

**Thank God for New Things**  
**Isaiah 43:15-19**

Brothers and sisters, As far as encouraging words go – we’ve got some really terrific ones in this scripture passage this morning don’t we?! I’m sure they practically jumped out at you from vs.18-19 as we read them... *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”*

Those words have a proverbial power to them don’t they.

We all know how easy it is to get stuck on things in the past and dwell on them - to the detriment of what is coming next... like an athlete who can’t stop ruminating about their last loss and it interferes with playing well in their next game.

We might be stuck on getting fired from our last job, being unexpectedly dumped by a girlfriend or boyfriend, or making some mistake that has shot our confidence to pieces – and we’re dwelling on it... we can’t seem to let go of it and move on. We’ve seen it happen to others, we’ve experienced it

ourselves – and in such situations we know that something or someone needs to step in and help us get unstuck.

Just like the wise Rafiki helps young Simba in the Lion King movie. Remember that? Simba is stuck on the mistakes in his past and he can’t move beyond them to become the leader he is supposed to be.

So Rafiki confronts him about it and bops him on the head with his staff... and the scene plays out like this... with Rafiki helping Simba move on from his past with these wise words *“you can run from the past or learn from it”* Then Rafiki takes another swing at Simba with his staff and Simba ducks – and Rafiki laughs and says *“see! You’re learning!”*

Brothers and sisters there is a lot of creational wisdom in coming to accept that we may have been hurt in the past, we can make mistakes, we can have bad days – but we don’t need to get stuck on it, we can learn from it and move on.

And so this morning – as you hear Jesus speaking these encouraging words – *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”* And their creational wisdom gives you a metaphorical bonk on the head, to get you to move on from something that has you stuck – you’re welcome. If that’s what you needed then indeed *“God’s mercies are new every morning.”* (Lam 3:23) learn from your mistakes and move on.

Or maybe you are coming in to worship this morning – acutely aware that you gave into temptation again this past week. You had one drink too many, poked around with some pornography, passed along some juicy gossip, lost your temper, said things you regret – whatever it was... the disappointment in yourself as a follower of Jesus, the guilt and shame of committing such sins, it’s still weighing on your heart and you can’t get it out of your mind and it’s just really bothering you – you’re stuck on it.

And brothers and sisters – let me make a side note here – this is exactly why we open in prayer at the start of the worship

service and that prayer always includes a confession of our sins and thanksgiving for the forgiveness we receive in Jesus Christ...

But maybe that prayer at the start of the service wasn’t enough, or maybe you missed that prayer as you arrived for the 10:20 service...

In any case – if you are burdened by your guilt and you are having a difficult time moving on from what you’ve done wrong. I pray the spiritual wisdom of Jesus’ words will help you to live by the grace of His forgiveness and enable you to fully participate and receive blessing from serving God in worship this morning no longer distracted by what you did this past week. *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”*

If that’s what you need hear and be encouraged with, it is true – God says *“I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”* (Hebrews 8:12) If God forgets

about your sins because of Jesus' payment for them – you can too brothers and sisters.

However, even though our initial hearing of these encouraging words evokes some helpful creational and spiritual wisdom for us this morning – that's not their intended purpose.

Did you manage to catch the irony in this scripture passage when it was read? Don't worry I didn't either – but if you look closer at it, you realize this passage is a bit contradictory.

It starts off with God listing some of His important names and titles; Yahweh, Holy One, Isreal's creator, their King – and then just before Isaiah relays what God says, there are more important descriptors, accomplishments that added.

Look at vs. 16-17 This is Yahweh *“who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick”*

Do you notice that all of these names, titles and descriptors are historical? We first learn about God's name Yahweh – I Am who I Am, when He calls Moses to go back to speak to the Israelites and to Pharaoh in Egypt.

And God reveals Himself as the Holy One when He meets them at Mt. Sinai to ratify the Covenant, and the mountain is quaking and on fire, and none are to approach for fear of death, because He is set apart as God.

And it's not often you hear God called Israel's creator – but this harkens back to the time when Jacob wrestled with God and was named Isreal, meaning “one who prevails with God.”

And God claiming the title of Isreal's King recalls the long and storied history of Isreal's monarchy – beginning with God's choosing Saul and then David and his house to rule His people.

And the additional descriptions of what God accomplished are references to His delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt and then taking them though the Red Sea on dry ground and

bringing about the destruction of Pharaoh's army that was pursuing them.

Now as I mentioned, all of these titles, and descriptions of what God has done... are historical. They've happened in the past, yet what God has to say is *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. I am going to do a new thing!"*

So, looking at these encouraging words in the context of this scripture passage is somewhat confusing because of this contradiction.

