**SEE, I AM DOING A NEW THING!**

January 3, 2021

Isaiah 43:18-19 “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

Happy New Year! God loves doing new things. Certainly God’s mercies are new every morning. Lamentation 3:23 says, “For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” God gave us a brand new life which is eternal, so that death no longer controls us; only life reigns in us. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” God made a new covenant, where we no longer try to obtain righteousness on our own, but Christ died in our place and became our righteousness. Hebrews 8:8 says, “The days are coming…when I will make a new covenant…I will be their God and they will be my people.” Covid-19 completely changed the way we do ministry. Many Bible studies and Sunday worship service have to be done online. Unintentionally I became a TV preacher. God is doing a new thing. However, we are slow in recognizing it due to our prejudice and stubbornness. I pray that we may see a new thing God is doing in our own life, in our church and in our nation.

Look at verse 18. “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.” God’s instruction to His people through the prophet Isaiah calls them to have a “selective memory.” This is a rather strange command in light of so many instructions of God to remember the former things of old (cf. Isa 46:9). God had even instituted the Passover for the Israelites to be celebrated every year. It was to remember and never forget how God brought the Israelites from slavery in Egypt by his mighty hand (cf. Ex 12:24-27). When God says to forget the former things, nor consider the things of old, he does not mean that God’s people should forget the former things by which God revealed himself and acted with his steadfast love, grace, and deliverance in their lives. This great act of God’s deliverance in the Exodus defined relationship with him as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. However, in the midst of such grace and unique identity, God’s people broke relationship with him many times by refusing to live in obedience to him, desiring to worship other false gods and failing to give witness to God as he described himself in Deuteronomy 32:39, “See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.” In order to restore relationship with himself, God “wounded” the Israelites by the force of other nations to “kill” their idolatrous spirit and bring them to repentance. In the context, God actually predicted through Isaiah the Babylonian captivity which would come about 100 years later (c.587 BC). He also predicted release from that captivity during the time of Cyrus, King of Persia, about 150 years later (c. 540 BC). Thus, in their relationship with God, a new thing was coming soon.

Look at verse 19a. “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” God is actually telling them to set aside reflections on the Exodus so they can consider more glorious deliverance and future by his forgiveness and grace! When sitting in the adverse consequences of your sinful choices, it is easy to remember the past blessings of God with regret and even feelings of remorse. However, you should not sit around in a “pity pot,” feeling sorry for yourself that you got yourself into such a mess. But we cannot simply forget our past mistakes, failures and sins on our own strength. Let me explain. Thanks to Christmas, we all end the year with new things—new toys for the kids, new clothes (not always the right color or size, but still new), new pounds on our bodies. We start the year off with new things, a new calendar on the wall, new resolutions for the new year. Everybody likes new things, including God himself. The way of God is to start fresh. But we are held captive by our past, past things we have done. The world is cruel when people don’t let us change—a reputation that haunts us. One of the problems with the internet is that things don’t always disappear, unflattering pictures can stay there for years. For example, look up reviews of restaurants or hotels—a disproportionate of reviewers are those that have something negative to say, it may be very true, but they are the ones that take the time to “warn” others. If that isn’t bad enough, the review can sit there for years. Even if an owner takes the complaint to heart and make changes, the review does not change.

The same is true with our brain. The brain is an amazing organ in the human body, mysterious indeed. It stores every word, every experience, literally everything you encounter throughout your whole life. Such ability of the brain to remember can be a blessing and a curse at the same time. While we cherish and would like to cling to those wonderful experiences from our past, we are also “haunted” by those adverse experiences which seem to have “left their mark” on our life. For some reason it seems that the negative experiences can easily override the positive ones to such an extent that they cripple behavior, destroy relationships, paralyze abilities and even stifle the desires to live in obedience to God. Telling someone caught in the snares of despair or depression to just forget the past junk and move on, just doesn’t work easily. We need “Divine amnesia.” Divine amnesia is described in verse 25 where God says, “I, even I am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.” We cannot forget our past sins by our own will power. But through the forgiveness of sins, God can help us to forget them forever. It is only when you embrace the seriousness of your sins, confess them to God and accept his forgiveness that you experience the new thing in your life. Joseph in Genesis had also divine amnesia from his wounds of being sold as a slave by his own brothers. He named his first son Manasseh, which means “forget.” Genesis 41:51 says, “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’” “Forget” did not mean that his past painful memory was erased. But he turned the pains over to God who healed him and helped him forgive his brothers and move on. His painful memories did not hurt him.

