

“Forget the Past?”—Isaiah 43:18-19

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Forget the Past?”, is Isaiah 43:18-19 → *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The brain is an amazing organ in the human body, mysterious indeed. Think of it’s power in your life. If someone were to open your skull, take out your brain and hold it in his hand, what would it be? Yes, it is still your brain, but as a clump of tissue which is lifeless and useless. However, connected to the rest of your body, it becomes the organ in your body which gives guidance to all your physical and emotional functioning. In addition to that, this “clump of tissue” also stores every word, every experience, literally everything you encounter throughout your whole life. We are indeed *fearfully and wonderfully made* by God (cf. Psalm 139:14).

As you well know, 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 present. 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 the Lord Jesus. And telling someone caught in the snares of despair or depression to just forget the past junk and move on . . . well . . . it just doesn’t work that easily. It must be “embraced” as a part of who you are and dealt with on the basis of Who God is as your Creator and Redeemer.

Yahweh’s instruction to His people through the prophet Isaiah in our text calls them to have a “selective memory,” if you will. He says in verse 18 of our text: *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old*. This is a rather strange command in light of so many instructions of the LORD to *remember the former things of old* (cf. Isaiah 46:9). The LORD had even instituted a *rite as a statute for* the Israelites and their children *forever* to be performed every year. The Passover was a meal shared with the specific intent of remembering and telling future generations so they would never forget how the LORD brought about the deliverance of His people. *With the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover as He passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when He struck the Egyptians but spared the Israelites’ houses* (cf. Exodus 12:24-27).

When He says to *remember not the former things, nor consider the*

things of old, He does not mean that God's people should forget *the former things* by which Yahweh revealed Himself and acted with His steadfast love, grace, forgiveness and deliverance in their lives. Even He acted thus because **He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob** (cf. Exodus 2:24), a covenant which harkens back to His promise in the Garden of Eden to crush the devil's power (cf. Genesis 3:15). This great act of God's deliverance in the exodus defined relationship with Him as the nation of Israel, a people set apart to act in obedience to His commands and worship Him alone in response to His love as a witness to the pagan nations around them (cf. Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18).

However, in the midst of such grace and unique identity His people broke relationship with Him many times by refusing to live in obedience to Him, desiring to worship other false gods along with Him and failing to give witness to Yahweh as He described Himself in Deuteronomy 32:39 → *See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand.* In order to restore relationship with Himself He "wounded" them by the force of other nations to "kill" their idolatrous spirit and bring them to repentance.

In the context, the LORD actually predicted through Isaiah the Babylonian captivity which would come about a hundred years later (c.

587 BC). He also predicted release from that captivity during the time of Cyrus, King of Persia, about a hundred and fifty years later (c. 540 BC). Thus, in their relationship with Yahweh a *new thing* was looming on the horizon. In fact, Isaiah speaks as if it has already taken place and they are in captivity to Babylon. He says in verse 19 of our text: *Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?* The LORD is actually instructing them to set aside reflections on the exodus so they can consider a still 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 the LORD with regret and even feelings of remorse. However, God is not about sitting around in a “pity-pot,” feeling sorry for yourself that you got yourself into such a mess. God is about doing miracles in your life **today** which can eclipse *the former things* in such a manner that you can *walk in newness of life* now (cf. Romans 6:4). It doesn’t happen by your simply forgetting your past mistakes, failures and sins (i.e. those ways in which you have disobeyed God’s Word). Rather, it happens on another level of forgetting which is bound up in “Divine amnesia.”

Divine amnesia? What’s that? It is described later in this chapter in verse 25 where God says: *I, I am He Who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.* It is a forgiving of

your sins which, even though you cannot do so, God can forget them forever. It is only when you embrace the seriousness of your sins, confess them to God and cling to His forgiveness **on His terms** (i.e. *for My own sake*) that you experience the *new thing* in your life. In verse 19 of our text He uses the picture of bringing new life into a dry, parched and dead wilderness: *I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert*. Notice it is totally **on His terms**: *I will make a way . . .* and He did.

So, what is the *new thing* God is doing in your life today? In His forgiving love He chooses to forget your sins and the mess they've 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's sin you've 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 affect on all of your life but it doesn't have to control it.

Colossians 2:17 says of God's dealings with His Old Testament Church: *These are a shadow of the things to come, but **the substance belongs to Christ***. He is the miracle that can eclipse *the former things* for they find their fulfillment in Him. Thus, the confession of the Christian

is “Jesus is Lord,” not the former stuff of your past. In Christ God has provided the complete forgiveness of your guilt and sin for His own sake, that is, on His own terms. Since you are unable to release yourself from the burden of sins, let alone forget them, He has done it for you. God took on your 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. In Christ God took on your human flesh in order to live perfectly under God’s holy law for you so that His obedience becomes your obedience through faith in Him. God’s Law is no longer a curse (cf. Galatians 3:13) but rather a joy (cf. 1 John 5:3).

In baptism you have been connected with Christ’s death and resurrection so that you can now *walk in newness of life!* Thus, as Romans 6:11 says, *you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God **in Christ Jesus***. You actually embrace your wonderful memory by leaving the forgetting of 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 because of the Person & Work of Jesus is *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding which will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (cf. Philippians 4:7). You are created and re-created for life, now and eternally!

If you worry about tomorrow . . . or regret the past . . . you steal the strength and peace from today. These are good words of wisdom. However, they are words of wisdom which can be lived only as you trust in Jesus, Who has dealt with your past in His cross and resurrection and provides you strength by His Holy Spirit to experience His peace and strength for obedient living now and into eternity. Amen.

Brothers . . . one thing I do:

forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

I press on toward the goal

for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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