are all united in their trust in and worship of the Lord.

Trust, worship, and thanksgiving are all found, from beginning to end.

It is a great example of how to respond to hardship and uncertainty. [*pauseeee*]

As I thought about this whole account, there was something that the king said which stuck out to me, and encapsulates what the people did that was such a good thing.

¹ Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 440.

And it's found in the latter part of verse 12, which I want to focus on this morning.

Jehoshaphat says, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." *[pauseeee]*

The first thing that I want us to see from this verse is that...

I. There will be times when you don't know what to do.

Anyone in here not know what to do when a situation arrives? *[pause]*

For me, I am definitely not a knowledgeable car person.

When it comes to cars, I have no idea how to fix them. *[pause]*

Give me some numbers, a Bible question, or a technology question and I can hold my own to some degree, but I am out of my depths when it comes to cars. *[pause]*

This is the complete opposite of my brother, who owns a car repair shop.

And let's just say that I definitely go to him when I have car issues. *[pauseeee]*

Don't you hate the feeling of not knowing what to do?

It's not the most pleasant feeling, yet we feel it all the time because we are limited people.

We have limited knowledge, limited wisdom, and limited power. *[pause]*

And the truth is that in life we very regularly feel like we don't know what to do. *[pauseeee]*

You think that you are knowledgeable at work because you have been there for a while, and there's always some new situation that comes down the pike that baffles you. *[pause]*

Or you think that you know how to parent, and you are quickly and often humbled.

If you feel like you know some stuff, just become a parent, and you will find yourself admitting, "I know nothing!" *[pauseeee]*

Not knowing what to do is that feeling of being perplexed, puzzled, and bewildered. *[pauseeee]*

For the king and Judah, they were perplexed as to what to do, for here came a huge army to fight them, and they knew they couldn't beat them through their own strength or numbers.

As Jehoshaphat says, "We are powerless against [them]". *[pauseeee]*

In times when you don't know what to do, you have to acknowledge that you are powerless.

You admit that you are incapable of preventing certain events from happening.

You recognize that you are powerless to change someone.

You concede that you don't have the answers in yourself. *[pauseeee]*

For most of us, these moments of feeling inadequate are frustrating and we get disheartened or even aggravated.

But I want you to know this, this morning: the feeling of being powerless is not a sin, it's not actually a problem or flaw in your life. *[pause]*

It's a normal part of what it means to be human, for God has created us to be dependent creatures.

In fact, the feeling of being powerless is right where God wants us. *[pause]*

You will get to the end of your knowledge, the end of your power, the end of your wisdom, and that's exactly where God wants you.

Why?

Because it's then that you are not only accepting reality, but you are primed to run into His arms. *[pauseeee]*

This is why Paul shared that God told him, "my power is made perfect in weakness," and so Paul could boast in his weaknesses, for it's then that God shows His power even more clearly.² *[pauseeee]*

Don't let your powerlessness cause you to throw in the towel of despair, but let your powerlessness cause you to throw yourself onto the power of God. *[pauseeee]*

You ever feel powerless?

Don't fret, for God wants to show His power through you or through your situation, just like He did here with Judah. *[pauseeee]*

In our culture, it's seen as a negative thing to be powerless, weak, and helpless.

That's why a common saying for us to hear is, "You are strong," or, "You can do it."³

But according to the Bible, it's actually a good thing to admit that you are powerless, weak, and helpless because *you are*.

But not only that, it also opens up the pathway to go to God. *[pauseeee]*

If Jehoshaphat and his people would have thought that they were powerful enough to fight, they wouldn't have seen their need to turn to the Lord.

² See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

³ Most famously as the Nike slogan.

So no wonder Jesus said that the poor in spirit were blessed.⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Being perplexed and powerless is a good place to be in for it brings you to your knees, so that you can rest in God's hands.

For we need to understand that when we are on our knees, we are in God's hands. *[pauseeee]*

So we need to change our perspective on powerlessness and the feeling when we don't know what to do.

Don't look down on it, and let it make you angry or hopeless.

