

December 8, 2019

“Something to Behold”
Isaiah 43:14-21

FCF: The need to slow down at Christmas

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The Lord is doing a new thing.
(anchor) And it is something to behold.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Listen to the words from Jason Gray’s song “Rest (The Song of the Innkeeper)” (**READ**):

(1) I found them standing in my door In the clumsy silence of the poor
I’ve got no time for precious things But at least they won’t be wandering
If they’re sleeping on my stable floor
(2) There were no rooms to rent tonight The only empty bed is mine
‘Cause I’m overbooked and overrun With so many things that must be done
Until I’m numb and running blind
(chorus) I need rest, I need rest
Lost inside a forest of a million trees
Trying to find my way back to me...I need rest
...(5) Tonight I can’t get any sleep With those shepherds shouting in the streets
A star is shining much too bright Somewhere I hear a baby cry
And all I want is a little peace

The irony, of course, is thicker than your Aunt Bertha’s fruitcake. And I have a suspicion that no few of us could sympathize with this man. We all need to slow down - especially at Christmas.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Isaiah 43:14-21](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“Behold” - we know what it means even if we rarely say it. It’s to look and examine, to see and consider. Beyond a casual glance, to behold is to take in, to peer into. We’re used to thinking one way but now need a shift. For our formula is incomplete. There is something we haven’t factored into the equation. So behold. You’re dashing through the snow in a one horse open sleigh, fast sliding in that curve, heading for the grave. You need to slow down and behold.

The Bible often connects our need to behold with the Lord’s initiative. That is, we are told of something He has done or revealed to us and we need to see it deeply. Which takes us to our text. Isaiah tells us that the Lord is doing a new thing. And it is something to behold.

What is this new thing we are to behold? There are three parts. First, the Lord’s greater power. Second, our greater need. And, third, His greater purpose. Each of these is “greater” for they go beyond anything we have seen before. And so we desperately need to behold them.

I. THE LORD’S GREATER POWER

First, we are to behold this demonstration of the Lord’s greater power. Isaiah is writing to a people not only with a future but a past, a past shaped by the pattern and paradigm of exodus, a deliverance from bondage into freedom. And there are three exodus experiences in view here.

A) The Pattern

1. The first exodus

The first exodus was around 1446 B.C. For 400 years, Israel was in Egypt as strangers, enslaved and mistreated. Then God unleashed the plagues. Then came the passover. Pharaoh let the people go but pursued them. But God opened a way for His people (**READ Isaiah 43:16-17**).

2. The second exodus

That great power formed the pattern for a second exodus. Isaiah wrote in the 8th century B.C. of events to come in the 6th. The people had been warned but turned their backs on the Lord. So the Babylonian army invaded, the kingdom was decimated, and the exiles carried away. Which then led to another and more dramatic demonstration of God's power (**READ Isaiah 43:14-15**).

B) The Fulfillment

But there was to be a third exodus, the fulfillment of all that had come before.

1. A greater exodus to come

Isaiah hints at an exodus on the far horizon, a greater deliverance from bondage into freedom.

2. A greater deliverer to come

A greater exodus through a greater deliverer. He would be no mere prophet, priest, or king but everything such figures were meant to be and more - born of a virgin, called Emmanuel, from the line of David, His rule ever expanding and never ending, coming through Israel for all nations.

So Isaiah's message was, "Take heart. There is another exodus to come and a greater one beyond even that. And it will be a demonstration of the Lord's power unlike any yet seen."

Application:

That is the new thing the Lord is doing. And it was brought about through the coming of Jesus. Which is to say that Christians should be the most excited about the Christmas season. We should be the most excited and should be examples and models to the watching world as to what the season is for and who the celebration is about. Of course, we can't do that if we're taking our cues from the world. We can't lead the world if we're following it. We can't do that if we're distracted by the materialism of the season and the pressure to impress. We're to lead.

In Jesus, the Lord is doing a new thing - so very powerful. And it is something to behold.

II. OUR GREATER NEED

We see a demonstration of God's greater power. And a revelation of our greater need.

A) A Deeper Bondage

1. Beyond the physical

This was a deeper bondage than could be seen on the surface. It was beyond the physical, the enslavement and mistreatment. It was beyond the chains and shackles, the bonds and masters.

2. Pointing to the spiritual

Their physical experience was pointing to a spiritual reality. The exile was an external eruption of an internal trauma. Which all began with the Fall, man's cosmos-shaking turning from the Creator King and fracturing of the whole person - spiritual, psychological, relational, physical.

B) A Sobering Exposure

What Isaiah is speaking of here is a deeper bondage and a sobering exposure.

1. Exile and captivity

Think about this for a moment. What led to the exile and captivity, the need for any exodus at all? That deeper bondage. It not only led to it. It was exposed by it. And that is sobering.

