

Calvary Baptist Church
2015 WINTER CSI • Small Group Studies

Session Three – Getting Unstuck: Get Moving Tuesday & Wednesday, February 24 & 25
--

I'm Not Done with You!
Isaiah 43:1,2

New Year's Day 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California in the Rose Bowl. In the first half of that game a player named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. After picking up the ball he became confused and ran the ball in the wrong direction. He ran 65 yards in the wrong direction. He almost scored a touchdown for the opposing team. Fortunately, just before he reached the end zone, one of his own players tackled him. When California attempted to punt, Georgia Tech blocked the punt, the ball rolled into the end zone and Georgia Tech scored what would end up being the margin of victory.

Everyone watching the game wondered the same thing: "Would coach Nibbs Price permit Roy Riegels to play in the second half?" At halftime all the players filed off the field. The California players sat on the benches in the locker room. However, Riegels sat over in a corner, on the floor, by himself and cried like a baby. Coach Nibbs was unusually quiet during halftime. Perhaps he was trying to determine what to do with Roy Riegels. The time keeper eventually comes in the locker room to inform the team that they only have three minutes before the second half begins. Just before the team returned to the field, Coach Nibbs stands up and says "men, the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players headed out of the locker room, all but Riegels. Coach Nibbs went over to him and said "Roy didn't you hear me? Let's go!" Roy, with tears in his eyes, said "I can't do it coach. I have ruined you, the team, the university, and myself." Coach Nibbs put his arm around Riegels and said "get up and go back. You made a mistake, but the game is only half over."

This is exactly what the prophet was saying to the people of God. They had gone in the wrong direction. They had turned from Jehovah. They worshipped gods which weren't God. They depended on other nations instead of depending on the strong arm of the Lord. As a matter of fact, the first thirty-nine chapters delineates their apostasy and the subsequent consequences. They had messed up. The people of God had picked the ball up and run in the wrong direction.

However something happens by the time you get to chapter 40. In chapter 40, the prophet begins to remind them that the game is only half over. This is the word for them. This is the word for you. When you think the whistle has blown indicating the end of a game in which you have made terrible mistakes, the Spirit of God will speak in your ear and remind you that it's only half over. It is the job of the enemy to make you think that it's over. It is the job of the enemy to make you think that God is done with you. But you need to know that the game is only half over!

There is a different mood when you begin to read ch. 40. In the section of ch. 40-55 it is as if "the hell and horror had been left behind, and one is moving up a high, sun-drenched summit to the very doors of the kingdom of God. Chs. 40-55 are so different from chs. 1-39 in historical setting, literary style, and theological content that biblical scholars have concluded that there may be two different authors responsible for these sections. It has been long held in biblical criticism that there was a "first Isaiah" who wrote chs. 1-39; and second Isaiah wrote chs. 40-55. Chs. 1-39 speak of the coming judgment. Chs. 40-55 speak of a present judgment and a coming restoration. The scholars say that no one prophet could author the judgment of the first section and the mercy of the second section.

Whether the book of Isaiah is authored by two or three authors, I do not know. But the real author stands behind these so-called authors anyway. The real author is not first Isaiah, second Isaiah, or third Isaiah. The real author is the one God. And from this one God can come corrective judgment and comprehensive restoration. The same God who is honest about Israel's behavior in the first section of the book, is the God who declares in this section this he has a "not yet" for his people. God is not done with them. There is a future for them. There are possibilities for them. The final chapter has not been written. The prophet is challenging the people of God to embrace their "not yet." The now is painful for them. The now is hellish for them. But in the midst of a painful "now" God inserts a comforting not yet, and he wants them to embrace it.

What's behind this second chance for them? God is giving some people a "not yet" who do not deserve it. Israel messed up so much. They went in the wrong direction so many times. They did not deserve a future. But God give promises them one. What's behind that? What's behind God giving second, third, and fourth chances? Does God just give up on us getting better? Does God just lower God's moral standards? Does God just play with us and set us up for ultimate judgment? What is behind God's acts of restoration?

It is clear from this passage that the reason God is not done with us, is because God can't help it. I'm not sure what was behind Coach Nibbs Price giving Roy Riegels another chance in the game. But I do know what is behind God giving God's people another chance. I do know what stands at the foundation of my "not yet." It's called "grace." Grace is what gives birth to your "future." According to our inconsistencies; according to our stubborn disobedience we should be finished. But there is something more stubborn than your disobedience, and that is grace! No wonder Paul said, "I'm really not all that much...But what I am, I am by the grace of

God...” No wonder the songwriter called grace “amazing.” It’s amazing because it gives birth to the not yet. It’s gives birth to a new future. The grace of God says “I’m not done with you.”

