

Message: "Perceiving the New Thing"

Text: Isaiah 43:18-21; 2 Cor. 7:10 NIV

43:18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 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. 20 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, 21 the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Orientation (Me)

We are starting of a new sermon series for the year: Divine Prophetic Imagination. This will be our 2024 church annual theme. We are praying to see the world through God's eyes.

God wants us to be filled with "Faith-Filled-Expectation." Today we're going to talk about the first of three things we need to do in order to receive the high motivation and expectation towards God.

But before we get into that, what would God say, we where to ask him, "How do you see the church today?" I think his response would be something like this...

Identification (We)

(Slide 2) We're living in a time where 70% of the people who call themselves Christians are not really Christians (oops!).

Many are acting out a feel-good approach to their Christian faith. They have adopted a Christianity that is more worldly than holy. Here are some of the worldly ideologies many Christians are unashamedly embracing:

1. Nobody has the right to judge me
2. I need to take care of mine before I help others
3. It's better to receive than to give
4. Its okay to talk behind someone's back with no intention of saying it to their face.
5. It's okay to cheat a bit to get ahead
6. Being entertained is better than being edified
7. Being productive is more important than being faithful
8. The decisions I make are based more on my opinions than on bible principles
9. It's better to be first than to be last
10. If someone offends me, I cut them off.

Many of these ideologies Christians are regularly practicing against their better judgment in front of the world. This is partly due to many preachers choosing to feed people's flesh rather than their spirit. Christians are chasing after the Flesh-filled preachers who tell them what they want to hear, leaving Spirit-filled preachers in the dust.

We are living in the time of what the Bible describes as "itching ears" (2 Tim 4:3-4). Many Christians are lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God. Rather submitting under the inspired preaching at their local church, they have a buffet of preachers at the fingertips to choose from on their YouTube channel. Who needs home cooked food, when they can go out and get fast-food on YouTube?

As a result, we have many Christians hearing the Word of God and not being moved by it. ***They are not being transformed into more Christlikeness because they resist the Word (Ugh!).*** No wonder why, the world can make a blanket assumption about the church being filled with a bunch of hypocrites. The unchurched don't see Christ in many Christians on the job or in the schools.

Illumination (God)

This was how God saw the church in Isaiah's day. As a matter of fact when this prophet wrote chapters 40 to 49 of his book, it is said that God showed him what the church would look like 200 year into his future.

Isaiah lived in a time when life was really good for the Jews. But it wasn't so good for God. While the Jews were at the height of their prosperity, they were at a all time low in their relationship with God. So God sent Isaiah to tell them that their days are number and they will soon captured into exile.

But not only did God show Isaiah this pending exile, he also showed Isaiah what life would look like after the exile. Isaiah 43 was written to speak to a post-exilic remnant of Jews 200 year after Isaiah died. Talk about using God's Eyes. And it was in this chapter that God requested these post-exilic Jews to do something when they come out of captivity. Let's read it here:

(Slide 3)

"18 Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 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." (Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV)

Doesn't this should familiar. This is the same message that the prophet Haggai told them regarding the latter temple having greater glory than the former temple in their day. Isaiah is preaching the same message as Haggie to this remnant. On that rather than comparing old temple and new temple, Isaiah was comparing "former things" to "a new thing."

When Isaiah is speaking about “former things,” he is speaking how God delivered his people from Egypt, gave them the promise land and established for them a royal kingdom. The former things spoke about the old exodus miracle story, where God took them out of slavery and made them a people. Why is God telling them to forget, when He had always told them to remember?

It was because they became so preoccupied with the old exodus miracle that they become unmoved by God. The old exodus made them feel prideful about their history. It made them feel powerful. It made them feel like they were better than everyone else.

They were so preoccupied with the glory of the good days, that they failed to remember why God took it away from them in the first place. God freed them from oppression so they can keep others out of oppression. But they ended up using their freedom to oppress the weak.