2. An ongoing struggle

It reveals our ongoing struggle, our continual battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil - the root of our wrestling with temptation, accusation, and deception. And it is too much for us. It is too much for us and we often can't even see it. Which is an awful state - ignorant of your enemy.

And so we need this revelation of just how great our need really is.

Illustration:

Let's think about angels. They are prominent in the events of that first Christmas. How did the shepherds respond to their appearing? (READ Luke 2:8-9) What's going on here? This was unexpected so they were surprised. Sure, but what else? Angels are messengers of God Himself, mediators of His presence. These men felt exposed. This undid them. Which was bad. No, it was good. It helped them to see their need of the Savior born and sent for them that night.

Application:

My friends, our need is greater than we know. This is why God had to send His Son. No one else could pull us free from the pit or dig us out of the rubble. Christmas is a message of bad news and good. It's cause for deep humility and for exuberant joy, both at the same time.

The Lord is doing a new thing, revealing our great need. And it is something to behold.

III. THE LORD'S GREATER PURPOSE

A demonstration of the Lord's greater power, a revelation of our greater need, and then an affirmation of His greater purpose (READ Isaiah 43:18-21). Things long promised now coming.

A) The Restoration of Creation

1. Historical context

First, the restoration of creation. The historical context - this exodus from Babylon would not be through water but the desert. And, again, provision would be made for the people along the way.

2. Beyond those events

But those things were meant to point to something beyond even that journey, a restoration of every desert, of creation itself. Something big was coming (READ Isaiah 2:4; 11:6-9). This would mean the undoing of the vandalism of the Fall. A cosmic healing is finally coming.

B) The Renewal of Our Hearts

A restoration of creation. But not only that, the transformation and renewal of our hearts.

1. Tied to our own restoration

As Paul says in Romans 8, both are tied together. Mankind led creation into the Fall. So the redemption of God's people would bring the redemption of the world with it. They are tied.

2. A reordering of our worship

And with that renewal of our hearts will come (finally!) a reordering of our worship. The Lord's ultimate goal being our praise. That is His great goal and our great good. No more will we be so easily giving ourselves to all the cheap counterfeit gods that we sadly settle for. No more.

Isaiah is speaking of the assurance and affirmation of things long promised, the Lord's greater purposes with the restoration of creation and the renewal of His people's hearts.

Illustration:

Some of you may be familiar with the history of St. Nicholas. He was born to wealthy parents in the 4th century in modern Turkey. It's said that when his parents died, he used his wealth to help the needy of his hometown. He later became a monk, a priest, and then a bishop.

The story is told of a widower in the area with three teenage daughters. He was so poor that he was thinking of selling his eldest daughter into slavery so that the other two would have enough for food and dowries. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. Nicholas heard of their plight. It was normal to hang the stockings by the fire to dry each night. What was not normal was to find a gold coin in the bottom of your stocking. Which the eldest daughter did. And later, the others did as well. Which is root of the tradition of hanging stockings on Christmas Eve.

Application:

But it's more than that. It's also an illustration of the Lord's great purpose to restore His creation and renew the whole person. And St. Nicholas was living that out in the 4th century.

The subjects of the King are to be about His business. Followers of Jesus are to walk in His steps. What might that mean this Christmas? Ask Him to give you eyes to see the needs for restoration and renewal around you. Ask Him for eyes. And then hands to act and feet to move.

The Lord is doing a new thing, affirming His purposes. And it is something to behold.

CONCLUSION:

"But how can I behold this?" Good question. For this Christmas season, here's a simple answer. Gift yourself. By that, I don't mean the reductionist self-indulgent crass materialism we see in the commercials this time of year. "You've earned it. This holiday, treat yourself." It's very seductive. But it's such a long way from what the gift-giving tradition is supposed to be for. The roots of all that go back to the Magi and their gifts to Jesus. That shifted over time to our giving gifts to one another - which is fine. But now where are we? "Let's give to ourselves."

So when I say "gift yourself" I mean something else entirely different. I'm talking about the gift of time, time with Jesus. Time in His Word, prayerfully meditating upon it, being still and quiet in the presence of Jesus. Perhaps slowly reading through Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2.

That's the best way you can gift yourself. And a great way to gift someone else is to give them time as well. Let me speak to those of you who are married with young children. In fact, let me press here on husbands and fathers here with young children. Gift your wife, the mother of those children, with that time. Do it yourself. And give her time with Jesus. That's a gift.

"How can I behold this?" Gift yourself. Gift others. Do something radical, something outlandish. Fit everything else around your relationship with Jesus and not that relationship with Jesus around everything else. Make the first thing first. Then you're ready for everything else.

The Lord is doing a new thing. A truly new thing. And it is something to behold.

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