This passage informs us as to what kind of grace is behind our “not yet’s.” It’s a grace that **SPEAKS TO US WHEN WE SHOULDN’T BE SPOKEN TO.** The grace which is present throughout this passage is concentrated in two words “but now.” Behind those two words is the grace of God. A sharp corner is turned at this verse from judgment way to “grace boulevard.” The last part of chapter 42 spells out all that God has against God’s people. A court case has been set up. The Lord charges the people with a myriad of crimes against heaven. The one particular crime mentioned in the last part of the chapter is that of the people’s insensitivity to the Word. He has sent messengers, but they have not responded because they are blind and deaf. God kept sending them a Word, but they ignored it. Consequently, the people are suffering exile. Exile is where you end up when you ignore the Word of God. The prophet describes the condition of the people like this, “but this is a people plundered and looted.” They refused to obey the laws of the Lord. Thus the prophet continues, “So he poured out on them his burning anger...”

This diatribe against the people of God is interrupted by the first two words of chapter 43: “but now...” The Word of God is interrupted by the Word of God. Whatever the prophet was saying in the last chapter was not the last word: “but now...” That was the condition then, “but now.” That was the existential dilemma of the disobedient then, “but now.” Where justice would insert a “therefore”, grace inserts a “but now.” Justice would have the first verse of ch. 43 to read “therefore, the people are finished.” However, grace says “but now.” Where some people around you might insert a “therefore”, the Lord inserts a “but now.” “Therefore” means this is in consequence of what you have done. “Therefore” means this is the logical, expected conclusion of your actions. “But now” means you are about to be surprised by grace, because

what is being declared is the opposite of what you think is coming. What should follow is your demise; but what is following is your blessing. Life's "therefore's" would push you off a cliff because you got too close to the edge. Life's "but now's" catch you and give you a chance to get it right. "But now" says I want you to forget about what has been, because I'm turning you in the direction of the not yet. God is turning the people in the direction of their future.

The prophet says "but now, this is what the Lord says..." That's enough right there! "This is what the Lord says..." The grace of the text is that God is saying anything. It almost does not matter what God is saying; it's just that he is still speaking. Have you ever stopped speaking to someone? Have you ever felt like you had the right to stop speaking to someone? Many of us have felt that, and we have acted upon it. Someone betrayed you. Someone sought to destroy you. Someone has lied on you. You feel like you are justified by not speaking. You even feel like you are doing something right as long as you aren't saying anything bad about or to them. You pat yourself on the back, and decide that you just aren't going to say anything to them. The fact that you stop speaking indicates that you have given up on that relationship or friendship.

God really had a right to stop speaking to God's people. They offended God and hurt God deeply. But for some reason God keeps on speaking. God has had the right to stop speaking to us. God has had the right to walk on the other side of room to avoid us. God has had the right to block our numbers so that we couldn't call him on the mainline. God has had every right to delete our numbers from his list of contacts, but he hasn't. He continues to speak. "This is what the Lord says" means that God has not given up on them. God had every right to turn his back on the people and not say anything, but the fact that he is still speaking means something.

Mr. Robinson was my eleventh grade Chemistry teacher. He was an African American man who cared very much about his students. The problem was that it was hard to tell at that age. He was tough on us. He would embarrass you sometimes in class. He was obnoxious and loud.

He would call you out in class. One of the students got tired of it one day and said “Mr. Robinson why are always loud talking me in front of everyone?” He said to her and to the whole class, “as long as I am talking to you and barking at you, there’s still hope for you. If I ever stop talking to you as a student just know that I have given up on you!”

You are fine as long as God is still speaking to you. If his word convicts you in your heart, you know that there is still hope for you. Moses knew that there was still hope for him, even after he had committed murder and had to flee to Midian, when the Lord seized his undivided attention with the burning bush and told him to go confront Pharoah. David knew there was still hope for him even after his rendezvous with Bathsheba and even after murdering her husband, when the Lord sent Nathan to him. Jonah knew there was still hope for him, even after he boldly disobeyed God’s call and went to Tarshish instead of Ninevah, when God spoke to him and told him to go again to Ninevah and preach the Word. Peter knew that was still hope for him after he had denied his connection to Christ three times, when the Lord pulled him aside and asked “do you love me Peter?” You may not always like what God is saying, but as long as God is still speaking, there is yet some hope for you. Our prayer is that God would never abandon us to our own devices. If it hurts, speak Lord. If it makes us uncomfortable, speak Lord! This is our prayer!

Behind the second chance the people were getting, moreover behind their “not yet”, was grace. It was a grace that speaks to you when you shouldn’t be spoken to; it’s also a grace THAT CLAIMS YOU WHEN YOU SHOULDN’T BE CLAIMED. One of the things that God’s people were feeling as the result of exile was that God no longer cared. They felt abandoned and felt as though they had been left to fend for themselves. They felt shame and loneliness as they lingered in the inescapable clutches of exile.