Rather, see it as a God-ordained moment to trust. *[pause]*

Perplexity, powerlessness, and puzzlement are not occasional annoyances that need to be avoided at all costs.

They are opportune moments to exercise faith in your great God. *[pauseeee]*

For God welcomes the weak and weary.

He doesn't turn away from those who reach out in need, for "the Lord is near to the brokenhearted."⁵ *[pause]*

Jesus said to us: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."⁶ *[pause]*

Our need doesn't disqualify us or make us "lesser than", but our need is exactly what we bring to Christ, who bears us up with His presence and power. *[pauseeee]*

There are a lot of unknowns ahead in 2024.

There will be many times this coming new year that you will not know what to do.

You will say like Jehoshaphat, "I am powerless against this! I do not know what to do." *[pause]*

Even as a church we will feel the same.

But will we despair?

Will we turn to other places for answers and solutions, like the world's thinking and remedies?

Or will we be like Jehoshaphat and say, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."?
[pauseeee]

⁴ Matthew 5:3.

⁵ Psalm 34:18.

⁶ Matthew 11:28.

It's that second part that we will consider next.

For yes, there will be times when you don't know what to do...

II. But this you should do: turn your eyes to the Lord.

Let's say that you usually know how to do your own tax returns. *[pause]*

For many years, your tax returns were simple and straightforward.

But then one year, due to multiple reasons, your taxes became much more complicated. *[pause]*

This is what happened to me.

Before I became a pastor, my taxes were very easy to do, but once I became a pastor, the taxes got complex. *[pause]*

As a pastor, you are considered self-employed, and yet you get a W-2, so you are also seen somewhat as an employee, so this complicates things.

And then there are other unique things involved with being clergy like housing allowances and other things related to being in a parsonage. *[pause]*

So once I became a pastor, I no longer knew how to do my own tax returns.

I felt like I no longer knew what to do, but there was one thing that I did know amid all that I didn't know -- I knew where to go: a tax preparation company. *[pauseeee]*

Likewise in life, as we just saw, there will be many times when you won't know what to do, but there is one thing you *can* know: where to go. [pause]

You may not have all the answers, but you know the One who has the answers.

You may not have all the power, but you know Who is all-powerful. [pauseeee]

May we confidently say, "I don't know much, but this I know: I know my Lord."

"I don't know how to solve this, I don't know really what to do, but I know where to put my trust." [pauseeee]

There are countless times that when we think of the unknown, we think that there's nothing we can trust.

Kind of like walking in complete darkness in an unfamiliar place.

But that's not true, for you can always trust God Almighty, ruler of Heaven and Earth!
[pauseeeee]

In life, we may feel like we are walking in darkness, but we aren't truly, for the God of light is with us. *[pauseee]*

Jehoshaphat's first reaction to the news of this great horde coming towards him was fear. *[pause]*

Initial fear in such a situation is a normal human reaction, but notice what he does as soon as he feels afraid...

He "set his face to seek the Lord". *[pause]*

He was following in his ancestor David's footsteps who said, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you."⁷ *[pauseeee]*

Where do *you* take your fear?

Is seeking the Lord in trust your first response? *[pause]*

Sometimes turning to God can be our last resort in times of trial instead of our first step.

We end up saying, "OK God, I've tried everything else, so now I'm going to You."

But King Jehoshaphat shows us what to do: turn your eyes to the Lord. *[pauseeeee]*

To 'set your eyes' on something means to look somewhere for help. *[pause]*

Have you ever been in a group of people, and a problem was brought up, and everyone knows that there's one person among you who can solve the issue?

What happens?

All of your eyes go directly to that person, as you look to them, for they are the one with the answer and solution. *[pause]*

That's kind of the idea here.

Jehoshaphat and Judah's eyes were all on the Lord, for they knew that only He could intervene and help them.

So it's this image of trust. *[pauseeee]*

Throughout the Psalms it says things like, "My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net."⁸

⁷ Psalm 56:3.

⁸ Psalm 25:15.

