

Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁶This is what the LORD says,
who makes a road through the sea
and a path through mighty waters,
¹⁷who brings out the chariot and the horses,
the army and the strong warrior.
They will all lie down together.
They will not get up.
They are extinguished.
Like a wick they go out.
¹⁸Do not remember the former things.
Do not keep thinking about ancient things.
¹⁹Watch, I am about to do a new thing.
Now it will spring up. Don't you know about it?
Indeed I will make a road in the wilderness.
In the wasteland I will make rivers.
²⁰The wild animals, the jackals and ostriches, will honor me,
because I am providing water in the wilderness,
rivers in a parched wasteland,
to provide water for my chosen people to drink.
²¹This people that I formed for myself will declare my praise.

A New Thing

I.

You take out your phone and open your banking app. The balance isn't as high as you would *like* it to be, but you're going to be ok—for now. But income hasn't kept up with inflation, and the prices of everything are going up. Then something goes wrong. You're not feeling well, and the trip to the doctor shows that health problems are on the horizon. Health insurance will cover *most* of the costs, but there are always things needing to be paid out-of-pocket. Then the furnace quits working, or the water heater goes out; the car breaks down.

The future starts to look pretty bleak. You just want a break, something that takes your mind off your current problems. The notification section of your phone reminding you of some special photo memory of the past lasts only a few seconds. You need something a little more substantial to take your mind off the present worries.

The next holiday celebration offers a chance to do just that. Family and friends gather together. You sit down to a big meal together and reminisce about happier times.

Every year they did the same thing you do at holiday celebrations. They got together to remember happier times in the past.

Their celebration was not a haphazard discussion of family memories, but focused; directed. There was a book that made sure every family celebrating that holiday did things in exactly the same way. The book was called the Haggadah.

The Haggadah had text and illustrations to show each family exactly what was to be done and how it was to be done. There were several *days* of preparation needed before the big day finally arrived. When the special day came, each family would set the table exactly the same way. Each family would supply the same ceremonial foods, laid out on the special plate the same way. Each family would have the same kinds of pouches and bags to use to tell the story. Each father, as the head of the family, would wear exactly the same ceremonial clothing.

Soon after they sat down to begin, the youngest member of the family would use the Haggadah

to ask the same set of four questions: “How is this night different from all other nights?” “Why do we eat only unleavened bread on this night, when on other nights we eat any kind of bread?” “Why the bitter herbs?” “Why do we eat in such a relaxed position, rather than hurriedly?” The questions were a set up for the father in the family to tell the story of the Exodus.

God gave Moses all the instructions for the people in celebrating the first Passover. Then he said: “This day shall be a memorial for you, and you are to celebrate it as a festival to the LORD. Throughout your generations you must celebrate it as a permanent regulation” (Exodus 12:14, EHV). No matter where they were, the Jewish people were to celebrate Passover year after year. The first Passover—in Egypt—was eaten in haste. The final plague was that God would destroy the firstborn of every Egyptian family. God’s angel would pass over the houses marked with the blood of the lamb.

Every year after, Passover night was to be a long night—lingering over every detail of the story of the plagues, and the flight from Egypt. Reveling in God’s great acts of deliverance—a pillar of cloud going before the people by day, and a pillar of fire at night; water standing high overhead on each side, providing a path of dry ground to escape from Pharaoh pursuing the people; God thundering from Mt. Sinai and giving his 10 Commandments to the people, as well as the rest of his laws, through the hand of Moses.

Each Passover was quite a night. All the problems of the present were forgotten as the people remembered the past, and God’s greatness.

II.

Isaiah began today’s text: “This is what the LORD says, who makes a road through the sea and a path through mighty waters, ¹⁷who brings out the chariot and the horses, the army and the strong warrior. They will all lie down together. They will not get up. They are extinguished. Like a wick they go out” (Isaiah 43:16-17, EHV).

Perhaps it was Passover time when Isaiah wrote. Certainly he reminded his people of the Passover story. He reminded them of these great and wonderful things God had done. He prefaced the Passover story by saying: “This is what the LORD says.” The One who had done such great things for his people was about to speak to them. They should pay attention.