But in his continued conversation with the people the Lord tells them that he has called them by name. God has invited them to relationship. God went after them. When they were in the midst of their mess, God went after them. God went after them publicly. The Lord says “I called you by name....” There is a sense of volume and verbal expression associated with this. God didn’t call them quietly. God was sneaking behind the backs of the nations. He called them in front of everybody, and made sure that everyone could hear him calling his people. He invited them into relationship in front of everyone.

He goes on to say “you are mine.” Because he called them, they now belonged to him. He meets them at their point of need. They needed to know that they belonged, and God affirms them by declaring that they belong to him. God is so gracious that God meets them at their point of need. It is amazing how God knows your need and meets you at that point of need. You don’t always know how God is going to do it. Somehow or another God locates you amongst the masses of many, and he says exactly what you need to hear. Have you ever felt like you were the only one sitting in the pew?

The fact that God calls them and God affirms them means that God is yet claiming them as his own. In the midst of exile due to disobedience, God is claiming them. God is claiming them when they have hit the bottom. We are alright with claiming people as long as they are on top. We aren’t prone to claim folks when they have hit the bottom. We are silent about our “claiming” when someone is in trouble. We have certain family members whom we won’t claim because of their lack of productivity and successfulness. But we will trumpet loudly those who have made something of themselves: “that’s my cousin; that’s my nephew; that’s my daughter who graduated from the university.” Real love affirms even when the object of love is not too lovable. Anybody can “claim” someone when that person is on top. One of the reasons Jesus

got into so much trouble is that “owned” people in public whom no one else would own. He ate with the sinners in town, and was ostracized for it. Jesus will own you in public.

According to the prophet, God claims and affirms God’s people because of what God has invested in them. Notice the language: God “created them”; God “formed them”; and God “redeemed” them. God “created” them, that is to say he made them from nothing. God called formless matter into existence. And then God shaped that formless matter into something beautiful. The Lord says “I formed you”. God intimately shaped into his design. And then what God created and formed got into troubled because it decided to rebel against God. Therefore, that same God who did the creating and the forming also redeemed them. The word for “redeem” is the word which describes the role of the kinsman redeemer. The kinsman redeemer was near relative who could free family members and their property from bondage by paying their debts for them. It was typically someone who was “next of kin.” In a very real sense, Jesus is our next of kin who came and paid the debt that freed us from bondage. God has invested too much into us, for him not to claim us. He created us, he formed us, and he redeemed us. This is why the Lord is can’t be done with us! One of the things about a mother’s love, in many cases, is that a mother will claim her child no matter what that child has done. I’ve seen it with my own mother. Children may be “jacked up” in some cases, but a mother will typically come running to the rescue. That’s because of what they have invested in the child.

Behind the second chance, indeed behind this offer of a “not yet” is a grace which speaks to you when you shouldn’t be spoken to; is a grace which claims you when you shouldn’t be claimed; and a grace which PROTECTS YOU WHEN YOU SHOULDN’T BE PROTECTED. In appropriating the “not yet”, the future which God had for his exiled people, the people were going to have to go through some things. They couldn’t just jump from where they were into the realm of blessing. You can’t just jump from one this side of the Jordan River into the

Promised Land, you have deal with the obstacles. They would have to go through some mess and tough times. The extreme perils to which the people of God might be exposed is described as waters, rivers, fire, and flames. Even though they were God's people they would still be exposed to the waters, rivers, fire, and flames.

You would think that in light of what had been said about them that they would be exempt from peril. It had already been said about them that they were created, formed and redeemed by almighty God. If they were all of that, you would think that this same God would insulate them from the exposure to harshness. That is not that case. Even though you have been created, formed and redeemed, does not mean that you won't have to encounter the dangers of life and the perils of claiming the not yet.

They would, in the words of the prophet have to "pass through" the waters, rivers, fires, and flames. But that's just the point! They wouldn't dwell in, they would pass through. The danger you are exposed to, the issues you encounter, you must know that you are passing through, not dwelling in. You want to give up sometimes because the enemy of your soul has convinced you that you are dwelling in. You have to know what the Psalmist said "yea though I walk THROUGH the valley." I am not a permanent resident. When it comes to trouble, you are a pilgrim, not a resident! Passing through! When it comes to pain, you are a pilgrim not a resident!

No matter what the people of God are passing through, they are not alone. God says "I will be with you." God may not keep the waters, rivers, fires and flames from them, but he will not let them go through it alone. God wasn't just "talking stuff..." God had already proven himself in these areas. Already God had proven that he would be with them in the water...Red Sea...Jordan River. Already he had proven that he was with the in the fire...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego