

Dear Future Me: You Are No Small Thing!

A sermon based on Isaiah 49:1-7 - *Listen to me, you islands;*

hear this, you distant nations:

Before I was born the Lord called me;

from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.

² *He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,*

in the shadow of his hand he hid me;

he made me into a polished arrow

and concealed me in his quiver.

³ *He said to me, "You are my servant,*

Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."

⁴ *But I said, "I have labored in vain;*

I have spent my strength for nothing at all.

Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand,

and my reward is with my God."

⁵ *And now the Lord says—*

he who formed me in the womb to be his servant

to bring Jacob back to him

and gather Israel to himself,

for I am^[a] honored in the eyes of the Lord

and my God has been my strength—

⁶ *he says:*

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant

to restore the tribes of Jacob

and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,

that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

⁷ *This is what the Lord says—*

the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—

to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,

to the servant of rulers:

"Kings will see you and stand up,

princes will see and bow down,

because of the Lord, who is faithful,

the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What are you worth? How would you answer that question? Would you look at your assets minus debts to figure your net worth in dollars? That's where my mind would go. Would you look to your accomplishments, achievements, and successes to determine your self-worth? Would you look at the impact you've made on the lives of others and try to figure out how much you'd be missed to determine how much you're worth to others?

Well, a few years ago, the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils tried to determine the worth of a human. So they calculated the amounts of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen and all the materials that make up the human body, and found the going rate for all of these elements was...about \$1. Yup, that's it. You're worth about as much as a single app downloaded to your phone. You're worth less than a single burger on the value menu at McDonalds. You're worth less than a cup of coffee at the gas station.

Is that what you're worth?

I hope you don't really think that. I hope you realize where you find your true worth...not according to the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, but in your heavenly Father's eyes. There are numerous places throughout Scripture where God clearly lays out your worth; to him, you're worth everything. And we're going to see that reminder here.

Which I think will be important because...well, do you always feel that way? Do you always feel incredibly valuable to God? Do you always feel incredibly valuable in life? Or, are there times where you feel small, insignificant, maybe even somewhat worthless?

Like, have you ever stared out the window of the airplane after takeoff? You see the people, the cars, the buildings become like matchstick or matchbox car size, then the size of a grain of rice, then disappear altogether? And you think about...you imagine the hundreds, thousands of bodies moving around their homes, driving on busy streets, cooking breakfast on their stoves, taking their dogs out for a walk in the -20 weather.

And you wonder where you fit it. Am I more than just a dot on a map? Do I even have a purpose? Would it matter to anyone if I disappeared or faded away? Would anyone even know I was gone? Does anyone see my struggles or hear my cries or feel my pain right now?

I've been there. I've shared it with you...the days I work tirelessly – a lot of good work, and I'm left wondering if I've even made a difference. Conversations I've had where I come out feeling lost...or like I've lost the battle.

It's easy, isn't it, to get into your own head, to fill it to the brim with negative thoughts, realizing life doesn't stop – people don't just stop whatever they're doing – just because you've lost someone you love, or because your heart is hurting, or because you're lonely or tired or afraid or frustrated or sad. The truth is, the world doesn't stop. It doesn't hit the pause button. It doesn't drastically change because of your feelings. And so, it's easy to feel so small, insignificant, worthless, isn't it? Like, if you grab out your "Dear Future Me" letter form for today and look at the first part asking you to recall the most recent time you were left feeling like that – small, lost, lonely, afraid, insignificant, mad, sad, hurt would you have trouble coming up with something? I don't think I would.

But maybe you would. Maybe you're the kind of person, where even the roughest of days isn't enough to break your spirit or affect your self-esteem...where you find value in your work or your family life or whatever it is.

Again, the question is, what is your worth?

I want to tell you about Tom. Tom had a beautiful house. It was a mansion really. It was full of the nicest furniture, decorated with expensive paintings, and he kept remodeling it again and again to keep up with the latest fads. But he just had to keep up appearances. He loved entertaining and had the rich and the famous over often.

Only one problem. Tom didn't have any money. This is a true story, by the way. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, lived large. But he had no money. He was in deep debt. At his death, his estate and all his possessions were auctioned off to repay his debtors, leaving his surviving daughter to rely on the charity of others to find her next meal.

You see, things aren't always what they seem. Someone might seem to be worth a lot, but really be worth very little. And someone might seem to be worth a little yet really be worth a whole lot.

So, what are you worth? That \$1? "Of course, not!" you say! "I'm worth so much more than that!" And we look at ourselves and estimate our value and think we're very worthy. I'm a good person! I'm not that bad. I'm worth a lot to my family and friends. And I'm worth a lot to God. He's lucky to have me on his team!

But you know what God says? ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).***

Or maybe you're scared because you're not really worth that much and you don't want anyone to find out. Like Thomas Jefferson trying hard to hide his debt under a veneer of extravagance, we do all we can to hide our failures, cover them up, pretend they're not there. But God knows the truth. And so do you.

Our true worth. Is it \$1? No. You and I are worth far less than that on our own. We are sinful. We can't appease God's righteous anger and punishment by trying to keep his law. Compared to God and his perfection, we really are small, so incredibly small, even smaller than that grain of rice people look like when you're taking off in a plane. We're not worthy of God. We're not worthy of eternal life. The only thing you and I are worthy of is hell. We put the wrong value on others. We put the wrong value on ourselves. We shouldn't matter to God at all.

