

We Seek – God Speaks

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20: 1-14

Date: August 23, 2020

PROBLEM

VACATION STORY

There was a time when I was coming home from a vacation and it was late – actually early in the morning – and I was starving after a long day of travel. There was nothing in the fridge and I didn't want to get up the next day to get milk for even breakfast so I ducked over to an all night grocery store and got what I needed.

TEXT STORY

The people of Israel had a much greater problem than no food in the fridge. They had an army – armies – coming to attack them. The Moabites, the Ammonites and the Meunites had joined forces and were marching against Judah (Israel's southern half of its country).

The armies are described as vast implying that they outnumber Israel greatly. The armies are described as close at hand as they are already encamped at En Gedi implying that they are very close to Jerusalem and there isn't much time to prepare or plan or act.

The enemies facing Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah clearly present a significant threat and danger to their very lives and have created a high level of stress and fear in Jehoshaphat and all the people.

CULTURE STORY

I began with an innocent story of an empty fridge or cooler but there are amongst us much greater stories of emptiness. There are enemies in our own lives that cause us anxiety and fear. There are enemies that can't be resolved with a trip to the grocery store.

Covid 19 has created a great deal of stress and anxiety with people working in areas where a high risk of infection exists and also people not being able to work at all. Even the potential return to school or work or even worship presents confusion and chaos, anxiety and anger over how we will cope and survive.

For some though – the issues / the enemies are even greater. A diagnosis that the cancer is no longer treatable and someone you love dearly has weeks or months to live. A relationship that is broken suddenly and completely and wasn't seen coming and the break is devastating the heart and the hope of loving and being loved ever again. A failed vocation where the opportunities to be rehired in your field are slim and where the training you've been educated in is now meaningless. A diminished faith where all the answers of family, of science and technology and even of the church – fail

These enemies – these armies – make like seem hopeless, impossible that there would be a way out escape much less survive.

PRAYER – WE SEEK

PERSON

In the text it's clear that Jehoshaphat is alarmed. Other translations speak of fear and the word in Hebrew speaks of great distress. Clearly the enemy facing them is of significant importance. Jehoshaphat was young but not inexperienced. He wasn't a perfect King for Judah but he knew what he had to do now. He follows the pattern of God's call to His people – He prays

PREPARATION

Jehoshaphat recognizes that this problem is big – really big. He also recognizes that this problem isn't just his and all of Judah will be impacted by an invasion. So Jehoshaphat instructs all of Judah to gather together at the newly completed temple courts. Jehoshaphat didn't take this call lightly either and he called for all the people – including Himself – to fast. A commitment to pray without food. A focus upon God and not themselves.

Verse 4 speaks of how they came from every town and verse 13 describes those in attendance as all the men – all their wives - all the children & all the infants. No one was exempt from this call to pray. There was no one left in the villages or the fields. There was no church / Sunday school, there was no nursery. The problem was facing everyone and everyone needed to address the problem

The people met in the temple courts - the place where God dwelt. Their place of worship and praise would become their place of prayer and petition.

PETITION

CHARACTER – vs. 6

Jehoshaphat prays in the midst of all the people and begins by calling upon the character of God. In the midst of God's house and in the midst of the people of God – Jehoshaphat declares God to be ruler all kingdoms and nations and the powerful Lord over all of creation. The one true God.

PROMISES – vs. 7-9

The one true God who made a covenant with them. A covenant with Abraham and through all generations. The God who helped His people capture and take over this land. The God who guided and directed His people to build this temple.

The God who promised Solomon - that if the people of God were ever in trouble - then they should come to the temple and pray and then God would hear their prayers and act. Jehoshaphat calls upon these promises from God to be fulfilled.

PROBLEM – vs. 10-12a

Jehoshaphat then names their calamity – their problem. Not only are they in trouble with these armies as the doorstep of Jerusalem. But they were nations that God Himself restrained Israel from defeating when they came into the Promised Land - Deuteronomy 2: 5. The very nation groups that God spared are now attacking Judah!!

DEPENDENCE – vs. 12b - 13

Jehoshaphat then names their hope – their humility. We don't know what to do BUT our eyes are upon you.

He recognizes that this problem is beyond his grasp and IF there is to be a solution then it won't come from his kingly leadership and it won't come from a power or strength of the people. It can ONLY come from God

WAITING

The text isn't clear what happens next - but I think vs. 13 / 14 speaks of a period of waiting. A willingness to recognize that talking is done. A willingness to recognize that action can't happen - so they wait. I can imagine the silence spreading throughout the temple courts. An awkward silence – a submissive silence.

APPLICATION**HUMILITY**

In our world it is hard to admit that we are ever over our head. There's a Youtube video out there with some DIY help for almost every problem. There's some equivalent of a 24 hour grocery store to get you through the night.

But there are some problems – issues – giants – enemies that are just bigger than us. Things that money can't fix, things that science or technology can't fix. We find ourselves driven to a place of helpless – hopeful – prayer. We don't know what to do but our eyes are on God.

COMMUNITY

We do this not as a group of individuals but as a covenant people. A people in a community – a family of faith. The power isn't in us gathering together before God but rather in gathering together we discover God's power.

PRESENCE – GOD SPEAKS**JHAZIEL**

Into this fear God speaks faith. Into this confusion God speaks clarity. Into this silence God speaks salvation. In verse 14 the text declares that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel. The text makes it clear that it's God who is speaking. Jahaziel is part of the tribe of Levites – priests. Not usually prophetic but God uses whomever God wants to use to bring revelation to bring His power.

The text is clear that Jahaziel is identified by his lineage but it doesn't say if this declaration is to reinforce his position or to indicate his age. I've often delighted in the possibility that Jahaziel was a young person in the tribe. Because God chooses the different – the unusual. God didn't speak to the parents, to the religious leaders – per se – not even to the King.

JEHOSHAPHAT

But still - King Jehoshaphat recognizes God's voice through Jahaziel. I think – again – the text isn't clear why Jehoshaphat affirms this message – later in verse 18 – but he recognizes God's voice. Possibly because this isn't his first prayer to God. Possibly because this isn't his first hearing from God. Perhaps Jehoshaphat has become accustomed to hearing / speaking with God and so while God doesn't speak to Jehoshaphat directly - Jehoshaphat understands that God is still speaking directly to him.

JESUS

In our world here in 2020 - we also have the opportunity to be like Jaheziel and Jehoshaphat to hear God's voice. We have the joy of seeing, of hearing and of knowing God's presence amongst us – every moment of every day

God was revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ while he walked on this earth showing us and enabling us to be a part of His family - part of His kingdom.

The bible speaks of how – even now - Jesus intercedes for us in heaven and the bible speaks of how – even now - the Spirit prays on our behalf with sighs and groans.

Our connection with God is available through Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We can pray to God and we can hear from God. When the armies against God – and God's creation – are too big we can pray and God will hear. But also the power of the spirit and the clarity of Jesus to help us hear God's words of encouragement and God's words of direction. Words that we will dive into next week

Until then we – like Jehoshaphat and Jahaziel and all of Judah – can take comfort in the knowledge and the realization that God's presence continues to be with us. Even if / when we don't feel it and even if / when we don't understand it.

But in humility and in hope we can call out to God in prayer and know that God is drawing us closer to Him in relationship and closer us closer His revelation for us. Our seeking God through prayer gives us access to God's presence. God's presence gives us peace – and power as we shall see in the weeks to come.

AMEN