What the Almighty God said next was surprising; stunning, even. “Do not remember the former things. Do not keep thinking about ancient things” (Isaiah 43:18, EHV). It was the Almighty himself who had given instructions through Moses to *remember* these great things that had been done for his people. That same God now said to forget them. What a shocking idea!

“Watch, I am about to do a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19, EHV). Certainly Israel’s past was not an insignificant thing, or an unimportant thing. However...don’t cling to the past. Don’t get so wrapped up either in the misery of the moment or in the great blessings of God in the past that you forget to look to his promises of today—promises that look to the future.

III.

“Watch, I am about to do a new thing. Now it will spring up. Don’t you know about it? Indeed I will make a road in the wilderness. In the wasteland I will make rivers” (Isaiah 43:19, EHV).

For months now in Bible class we have been studying “Where Did the Bible Come From?” In doing so, we have discussed prophecy, most recently something called “predictive prophecy,” in which God reveals the future to his people. We have talked about “prophetic perspective.” That can mean that the prophecy refers to a more immediate fulfilment, and then an ultimate fulfillment.

There the Jews sat in Babylon while they celebrated their Passover and looked back to the miracles of the Exodus. Those events were wonderful, but God himself was telling them through Isaiah not just to look back, but to look ahead for something new.

The more immediate fulfilment of what Isaiah relayed to the people would come when God would deliver them from their exile in Babylon. It would be spectacular.

And it was. It was the same as God leading them along the path from Egypt to the Promised Land. He provided for them along the way. They came back to Palestine to rebuild the temple and

live in Jerusalem again. They resettled places like Galilee and Capernaum and Bethlehem.

But this more immediate fulfillment of what God said through Isaiah really just laid the groundwork for God's ultimate fulfillment. It was essential for Jews to live in Galilee and Bethlehem again. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for me in Israel. His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2, EHV). The Savior would be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah, himself, had already foretold important things for Galilee: "In former times, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will cause it to be glorious, along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. For those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:1-2, EHV). Jesus' ministry in Galilee would be significant; he was known as a Galilean.

"Do not remember the former things. Do not keep thinking about ancient things. ¹⁹Watch, I am about to do a new thing. Now it will spring up. Don't you know about it?" (Isaiah 43:18-19, EHV). God's greatest deed of all time wasn't making water stand up in walls on both sides of an endless stream of people crossing the Red Sea on dry ground. It wasn't making sure they had enough to eat and drink out in a barren wilderness, wandering around for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land—the land flowing with milk and honey.

God's greatest thing—a new thing—a thing that springs up—a thing that he wants everyone in all of human history to see and rejoice over—is Jesus' payment for every man, woman, and child who ever lived or ever will live on the cross of Calvary. It was a thing that seemed *insignificant* to most of those standing around watching yet another convicted criminal die on a cross. Even when the sun stopped shining that day, and the temple curtain tore in two from top to bottom, it didn't seem all that earth-shattering.

But it was. It was the most important event in the whole history of the world. "The wild animals, the jackals and ostriches, will honor me, because I am providing water in the wilderness, rivers in a parched wasteland, water for my chosen people to drink" (Isaiah 43:20, EHV). Even wild animals praise God for the salvation he brought for his people.

IV.

"This people that I formed for myself will declare my praise" (Isaiah 43:21, EHV). Worship is more than just declaring that God is awesome. It means to thank and praise him.

There is no need to open up a Haggadah and compare the pictures, the way the Jews do for Passover. It doesn't matter if traditions in one place vary from those in another place.

We are this people that God formed for himself. We have been brought into his family of faith by baptism. We have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb—the blood of Jesus, our Savior. In the next two weeks we will look back at the greatest events that ever happened in the history of the world—we will look back on the sufferings, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. We will speak about the greatest thing God has ever done—he brought us salvation in Jesus.

This people that God formed for himself want nothing more than the opportunity to praise him by telling the world of his wonderful acts—this new and greatest thing. You don't need a special opportunity to do that, but since next Sunday—Palm Sunday—has been designated a Friendship Sunday, take time to invite your friends and relatives—and people you haven't seen at Holy Trinity in a while—to join their voices with yours in singing praises to God for his mighty deeds. Amen.