

Praise God for Something New

I'm a sore loser. I'll admit it. It's not just with sports either. It's playing board games with the family. It's discussions I have with other people. It's life in general. I don't like losing. It's not from a lack of experience; I'm very familiar with it. But that doesn't make it any easier or enjoyable the next time. Then again, no one likes feeling like the loser. Whether it's in the workplace or at home, at school or how you personally view yourself, we want to be successful. We want to feel like we are doing the right thing. We want to be ahead of where we were the day before. If not in the sight of anyone else, at the very least how you see yourself. But when we aren't, we feel like there is something wrong.

The people of Judah were familiar with this feeling too. When you look at their recorded history in the Bible, it seems like we see a lot more of their defeats and failures than victories and successes. And when Isaiah writes these words for them, more losing is on the horizon. God had sent prophet after prophet, servant after servant to turn his people back to him. But the people refused to listen. So this time an invading army would come and rip the people from their homes, topple their walls, destroy their beloved temple, and they would be carried off to live in captivity in the distant land of Babylon. As they watch their livelihoods go up in smoke, their accomplishments and successes burn into ruin, I'm sure they very much felt like losers. Or even worse, like the Lord had abandoned and forgotten them. It's to them the Lord speaks:

“This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters,¹⁷ 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. 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”(Isaiah 43:16-21).

Yes, Israel would face rejection. But just as in the past, so the Lord will do again. The Lord reminds them how he split the Red Sea and gave a path through those mighty waters as they went out from Egypt. He reminds them that it was by his hand and his doing that drew out the chariots and horses of Egypt along with their army and reinforcements. It was the Lord who caused the waters to flow over and drown them, extinguished and snuffed out like a flame. The people of Israel knew

all about this. This was their identity. This was their culture. This was their July 4th and Independence Day. These were the good ole days! And the Lord is telling them: as good as that was, what he will do now is even greater. **“See, I am doing a new thing!”** the Lord says.

And that right there is where we feel the struggle. New means change. Many people don't like change. Or new means something in the future; but, you want it right now. Too often and easily do I listen to the so-called experts of this world, the successful ones who tell you it shouldn't be this way. We see their lives and they seem like the ones who have it figured out, “Why can't that be me?” In reality, we don't want too much lest we be accused of being greedy, snobbish, and thinking you are better than everyone else. But a little success would be nice. We want to have a comfortable life. We want to be able to leave some type of legacy behind for the next generations. It's nice to be able to point back at the accomplishments and remember “the good ole days.” We want mom and dad to assure us we are doing well and not just say it because they are mom and dad. We want our employers to notice our hard work and acknowledge it. We want our spouses to recognize our efforts and not take it for granted. At the very least we want to be able to look in the mirror or put our heads down on the pillow at night feeling good about what you have done today. This is also nice because when we aren't feeling very successful, when we feel the rejection, when we suffer and struggle, we can point back and say, “But look at that, at least...”

As great and wonderful as that might be and nice to have, you know how that only gets you so far. Inevitably there will come another time when the success and accomplishments you planned for and wished you would have are not yours. And we wonder, “Where did I go wrong? Why isn't God letting me have this? Why am I missing out on something that I know would be good for me?” Why do the wicked prosper, Lord? They have no struggles—so why me? Life looks like it's going completely fine for them. We are doing the right things. At the very least I'm trying my best. And for what? Surely in vain we have kept our hearts pure and followed God's will. And for what? Dwindling numbers in the pews and offering plate, not as successful as a retirement portfolio, not as nice things as they have, children who won't listen, friends and acquaintances who ignore me, and I'm still wrestling with the same sin today as I was yesterday. It looks like we are losing! We might try so hard to hold onto the past because we remember the successes back then and want to go back. Or we look to a future that isn't coming quickly enough that we think we know what we really need.

What we fail to see is that God is already at work right now. To you the Lord says, **“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, ²¹the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise” (Isaiah 43:18-21)

God is not telling his people to have spiritual amnesia and completely forget about their past. What he is saying is that what he is doing for them now is far superior. He's neither reusing the old nor refurbishing the gently used. This is new. He's not a God who sits back, with his hands off letting the world do what the world does. The Lord is at work with his people and for his people. Yes, the people of Judah will be taken into captivity. But the Lord will neither forget nor abandon his people. He didn't in the past; he won't start doing it now. Through the barren landscape of the desert, God will pave the road to bring them back to their homeland. In the Great Waste he will cause streams to flow to provide for them along the way. This is so contrary to nature that even the desert animals will be moved to praise the Lord.

And because he will do that, you can be sure between now and then he's still at work for his people. **“Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”** the Lord says. Yes, to the eyes of the world it doesn't look like it. But, this is how our God works. He creates something out nothing. He gives life where there is death. He makes new what was old. He is the Lord who hides himself among what the world calls foolish and weak to shame the wise and strong. He chooses the lowly and despised and the rejected so that no one can may boast before him (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). No, our boast is in the Lord who does a new thing. Being saved from this world filled with rejection and disappointment isn't found in you being more successful and accepted in the future. Being saved from this world of heartache and pain isn't coming from you your legacy you leave behind. Being saved from your own failures, isn't found in doing better next time. Clearing your conscience and being right with God would not come from following the Law. No, it's by the Law that we become conscience to our sin that condemns us. This isn't coming from you and your flesh!

It's built on Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. He is the son who the owner of the vineyard loves and gave him up for us all. The Father knows full well that the people will reject and kill him; he sends his Son anyway because his will has been and always will for all to be saved. This is why Jesus is born and lives. He came to suffer and to die for us who by nature reject God and are losers in sin. He comes to be forsaken by the Father for us who have forsaken to follow his will. He comes to lay down his life and die for us who are condemned to death as a result of our sin.

And from that death the Father raises his Chosen one to life. For that is how your God operates. And he has made this same Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead, your cornerstone and foundation. You who were dead have been raised to new life in him in the waters of baptism. In this lifeless sinful world, he gives you the springs of living water with His word. In this barren wasteland He shows you the way to eternal life is Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the life.

See, he is making you new as he leads you back to the baptismal font where we daily die to sin and rise his forgiven child. Forget the former things; do not dwell on your past sins and failures—your sins have been washed away and your Father remembers them no more. See, he makes you new as he provides for you in this wasteland with nourishment for your starving soul. Take and eat. Take and drink. This body and blood is given and poured out for you to strengthen you as you continue your way until he brings you home to him. See he's leading you through this dark valley of death and you need not fear any evil; you are his chosen people that he has formed to be his own. See he is doing this now; guarding and protecting, blessing and keeping you.

Consider the successes, the accomplishments, the legacy, everything as garbage that you might know the power of Jesus and be united with him through faith in his death and resurrection from the dead. Forget what is behind, strain towards what is ahead—this world and all it has to offer is nothing compared to what Jesus has prepared for you. Your validation and identity is built on Christ the cornerstone who declares you God's child; with you he is well-pleased.

And now here's another new thing: he chooses to use us, clay jars that we are formed by hand, to proclaim his praises. We can really enjoy those successes and accomplishments when they come, not as the end all and be all, but blessings from God and gifts for you to enjoy. They are not a means for me to get ahead and to impress, but gifts to use to serve and love my neighbor and for their good. Proclaim it in your homes as you teach your family—spouse and children—by how you live and act that the single most important thing in your life is your relationship with Jesus and everything else is garbage compared to him. Proclaim Him in your life with your coworkers and friends that it's not about you, but serve and love them that they too might know Jesus and his love for them. Proclaim it here in the assembly with your brothers and sisters in Christ as we encourage each other to press on to the prize that Jesus won on the cross and sealed with the empty tomb for you. Praise the Lord he has done this new thing for you and he's revealed it to you. Amen.