But we do. How can you know? Would it take something like I read in a blog, where the writer said, ***"What would I shout from a rooftop this morning? Your love matters. You matter. Your small acts of kindness are no small things. Your tiny act of love could have a huge impact. Don't wait."*** Is that it? Is that where you find your worth...in what you do or even how you feel?

No. You know, the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils says you're worth \$1. But that's just for the elements that make you up. But the arrangement of those elements in the right order is worth a lot more! I recently read a single gram of bone marrow is worth \$23,000. If you've got the right DNA, it could have a market value of 9.7 million dollars. A lung is worth \$116,400, a kidney \$91,400, and a heart \$57,000. When all is said and done, your living body—should you choose to donate the whole thing—is worth about forty-five million dollars!

And believe it or not, you're worth even more to God. And your value isn't based on your works, your feelings, or even science. Your worth is based on the reality and truth of God's Word.

And God's Word through Isaiah gives us all the assurance we need to know our true value in God's eyes.

Take a look at our verses. Like last week, Isaiah is writing about the Servant of the Lord, which, again, is Jesus. Look at the description, ***"He made my mouth like a sharpened sword...he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, "You are my servant Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."***

Christ was a weapon in the hand of God. I mean, think back over the words of Jesus. They were often like a sharp sword cutting away deception and unbelief, exposing sin, but then applying the healing balm of God's grace for sinners.

And beyond that, God concealed him like an arrow in a quiver: Jesus came with his glory hidden in flesh, meaning this Servant would suffer, but in that suffering God would display his splendor.

So suffer he did. Listen to his words, ***"I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."***

Do you understand what that meant? Christ would encounter strong opposition during his ministry. Jesus experienced the same hurt a pastor feels when he has invested much time on a new family in his church, only to see the family fall back into old habits. Jesus experienced the same hurt parents feel when one of their children turns away from the Lord to a life of sin. Jesus experienced such pain and frustration in his ministry and even wondered if his work was doing any good at all. He experienced that in us and our sins.

And he would temporarily suffer apparent failure. But, with the words ***"Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand,"*** the Servant expressed his confidence in God...that even though it appeared as though he had failed, it was enough for Jesus to do God's will and to trust that God would give success to his labors, even his death on the cross.

You see, believe it or not, you're worth more to God than his own Son. He gave his Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, to be killed on a cross. He gave the sacrificial lamb who suffered hell in our place. For everyone! For Jew and Gentile!

For it was ***"too small a thing... to restore [just] the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel (the Jews..."*** so God ***"also made [Jesus] a light for the Gentiles, that [he would] bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*** And that's pretty much us in Alaska isn't it? At least from the perspective of an ancient Israelite we're the ends of the earth! God's salvation is for us.

That's how much you're worth to God. You're worth Jesus – his life, his death, his resurrection. Which was no small thing because you are no small thing to God. You have incredible worth to God...because of...only because of Jesus.

You have worth not only because of what it took to take your sins away, and to forgive you, and to make you part of something so incredible, even more valuable and prestigious than the Royal family. You have value also because of what God has made you to be.

1 Peter says, ***"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).*** It sounds somewhat similar to what Isaiah writes here, doesn't it, how ***"I (God) will make you a light...that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

Now, I know that's primarily a reference to Christ, but that verse has often been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. You see, Christ is the Light of the World, and we Christians reflect his light. That is what God has made you to be...his light to share the Light – the message of salvation through Jesus – to the ends of the world, and everywhere in-between. And, I'll tell you, that's no small thing.

I think we often feel like that. “I’m just one small voice. I’m no professional speaker. I’m no expert of the Bible. What good can I do?” Which is enough to scare us off from being true lights for Christ.

Have you ever gone to a lake or pond before, where the water’s calm, and you take a pebble or rock and toss it into the water? What happens? One tiny pebble can make ripples throughout the entire body of water.

Do you get my point? You’re just one person. You might feel like a little pebble. You might just be one voice in the crowd, but you have a life-saving message that can cause life-changing ripples throughout the lives of many.

And I get it, how even with that truth, still if I’m the only one going out, it can be uncomfortable, overwhelming to go on and be courageous for Jesus. You might feel that, despite any kind of encouragement I might give.

So don’t. Don’t be the only pebble. Light one candle in the dark, and it’ll be enough for someone to see you. Light up a bunch of candles, and you can lighten up an entire room. You are all one light, but put us all together – have all of us committing to going out and being lights for Jesus and we can make a huge impact. We can cause a wave. You see, we go because it’s no small thing to share the gospel with someone else and see God work on their hearts.

But that’s not going to happen until the gospel of Jesus grabs you so tightly and wins you over so completely...and until you see the world as Jesus wants you to see it – a lot of lost souls walking around...not until then will you truly be moved to go out and shine.

So, can you do that? This week, your “Dear Future Me” letter, share with your future self at least one Bible verse – your favorite – that reminds you of the true worth you have in God’s eyes. And then, doing that, think of one person in your life whom you would like to be the ripple from your pebble – the one you want to share the message of Jesus’ love with. Write that name down, and pray for them. Pray that God would use you to be the light in their life, to bring salvation to them. And in a year, Lord-willing, you’ll be able to look back on the success God worked through you.

That makes you rather valuable. For you know what you’re worth without Jesus. And you know what you’re worth with him! So even if you don’t have much in the bank, in the market, or in home equity, even if you’re debts outweigh your assets, even if your accomplishments seem rather paltry, and even if no one were to miss you when you leave this earth, you know that these things don’t determine your worth. Jesus does. And through him you are worthy of eternal life. That’s no small thing. And the message you get to share with others. That’s no small thing, either. May God grant you to go! Amen.

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