God wanted them to forget the former things, because they were longing for a Jerusalem that God didn't want. They were longing for the good life that their wealth brought them through their oppressive ways. Little did they realize that their longing for old Jerusalem, was really a longing to go back and enjoy their past sins. This is the danger in living in nostalgia:

(Slide 4) Nostalgia makes us want to go back and enjoy our past sins (ahh!).

Application (You)

While you know your past sins are wrong, nostalgia makes you look back on them with pleasure. A spouse knows her infidelity was wrong, but she can't help to remember how good it made her feel. This is how dangerous nostalgia is to our faith.

Rather than feeling sorrow for your sin, nostalgia makes you feel sorry for what you lost. Rather than feeling sorrow for how much pain you caused God, nostalgia makes you feel sorrow only for how much pain God caused you. Apostle Paul explains this further in 2 Corinthians 7:10

(Slide 5)

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10 NIV)

Paul says, Godly sorrow leads to life and worldly sorrow leads to destruction. Godly sorrow remembers the ugliness of your sin, but worldly sorrow remembers everything in the past but your sin. Walter Brueggemann says that the worldly sorrow of nostalgia causes you to miss your past too much, too well, too long that it takes your eyes off God and blinds you from your own sin.

Worldly sorrow brings tears of self-pity tears for the consequences of their sins. Richard Owen Roberts says, when we see a person in tears, many often make the mistake of assuming those are tears of repentance. But those tears might not be anything more than tears of regret that the person got caught. Tears that come as a result of being caught are not tears that come from the sorrow God brings.

The Godly sorrow that comes from God always produces to true repentance. True repentance brings a sorrow that sees “the great evil” of all sin that is against God. It sees how sin breaks God’s heart and his creation. Without this sorrow, many who weep in their sins, will continue to do the same sin. But true repentance breaks us free from the kind of nostalgia that glories our past sins. True repentance wants a preacher to not tell them what they want to hear, but to tell them what they need to hear.

(Slide 6) *To see the world through God's eyes, you need to view sin in the way God views it (yeah!)*

Vision (We)

Why God told the post-exilic Jews to “forget the former things,” he was really telling them to take their eyes off their past pleasures and repent of their past sins. But there is also another reason why. Look read the passage again:

(Slide 7)

“18 Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 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.” (Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV)

God wanted them to “forget the former things” (repent), so that they can “perceive” (see) the new thing. They needed to repent of letting the old exodus sinful and oppressive lifestyle, because he is doing a second exodus among them. He didn’t want them to repeat the same mistakes over. He wants them to learn from their past mistakes.

If the remnant does not forget the former things, then God will not remove the resistance in them against the new thing. This resistance is a force within and around them that is keeping them from seeing the new thing. It is like a veil blinding their eyes (2 Corinthian 3:14). This resistance keeps them from becoming a healing balm in society. It keeps them from being an Ark in coming storm. It keeps them from becoming a safe house with the blood of the lamb over the doorpost, when the angels of death pass by.

God is saying, “You can’t afford to not repent. You will miss out on the new thing I am doing.” In this new exodus, there is another miracle coming. It is going to be better than the old exodus miracle. The old exodus miracle happened when God made a dry path through the Red Sea. But this new exodus miracle is going to create a steam of water running through a heat-scorching desert (v. 19).

Yes we are living in a spiritual desert today... in this financial desert... in this political desert... in a social desert... in an emotional desert. And God told these people that he is going to bring a stream running through it so that we can be like a tree by the rivers of water (Psalms 1). That river running through the desert is Jesus.

And we how are planted by that river, he is going to use to extend that river into the desert. God will use us (the Church) in such a way that even the beast of the world (wild animals, jackal, owls) will be impressed (v. 20). We won't let the world turn us into them— savages/beast who oppress one another. But God will turn us in a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, and a holy nation, fostering an oppressive free environment among us.

We are the New Thing! We are the refreshing springs of Christ in the world. Can you perceive it? Can you see what God sees? True repentance enables us to “perceive” and become the new thing God is producing in the desert.

(Slide 8) ***A life committed to true repentance enables us to “perceive” the new thing God is producing through his church in the desert conditions of our world.***