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Walking Into the New Year with Great Hope, Part 1

Isaiah 43:15-21

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

"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. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

Our text today is found in revelation chapter 21, verses one through five. John says this:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former, things have passed away, and he who is seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things new also. He said, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

The good news of our Lord.

I get so encouraged by that scripture. It just stirs me when I think about the good things God has in store for his people. It moves me. I like contemplating it, thinking about it.

It's interesting. After our Christmas celebrations in here this past holiday season, I was a little worn out. We do those three services. I have a little, maybe what you might call holiday sort of spiritual holiday hangover. And we were actually traveling the day after Christmas, and that was nice.

I took a little nap in the car. My wife was nice enough to drive as we went down to southwest Iowa. I spent a little time there, and then after a few days, we got back here into town. It was unseasonably

warm there for a few days. And so I went outside, and I was walking to do a few things and take care of some garbage on our property and some things like that. And all of a sudden, just the, the calm of nature just sort of overcame me. And I paused for a minute, and something happened inside of me.

I don't know exactly how to explain it, but in the quietness there in that winter, still quiet, I got this. Now you just need to understand this about me. I'm a realist. I have to proactively look to be a optimistic, sort of positive, sort of maybe idealistic type person. And so I'm a realist. I've been through a lot of things in life, and I don't always look ahead with great anticipation. My natural A man drifts towards. I call it realism. My wife sometimes calls it something else.

But I was standing there in the stillness of winter, and this surge came into me of enthusiasm and excitement and anticipation about the coming year. It hadn't dawned on us yet. I was still in between Christmas and New Year's, and I was overcome by this great excitement in my spirit, and it actually confused me a little.

I was shocked by it, and it has continued in me. I don't know how to explain it. It just is obviously something unnatural for me. Something you might say supernatural. And I've had it more and more as my Christian life has progressed. Enthusiasm and excitement and anticipation about what lies ahead.

And so I started to do some thinking about that. Where is this coming from? God. What is this about? Because I know I have no idea what lies ahead. I'm a realist, and I believe what the Scripture says. James told us, listen, you who say today or tomorrow you're going to go to such and such a place and do business and make money there. God says through the pen of James, well, you do not know what will happen tomorrow. All such boasting or bragging, James says, is not of God. It's evil.

So it's not that I know what's in the future. It's not that I can actually sort of speak it into existence, but somehow I have been having more and more anticipation, excitement, and enthusiasm of what lies ahead. And so I was asking God about it. And I had the sense that over time, as I've gotten to know God through the revelation of His Word, it's just starting to become a part of my new nature.

It was the great A.W. Tozer who said, what we think about God is the most important thing about us.

What we think about God, and sometimes we just plain I do stop thinking about God. And when I stop thinking about the true nature of God and what he's like, it's detrimental to my soul and my spirit. But when I feed my soul and my spirit with the revelation of God, the Word of God, what he truly is, who he's truly like, his true nature, the new nature just comes alive in me. And that can happen for anyone at any stage of life. Whether you're old or middle aged or young, you can be surging with excitement and anticipation about what lies ahead if you know the nature of God.

Our text today that Amy Read illustrates one of these characteristics of God, and I would like to look into the text and just put our minds on our creator here for a little bit. Isaiah 43 reveals God as our creator. He's our creator and our maker, and he is the Lord, the Holy One. He says he is the one who is set apart as our King and our leader.

The prophet Isaiah was speaking to the people of God during a time when they were cast out of their homeland. They were in exile. They had been through some hard things, and they were in great challenges. And God came to them through the prophet Isaiah and reminded them that he was their creator. He was their Lord, their Holy One.

He was the one set apart as their king and their leader. And then he said this of himself. He said, I am the one who makes a way in the uncharted seas. They didn't know what lie ahead for them. They'd been through some very deep challenges in their lives. And God said, it is in my nature to be the one who makes a way for my people in the uncharted seas. It is in my nature to be the one who makes a path in the mighty and turbulent waters that lies ahead.

He's the one who makes a way in the unknown, in the treacherous, in the mundane. In the good and in the bad. If you know him and you understand this about him, it should be very encouraging to you.

