

FLEA VIDEO #9: OUR STARTING POINT

(II Chronicles 20:6, 12)

6.2.20

One of the most poignant prayers that I have ever found in the Scriptures, one that connects with me every time I read it, is found in the OT book of II Chronicles, and it is spoken by the king of Judah - a guy named Jehoshaphat.

A brief recap: Jehoshaphat was informed that a vast army of soldiers - troops of Moabites and Ammonites, along with some Meunites - was gathered to wage war against Judah. Their numbers completely dwarfed what Judah could muster to defend themselves. In response, Jehoshaphat called on the entire nation to enter into a time of fasting and prayer, and the Bible tells us: ***The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek Him - II Chronicles 20:4.*** And as they entered into this time of prayer, Jehoshaphat stood up in front of everybody in the courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem, and said this: ***"Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hand, and no one can withstand You" - Jehoshaphat, II Chronicles 20:6.*** What a wonderful acknowledgement of the Mighty God he served. But then he closes his prayer with these words, and they're the best part of the whole thing: ***"{W}e have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You" - Jehoshaphat, II Chronicles 20:12.*** How cool was that! Instead of waiting to see how they might do in battle, and then call on God if they needed to, they made calling out to God their starting point. They embraced their helplessness apart from Him as their starting point.

It's no secret that we are living in incredibly unsettling days - to say the least. Certainly, in my lifetime, I have never experienced at a cultural level so much fear and dread - maybe even approaching the terror of 9/11. And, over this last week, rioting that I have not seen since the 1960s in places like Newark and Detroit. And that kind of chaos breeds fear, which feeds tension, which feeds anger, which just keeps that cycle going. And then, to make matters worse, we often try everything we can, in our own efforts, to fix things or make things better or whatever. And then, if all else fails, we'll turn it over to God. God doesn't want to be our "end game"; he wants to be our "starting point."

The sad truth is, chaos has been the very best the world can know when they continue to only look to themselves for solutions and insight and strength. The issue becomes: Is there something or Someone bigger than all this chaos? Yes, there is: God. While we may not know the future, we can know the One who holds the future. God knows all times - from beginning to end. And we are invited to rest in that. We are invited to make God our starting point!

The Bible gives us a number of verses that we are offered as "starting points" in which we can place our hopes, our fears and our futures. The first one is from Old Testament history. Moses, the man of God who had led the nation of Israel out of Egypt to the border of the Promised Land, was coming to the end of his life. So, he left what we could think of as his last will and testament with the people; his words are contained in the OT book of Deuteronomy. And among those final words, he said this: ***"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified ... for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you" - Moses,***

Deuteronomy 31:6.

The second one is from the NT book of Matthew. At the very end of that gospel, Jesus is preparing to leave His disciples and return to heaven. But before He goes, He gives them this promise: **"[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.**

And lastly, some wonderfully encouraging words from the Psalms, from David, the shepherd boy who became the king of a nation, and part of the ancestral line that culminated in the birth of Christ. It starts out: **The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing - David, Psalm 23:1.** The complete decisiveness and assurance of this verse is wonderful. And because of the fact that the Lord is David's shepherd, he can note a few verses later: **Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me - David, Psalm 23:4a.** Certainly, we can all relate to walking through a dark valley as we are witnessing a very challenging virus, economic uncertainty and the accompanying social strain of lockdowns and business closures and now, deeply disturbing issues of race and injustice. Yet David says there is nothing to fear. Why? How can he even think to say that? The first five (5) words of this psalm say it all: **The Lord is my shepherd - David, Psalm 23:1a.** That was David's "starting point." Two important roles that David is acknowledging by those words:

- a) David is recognizing the Lord as the shepherd. He is recognizing the Lord as his leader, his guide, his provider, his protector - his everything.
- b) David is recognizing himself as a sheep. Sheep are notoriously defenseless, virtually completely helpless. They depend on the shepherd simply to survive. David sees his life in that same way: He is completely helpless without his Shepherd - the Lord.

It is often very hard to admit to our vulnerabilities - that I'm not strong enough or smart enough or fast enough (or whatever enough), that, in the final analysis, I am helpless. And yet that's the very place God wants us to be. Jesus Himself told His disciples: **"[A] part from me you can do nothing" - Jesus Christ, John 15:5b.** And as Jesus had told the apostle Paul: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" - Jesus Christ, II Corinthians 12:9.** That made Paul realize an incredibly comforting truth; as he wrote it: **[W]hen I am weak, then I am strong - Paul, II Corinthians 12:10b.** In other words, when I get out of the way and just let God be God, that's when I will see His power - in each and every situation. Why wouldn't I want to start my life there? And it is because of everything we have in God through Jesus Christ that Paul could write to the Philippian Christians: **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:6-7.**

TRANSLATION: Be anxious about nothing, pray about everything! And as Paul so confidently concluded a few verses later: **[M]y God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:19.** And God's "shelves" will NEVER be empty!

I know these are very uncertain times. And uncertainty is frightening. But while uncertainty is here, so is God. While fear is all around us, so is God. All He asks is for us to surrender our lives to Him through Jesus Christ; in other words, His charge is that we make Him our "starting point." It truly doesn't get any better than that!