Or, “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”⁹ *[pause]*

Even in the New Testament, we see that as we run the race of faith, we do so “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”¹⁰ *[pauseeee]*

Yes, our eyes can often be elsewhere, and we can use our eyes to sin, but we can also use our eyes to look to the Lord in trust. *[pauseeee]*

So where do you turn your eyes to in times of uncertainty and powerlessness?

Most often our eyes are either on ourselves, on our situation, or on something other than God. *[pause]*

We keep looking inward trying to find the strength, the wisdom, and the knowledge, but this will not do.

Like Judah here couldn’t look inward because they were powerless, so we can’t look inward for the answer. *[pauseeee]*

You can’t always solve a problem, but you can *always* trust your Provider.

You can’t always figure out a solution, but you *should always* put your faith in your Savior. *[pause]*

Our eyes are not to be focused on our lack of strength, but on God’s endless supply of strength. *[pauseeee]*

We also are prone to focus on the situation, and obsess over it. *[pause]*

What good does this do, though?

It only makes us more fearful.

No, our eyes are not to be focused on the unknown, but on our God who knows. *[pauseeee]*

Additionally, we tend to look to the world’s so-called answers and solutions.

But since they are devoid of trust in God, then they are either ineffective or band-aid solutions to deep issues.

Just look at all the problems in our world and ask if our world has the solutions. *[pauseeee]*

No, our eyes are to be on the Lord - He’s the answer.

He can be trusted with everything because He is in control of everything.

⁹ Psalm 121:1-2.

¹⁰ Hebrews 12:2a.

He has all power and wisdom, so nothing is too hard for Him! *[pauseeee]*

Christian, be filled with hope! Our God reigns!

This is why Paul can say that he may be “perplexed, but not driven to despair.”¹¹ *[pauseeeee]*

Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah show us here that faith walks in the unknown with hope.

Even though their situation looked bleak, they didn’t become hopeless and resign themselves to defeat...

...But they were hopeful because they knew who their God was, and they simply looked to him in faith. *[pauseeee]*

So also, remember who your Lord is and abound in hope! *[pauseeee]*

What will you face this coming year?

I don’t know, and you don’t know either, but may our eyes be prepared to know where to look, and our hearts grounded in who we should trust. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you will experience a serious physical problem, and you will think, “I’m powerless to heal myself.”

Maybe it will be the death of a loved one, and you will say to yourself, “I can’t do this!” *[pause]*

Maybe it will be a financial struggle, and you will say, “I have no idea what to do, or how this is going to work out.”

Or maybe it will be a temptation to sin that keeps coming back, and you will think, “I am too weak to beat this.” *[pause]*

Remember that being in that place is not a sin, and it’s right where you are primed for great faith because you are at the end of yourself, so you can look beyond yourself to the Lord. *[pause]*

Where will your eyes be?

Where will your trust and hope lie? [pause]

The Lord has the power to do only what He can do, but will we trust His control and will?

Will we remember that He truly will work all things together for good?¹² [pauseeee]

You see...

There are a lot of unknowns in 2024, but this we know: we have the Lord.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 4:8.

¹² A reference to Romans 8:28.

The future of what will happen in the next year is foggy to us right now.

We don't know what will happen.

There may be great times ahead or great trials. *[pause]*

Without a doubt I know that there will be times in this new year when you won't know what to do.

But know this, there's one thing you can know to do: look to the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

We are entering an unknown 2024, but we have a God who we know. *[pause]*

He's the God who routed the enemies of Judah before the battle even started, and made Judah mere spectators and spoil collectors.

And He's the God, who through Jesus Christ, routed the enemies of sin and death on the cross and in the grave...

...And in doing so, He made us mere onlookers of the victory that He accomplished for us, but more than that, He made us glad recipients of His great and gracious salvation! *[pauseeee]*

We were powerless against death and condemnation, which our sin deserved, and all we can do is set our eyes on Christ in faith, who died in our place and rose victoriously. *[pause]*

Have you trusted in Christ alone to save you?

Only through Him will you find forgiveness and eternal life. *[pause]*

And believer, if the Lord has done all of this amazingness for you on the Cross, don't you think He can help you today, tomorrow, and all through 2024? *[pause]*

Where will your eyes be in the new year? Who will you seek?