Look at verse 19 again. “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” The most important word in this verse is SEE. It is an invitation from God himself. The next phrase makes it clear that God is already doing something new. “Now it springs up.” It is growing. God does new things. He is making a path through the wilderness. He is causing the stream to flow through the dessert. Instead of dwelling in the past demanding that God revive the glory days when you were satisfied and happy; Instead of dwelling in the past at everything that has gone wrong; Instead of demanding of God when he is going to start tidying up your life and bestow blessings once again and bring you happiness, change the question you ask of God. Ask instead for your eyes to be open to what he IS doing. Just because I cannot see God’s blessings at work, it does not mean that he is not working in my life. As a church, I ask God for clarity, to be able to see what he is doing in our church. God loves doing new things. God loves to restore the wandering souls. God loves to create new ways. I am committed to praying the same prayer not only for me, but also for this church. God is already at work doing new things. God loves doing new things. “SEE” is an invitation. “Do you not perceive it?” is the question.

When we are caught up in the thoughts and events of the past, wallowing in the hurts and pains of yesterday, we become oblivious to the “new” things God is doing all around us. That’s why God asks, “Do you not perceive it?” The perceptions of someone who struggles with letting go of the past literally become dulled—keeping them from “seeing” the good things God is doing all around them. We must get our eyes off the past and fasten them upon the power of God. The writer of Hebrews tells us to: “…fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith…” (Heb 12:2) This cannot be done when our eyes are fixed on our past. Some people don’t want to see God’s new work because they dwell on the “glorious” old days and “good old ways.” The Pharisees in the Bible were like that. They were stuck in the past. Some are caught by their past dark, bitter and painful events or failures, and they cannot see God’s new work now. We can call them spiritual PTSD patients—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder patients. So whether it was the glorious past or the dark and traumatic past, God’s people need to forget the former things and do not dwell on the past. God is saying you can’t dwell on that failed class; you can’t hang on to that love that did not work out. Instead they should see God doing a new thing! While there is a place and time to remember the events of the past to learn from the past, there is also a time to just let it go. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13b-14, “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” God does not want us to go through life looking in the rear view mirror. It is time now to look ahead and focus on what is before us. God wants to do a new thing in our lives. He wants us to rise up to our full potential in him. God has called us to do mighty things. He will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert for us.

We have to keep moving forward. It is only in moving forward that we ever accomplish what God has called us to. We cannot stay where we are, nor can we go backwards. The only direction we can go is forward. So let’s move on and keep our eyes focused on God and grow. There is a familiar phrase: “In order to go where we have never been, we have to do something we have never done.” If we want to grow into an ever-increasingly closer walk with him, we are going to have to allow God to lead us in places we have never been before; God is already at work whether we see it or not. Accept the invitation to SEE, pray for open eyes, ask God to reveal his ways and what he is doing. There is a wilderness, but God is building a path. There is a dessert, but a stream is flowing. God loves doing new things. God loves showing us new places. God loves using new methods. Open our eyes Lord, to what you are already doing among us and in our life.

What is the new thing God is doing in your life today? In his forgiving love, he chose to forget your sins and the mess you have made of your life, even though you still have to deal with your memory of it all. Even though you cannot forget the past, you can still experience the new thing God wants to do in his perfect forgetting while remembering his covenant of love. Whether it is sin you have committed or sin placed upon you by someone else, none of it has to control your life in the present or control your perspective of the future. Sure, it has an effect on all of your life but it doesn’t have to control it. In Christ God has provided the complete forgiveness of your guilt and sin for his own sake. Since you are unable to release yourself from the burden of sins, let alone forget them, God has done it for you. God took on the human flesh in Jesus in order to die on the cross as the perfect sacrifice to remove the just punishment your sins deserve. Jesus suffered it for you. When you believe in Jesus, you have been connected with Christ’s death and resurrection so that you can now walk in newness of life by leaving the past sins to Jesus, dealing with your present sins by confessing them to him daily and receiving his forgiveness. Then, by the Holy Spirit’s power, you move forward in the new thing God does in your life. God’s forgiving and forgetting by the grace of Jesus gives you the peace of God, which transcends all understanding and will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (cf. Ph 4:7). If you worry about tomorrow or regret the past, you steal the strength and peace from today.

Look at verses 20-21. “The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.” Here, we see something amazing and unusual, that is, wild animals like jackals or owls honoring God, saying, “Praise the Lord!” Why then does the Lord open up a way in the desert and make streams in the wasteland? It is to give drink to his people. These verses thus look to the days of the Holy Spirit being poured upon those who repent and believe in the Lord! Indeed, the Holy Spirit fell upon his children on the day of Pentecost. Since that time on, God’s kingdom work has continued to this very day. Everyone who repents and accepts God praises his name. When one person repents and believes in God, although many remain indifferent to this great work of God, not only the angels in heaven but also the animals on earth greatly rejoice over this miracle, saying, “Hurray! Praise God! The time of our redemption also draws near!” (Ro 8;20; Isa 55:12,13; Ac 10:13)

There are great work of God happening right now around us and around the world. Our God is always doing new things. Let us not be past dwellers or spiritual PTSD patients. Rather, through the help of the Holy Spirit we may forget all glorious or painful things of the past, and see what God is doing now. I believe that God is making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland at the University of Toronto. May God help us to see a new thing God is doing as we fix our eyes on him in the new year.

Big Idea: See a new thing God is doing