A few years ago, we hosted out at the Riverview Bible Conference singer and songwriter Michael W Smith. Maybe you've heard of him. If you haven't, he's a well-known Christian singer and songwriter. He was going through some of his old songs as he was singing out there at the Bible Conference, and I was sitting by a window on the left. And all of a sudden he moved into a song that he wrote entitled Waymaker. I'll never forget it. It was near the 2020 year, and we had been through some time of Covid, and I was struggling with some situations, circumstances in my life. And Michael started to sing this great hit of his waymaker, where he declares really out of Isaiah 43 that God is the one who makes a way when there is no way.

He highlights other characteristics about God in his song. He says he's a way maker, a miracle worker, promise keeper, a light in the darkness, aspects of the nature of God.

We don't know what lies ahead in the world around us is constantly changing, but God sits in heaven and he does not change like shifting shadows. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. That means he's always been a waymaker. He's always been a promise keeper. He's always been a light in the darkness. This is the God that we serve, a God who does not change no matter what lies ahead.

If you're drawing near to him, if you're getting to know him, you're coming to know the waymaker, the one who can get a path for us through uncharted seas.

A couple of years ago, a tornado blew through western Iowa. We had a lot of them. We've seen one here in Parkersburg many years ago. A few days after the tornado, I went and drove to Harlan, Iowa, where my folks, they were not there when the tornado hit. But I drove on to the property that I grew up on, and my parents were standing out in the driveway with a few of their friends. And this is a picture of what I saw standing on the back porch of our home.

There used to be 11 farm buildings there, a lot of trees in the grove. I pulled in and saw my parents standing there, and I got out and was on my way to give him a hug, and I just started weeping. Because here were my mom and dad, in some later years in their life, and their homestead was just decimated.

Now, I said, we drove down there after Christmas, and I pulled into this same property. And now there's one farm building, and it's new, and they have a home that's been rebuilt, and it's nice. And my mom says, the Lord came and he, with his big leaf blower, just cleaned up the farm. Made a way.

Can I tell you that's a great relief to us children, in the sense that now, someday down the road, we don't have to clean it up. We're enjoying it because. Why? I drove along the tornado path, 72 acreages decimated in Shelby County alone, and one after another after another was rebuilt. Why? Because there is a sovereign good God who's a way maker for people. Even people who don't know him. He pours out grace upon them.

We can look forward with anticipation and excitement if we know this God, if we personally draw near to him, because he's the one who makes a path in the wilderness. He's the one who charts uncharted seas. He's the one who draws people near to him and makes a way for them.

And he invites us to look back again and again. I remember when I was in college and I was plagued with anxiety, and I was not doing well in my grades, and I was overcome by my own sort of mental challenges that I was facing. And I, I actually drove myself into a counseling session. And I left there, and I remember just praying, saying, God, I have no idea how I'm going to navigate life. I have no idea how I'm going to do it. And I just drew closer and closer to him.

And over time, he just started to make a way to heal my mental issues, to keep his promises to me. And I can look back, and so many of us can, and see God is a way maker. He is faithful to his word.

But it's interesting. In our lesson today, God invites us to do something different. He invites us to yes, consider the past, but not dwell on it. He doesn't want us getting stuck there, celebrating in a sense, the good old days.

Listen to what he says to his people. Do not dwell on the former things. Nor consider the things of old. In a sense, God is saying, that's old news. What I've done in the past, yes, it's to be celebrated. Yes, it's to be commemorated. But but let's not dwell there. God says to his people, let's not pine for the past. Don't, don't consider, ruminate on the past.

And why is he saying this? God wants us to remember what he's done, but not so that we can just praise him for the past. He wants us to remember what he's done so it affects our present and the way we look at our future, so that we can live in the present with great faith and great optimism and great courage.

Here's what he says. Do not dwell on the former things. Do not consider the things of the past. For behold, this means observe. Pay attention to something right now, remarkable and impressive. Don't get so stuck in the past that you miss what's happening right now in the present. Behold. Take note. Something remarkable right now. Something impressive right now.

God often uses this to center us in the present. And he says, behold, I am doing a new thing, a new thing. God rhymes. He echoes, but he never repeats exactly the same thing. History is unfolding in a in a progressive way. We cannot stop it. And God is always working something new down through history.

And he wants us, yes, to remember his faithfulness in the past so we can look for his work in the present and be faith filled as we walk into the future. Behold, I am doing a new thing, he says. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it? Don't you see it? He wants us to pay attention to what he's doing in the world right now.