But, it's the key to understanding why Jesus is speaking them to us this morning, and why Yahweh, the Holy One, Israel's creator and King – who had performed mighty acts of deliverance in the past - was speaking these encouraging words to His people through the prophet Isaiah in the first place.

You see God's people – the people of Israel - were exiled in Babylon.

Around 600 BC God sent King Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Israel and Judah and take the people captive back to Babylon as punishment for refusing to repent of their Covenant unfaithfulness. Those who did not lose their lives would have to live as strange people in a strange land.

And Yahweh had this to say about their situation at the start of the exile via the prophet Jeremiah. God said *"to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.... When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place."*

So indeed, seventy years later God is keeping His promise to come for His people and bring them back to the land. If we

had started our scripture passage at vs. 14 this morning we would have read *“For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.”*

That’s the clue that God is going to bring about the downfall of the Babylonians... and if you know your biblical history and stories from the book of Daniel, you’ll remember that King Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son King Belshazzar. And Belshazzar sealed his fate by hosting a drunken party in his palace using the golden cups taken from Yahweh’s temple in Jerusalem. At this party a hand appeared and wrote the infamous words on the wall – that His kingdom would be given to the Medes and the Persians.

And as the scripture tells us, that very night King Darius the Mede conquered Babylon and took over the Kingdom paving the way for his successor, King Artaxerxes to decree that the Jews would be allowed to return to their homeland and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

So, in context, we can take Yahweh’s words of encouragement to mean that Israel can expect to be delivered by foreign powers instead of being conquered and exiled by them. It is time to move on from settling in Babylon and prepare to return to the promised land.

And this would be important brothers and sisters, because after seventy years there would be many Jews who had been born and raised in Babylon, growing up in its culture and surrounded by its religion and worldview, this would be all they had known.

The only thing that would have set them apart would have been the way in which their parents and the exiled community would have passed on their history and their past: the Covenant heritage, the beliefs and practices like Circumcision, the Law of Moses, whatever festivals and feasts could be celebrated and observed in a strange land among strangers... But this generation who had grown up in exile would still feel more familiar and comfortable in Babylon than anywhere else.

So, if God is going to bring them from Babylon back to Jerusalem – they are going to need to forget Babylon and all they know of its wealth and power and fame and riches...  
*“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”* But there is another layer to these words as well brothers and sisters.

The exile generation had grown up on the history and stories of Isreal’s past, hearing about the mighty acts of Yahweh bringing Isreal out of Egypt, the conquest of the Promised Land, the great deeds of Moses and Joshua.

They had heard all the stories of deliverance in the time of the Judges; Gideon, Jehu, Samson, all leading up to the great kings of Isreal, David and Solomon and the glory and splendor of Solomon’s Temple, the Golden Age of Isreal God’s chosen people. Those were the days! If only it could be like that again!

And truth be told – it would be a lot easier for the exile generation to leave Babylon behind for the new thing God was doing if they anticipated that that new thing was to make

Isreal great again. But Yahweh says *“forget the former things... do not dwell on the past! See I am doing a new thing...”*

Now what is encouraging about hearing that things are not going to be great and glorious like they were in the good old days? Well – we need to note that Yahweh says He is doing a NEW thing, not the same thing or different thing.

And this is encouraging brothers and sisters because a new thing is what is required here, though not many of the exiled Jews would have recognized the need for it. Which is why in vs.19 Yahweh asks *“do you not perceive it?”*

Now the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting to get different results.

God is not going to send the exiles back to Jerusalem, restore things to the way they were before – the glorious past - and expect this to produce lasting covenant faithfulness and true worship and service. The very fact that Isreal is in exile is

proof that the former things hadn't worked in this regard and something NEW is needed instead.

If the exiles stay focused on the past as they return, they will have a difficult time perceiving and recognizing the NEW thing – so forget the former things and do not dwell on these aspects of the past.

And this is why Jesus encourages us with these words this morning brothers and sisters, so that our focus on the past doesn't cause us to miss out on the new thing that the Holy Spirit is doing.

You see brothers and sisters, we are similar to the Jewish exiles in Babylon in having been born and raised in cultures that are not Christian, where the influence of the Church has greatly diminished or disappeared, where the laws of the land run counter to God's laws and there are many other religions and gods, idols and ideologies that are worshipped.

And while we follow Jesus and call ourselves Christians, we are much more familiar and comfortable with the riches and power and wealth and comforts of the Kingdoms of this World than we are with the Kingdom of Heaven, with the coming NEW Heavens and Earth, the NEW Creation.

So, for us brothers and sisters, this is an encouragement from the Lord to reframe our current lives in this world in stark contrast against the NEW Creation that is yet to come. Forget about the empty and short-lived promises of happiness and fulfilment in this life, put your faith in the promise of eternal happiness and fulfilment through Jesus in the life to come!

