

When you're stuck in a place you don't want to be

Confidence

Isaiah 43.1-7

Glasgow Elim 11 a.m.

6th September 2020

James Glass

When you're stuck in a place you don't want to be - confidence

Isaiah 43.1-7

Whenever you find yourself in a place that is unfamiliar, unexpected, or undesired, the experience can damage your confidence.

No doubt the experience of the people of Jerusalem in exile was one that seriously affected their confidence.

Many of these later chapters of Isaiah address the people in exile in such a way that it is very clear that they have been broken by the trauma of exile.

Their confidence in themselves as a nation is gone. Their confidence in God is wavering. And despite all the promises and assurances of God, you can't help but feel that they are not looking to the future with anything approaching confidence.

Where we find ourselves at the present time might not be nearly as extreme a position as the people of Judah and Jerusalem, but the uncertainty surrounding the future, and for some, the difficulty of the last six months or so has knocked their confidence.

Sometimes our confidence is damaged by something that has happened. Sometimes it is damaged because of what we think might happen. And sometimes it is damaged because we are uncertain about what will happen.

So today I want to talk about how we can develop confidence when we are stuck in a place we don't want to be.

But now, this is what the Lord says—

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

2 When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

3 For I am the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

I give Egypt for your ransom,

Cush[a] and Seba in your stead.

4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight,

and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east

and gather you from the west.

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'

and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

7 everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made.”

The first thing to note here is that the enemy of confidence is not a lack of confidence, it is *fear*.

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” (v.1)

And again in verse 5:

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you” (v.5)

Fear can affect how you *see yourself*. It can affect *how you see God*. It can threaten you because of *where you find yourself*. And it can impact on *what kind of future you see*.

The people in exile struggled in each of those areas.

Here’s what God said through the prophet.

1. If you want to develop confidence when you’re stuck in a place you don’t want to be *remember you are God’s possession* (vv.1,3,4)

This has a number of implications.

Identity

Firstly, because we are God’s possession, we can build a strong sense of *identity*.

“But now, this is what the Lord says—

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

God reminds these people in exile:

- God created you
- God formed you
- God redeemed you
- God summoned you or called you by name
- You belong to Him

This is who *they are*. But they *are who they are* because of *whose they are*.

If you want to develop confidence, remember *who you are*. And remember that you are who you are because of *whose you are*.

One of the greatest teachings throughout the New Testament is the *in Christ* teaching.

Here's an example from Ephesians 1:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he[b] predestined us for adoption to sonship[c] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1.3-5)

Apparently, the phrase "in Christ" appears 75 times in the New Testament. It's a very important concept and it is all about *who we are* and *whose we are*.

So when we understand that we are God's possession, it helps us to build our sense of identity in Christ – and that helps us grow in confidence.

A couple of other things are connected to knowing we are God's possession.

Value (v.3)

Because we are His possession, it means He has placed a *value upon us*.

*For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush[a] and Seba in your stead.*

In the context of Isaiah 43, these words have a historical and a future significance.

The mention of *Egypt* recalls the Exodus. God changed the history of Egypt to set the people of Israel free. And Cush and Seba (Cush is modern day Ethiopia) would be used as payment for the people of Judah and Jerusalem in the future.

It's not helpful to try and read this too literally. The point is that God was prepared to change the destiny of nations for the sake of His people.

That is how much He valued them.

But we know that He even went further than that. He gave Himself in the person of Christ to set us free. That is how much He values us.

Dignity (v.4)

He also gives His people *dignity*.

*“Since you are precious and honoured in my sight,
and because I love you,
I will give people in exchange for you,
nations in exchange for your life.*

“Precious”, “honoured”.

We have an identity in Christ. The value He has placed on us cannot be calculated. And the dignity He gives us we could never have expected.

When we begin to take those things into our hearts, we begin to see ourselves differently and our confidence grows stronger.

2. If you want to develop confidence when you're stuck in a place you don't want to be, remember that *God protects you wherever you are* (v.2)

When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

It is hard to work out whether these verses apply to any historical circumstances. Or whether they are simply an assurance that God will protect His people wherever they are.

Whatever the case, they are a promise of God's protection in the midst of pressure and difficulty.

Notice a number of things.

We will have trials

When you pass through the waters, when you pass through the rivers, when you walk through the fire – when not if!

There will be days when you feel overwhelmed. There will be days when you feel as though you are going to be swept away. And there

will be days when you feel the heat of the pressure around you and upon you.

His presence and protection

But He *will be with us*. And what threatens us will not destroy us.

If you want to build your confidence, believe God's promise of protection for those days of trouble. Because they do come. Paul talks about the *evil day* (Ephesians 6.13). But we can *stand* in the evil day clothed in the armour of God. Jesus said that Satan wanted to destroy Peter's life, but He had prayed for him so that his faith wouldn't fail (Luke 22.31-32). And Jesus is praying for us (Romans 8.34).

We can rely on His protection. And that gives us confidence.

3. If you want to develop confidence when you're stuck in a place you don't want to be, remember that *God is present in your future as well as your present (vv.5-7)*

5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

I will bring your children from the east

and gather you from the west.

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'

and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

7 everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made."

When Isaiah spoke these words to the people in exile, they were words for a broken people.

When people underwent the experience of that these people had undergone, it usually destroyed their sense of nationhood. They had no future.

But God turned everything around for His people and eventually they came back to their land and city.

He would bring them home. He would restore them. He would gather them again.

God was promising to be present in their *future* as well as their *present*.

We can have confidence about the future because God is already there. He has a plan.

There is no need therefore to fear the future.

Conclusion

Damaged confidence can be mended. You can grow in confidence. You are His possession. He will protect you. He is present in your future.

He's for you. He's with you. If that doesn't give you confidence, nothing will.

For reflection

What spoke to you most from the talk?

How do you think that this could impact your life? What steps could you take to respond to what God is saying?

How could you help others to grow in confidence based on this talk?

Why do you think it is important to remember *who we are and whose we are*?

How can recognising that trials *do* come help us when they do come?

Have you ever had an *evil day*? What was it like? How did you find God's protection?

How does knowing that God has a future for strengthen our confidence?