

January 9, 2022

Isaiah 43:1-7

“Choose to Believe”

Anybody here a sports fan? I knew that. Some of you are even diehard fans – though not necessarily all for the same team. Sport is a fickle lover. You love your team – and *sometimes* they love you back. Other times, not so much.

I have been a Denver Bronco fan since I was in Middle School and my family moved to Fort Carson, Colorado – about 60 miles south of Denver. My mother announced to the family that if we lived that close to a pro team we were going to root for them. And Baltimore Colts fan though I was, you did not argue with my mother.

It’s hard to live and die with a sports team...and yet we do. I have always felt the most important thing about sports is not the activity itself – but *the lessons to be learned about life*. We are going to watch a clip of a game which is known to all Denver Bronco fans. It was the AFC championship game with the Cleveland Browns. It was late in the game and – well – see for yourself.

(Play clip)

And that’s how it goes. Watching this clip, you can understand the difference in how the Brown’s fans and how Bronco fans were feeling. And for Bronco fans, that feeling where we aren’t sure how we can recover – where all seems lost, and the odds are stacked heavily against us – this is how the Israelites were feeling when the words were spoken to them in our text today.

They weren’t even on their own 1 and ½ yard line – they had been carried off into exile into a place where every day, just being there, drenched life with a sense of hopelessness - drowning out any chance of engaging life with a meaningful future. At least that’s how it felt. And into that harsh and difficult moment the word of the Lord came to that downcast ragamuffin group of people.

Doesn’t it feel sometimes, as if the game is almost over, and we are pinned on the one and a half yard line with a long way to go and not a lot of hope to get there?

It is important to remember the very real losses and challenges which had come upon the people who placed their lives in God's hands. Very real deep water. Very hot fire. Happenings from which one might never recover.

When hope eludes us, we need to know how bad they had it to believe God can be faithful in our difficult times. God asks for our attention with the reminder – *I am the one who made you in the first place.* We start down the roads of despair and God reminds us that God's hand has been in the mix all along. I made you – and you are mine. It is a good thing when we belong to each other...it is an especially good thing when we belong to God.

When we are presented with this good news it is up to us to believe it. When life is still hard – when we still live in the place we would rather not be – it is up to us to believe that it matters that we are God's.

When the Bronco's huddled up in their own end zone with the ball on the one-and-a-half-yard line the air had gone out of the team. Keith Bishop – who played offensive guard looked around at the dispirited teammates and said to them, ***"We got 'em right where we want 'em."***

It was an audacious thing to say...but no more so than the prophet assuring people living in exile – still aching from all their losses – that they are loved, and it is going to be OK.

Notice God never says it will never hurt. God never says it will be easy. God never says we get a pass on life's challenges...we are told that, ***with God's presence and help, it will not be too much.*** For some, the surroundings of Babylon were just too overpowering to even breathe. But for others, hope was born.

Among those familiar with this football game what happened next is known simply as, *"The Drive."* And it turned out Keith Bishop was right...*they had everything they needed* to drive down the field and score. Which they did. But that doesn't mean every play went well. Some plays went quite poorly. But they kept at what they knew how to do – and it was enough...on that day, it was enough.

Friends, this is God's call to us. To do what we know how to do and work toward the purposes of God. Let's not complain things *aren't as we imagined* they would be. Let's not *corrode the situation with fear*. Let's not imagine that *any distance to go is too much*.

The bottom line? *Our circumstances never define us* – because God made us, God is always with us – and that is enough to give us courage to move forward. Our opportunity to reflect God's glory will always outweigh the sum of our circumstances.

You are a beloved child of god – choose to believe.