As our Lord taught us in Matt 6:19-20 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven."*

So let me encourage you brothers and sisters, with three simple ways that we can do this, and what better weekend for

reflecting on this and putting it into action than on Thanksgiving Sunday.

So let's start with our treasure – our financial resources. We can use the monies that God has blessed us with to store up treasure in heaven by simply giving part of it back to Him. Not our budget leftovers – if we have any... but right off the top, when we do our weekly or monthly finances. We give what our grateful hearts have decided to set aside for Jesus, because Jesus comes first – and He is our treasure in Heaven.

And in the spirit of forgetting the former things for something new – maybe this is a new thing for you, giving back to Jesus not only to support His work and ministry here at Valleyview, but to demonstrate to yourself He is first in your life.

And this principle of giving to God first, to put Jesus first in our lives, also extends to our time and talents.

That is why gathering for worship is the first thing we do, on the first day of the week, of every week! Not just on a spare

week-end, or a free Sunday, or when we feel like it. This might be a new thing for you, forgetting about worshiping your priorities and prioritizing weekly worship instead.

And from there we store up treasure in heaven during the rest of the week by what we do with our talents. The question to reflect on brothers and sisters is how are you using your skills and gifts and abilities in what you do for school or work or hobbies – so that it points ahead to the NEW Creation.

Does your school or work give you lots of opportunities to meet and talk to people? Do you have the ability to create content and influence people? Do you make policies, or are you studying and discovering the designs and patterns and laws of God's creation? Maybe your new thing is being intentional about these opportunities to point away from the past to the future – to the New Creation.

There are so many ways we can store up treasure in Heaven brothers and sisters, but giving back out of our finances, making the time for worship each Sunday, and pointing the



way ahead with our talents, these are three simple ways in which we can forget the ways of this world, and keep our eyes expectantly focused on coming New Creation. Amen?!

Now Jesus words have another layer to them for us as well – just as they did for the exiles.

Sometimes we need to leave behind the ways in which God dealt with us in the past, how we lived out our faith in the past... because the Holy Spirit is going to do a new thing in us and what we are used to God doing in the past can keep us from perceiving and receiving the new thing.

And this new thing is an outworking of THE New thing that Yahweh hints at, Jesus Christ fulfilling the Covenant through His life and death and resurrection, there is no other new NEW Thing besides this...

But the implications of that NEW Thing which Jesus completed, these become new things for each of us personally... as the Holy Spirit works them out in our lives.

Now, I think we've already covered this a little bit as we've looked at giving back out of our treasure, time and talents, but there is still more new things to receive from this because of how the new thing that Yahweh will do is connected to Yahweh saying *"I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."*

You see brothers and sisters, we may have first come to faith in Jesus Christ and experienced His wonderful forgiveness, our belief system changed, we had peace – we learned how to pray and read the bible a bit, we attended worship... but after an initial growth spurt things kind of plateaued out. You can feel that your faith is kind of... dry, barren, there's not much fruit, or vibrancy...

Brothers and sisters, Jesus words to us this morning are an encouragement for renewal in our relationship with God. But we are going to have to be open to something new...

We are not going to experience this renewal – these streams in the wilderness by trying harder with our previous spiritual

disciplines; Doing more bible reading, saying more prayers, longer prayers, increasing our church involvement, listening to more worship music all day long...

Instead, we have to be willing to experience and come to know God in new ways – ways that are new to us, unfamiliar to us, awkward for us, difficult for us, perhaps even a bit scary for us as these new things God does can deal with some of the pain and hurt and scars in our past.

But we have this assurance that Yahweh is making a way in the desert and streams in the wilderness – He is doing a new thing... if you will forget the former things, stop dwelling on what you know of God from the past, you will encounter Him in new and deeper ways.

So, brothers and sisters, I pray Jesus' words will encourage us this morning to seek His new ways to grow in our relationship with Him, with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit and receive that refreshing renewal and vibrancy in our faith.

If you are wanting that, if you desire that, if you are willing to seek this New Thing – there are some concrete steps you can take. There is a Dunamis conference coming up at the end of November that will help you grow in your relationship with the Holy Spirit – that may be a new way of knowing God for you. Maybe you need to go...

I also have the 3-Colors of Spirituality course that many of us here have found extremely helpful in learning how to experience God in new ways connected to each person of the Trinity, and how God reveals Himself as three persons in one God. Come talk to me about that...

Well brothers and sisters – whatever it was that Jesus' words encouraged you in this morning, whether it was that creational wisdom of moving on from something, forgetting your sin because its forgiven, forgetting this world for the new creation, or forgetting what God has done in the past so you may know Him in new ways – one thing is for sure, today Jesus has told us that the old things are on the way out, and the

new things are on the way in. Make sure you are watching for it and responding to it! Thank God for New Things. Amen?