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Walking Into the New Year with Great Hope, Part 2

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 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 lies 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. 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.

To remember what he's done in the past is to help us see that he is a God who works in the world, and he's faithful to his word and his promises. But he never changes, and he never stops working. And what

he wants for his people is, yes, to be built in faith as they walk with him, to be strengthened in faith as they walk with him so they can see him in the present and be encouraged and filled with faith in the now, because it is our faith that is the lever that opens up the doorway of heaven.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe he is God and he rewards those who seek him. When Jesus went into his hometown to do his first sort of miracles and he appeared there, he couldn't do many things there.

Why? Because the people saw him as Jesus, the son of the carpenter. They didn't see him as Jesus, the Son of God. The Scripture says because their faith was so little, he couldn't do much there. And so he left there and went on. It is true that according to our faith it will be done to us.

This is me, as a realist, speaking to you. God wants to birth faith, courage, strength into his people. This is what he longs to do in the present, so that his church can be strong and influential in the world and leave a mark. And I think all this was welling up in me in the quietness of that still day there in late December, that we serve a God who never stops working, and he's always up to something new.

I was sitting with a friend last night at a Christmas party, and out of nowhere he turned to me and said, aren't you excited about 2026? I said, yeah, I am. Why are you? And he just echoed this to me. He said, because don't you feel God at work? Don't you sense him doing things right here in the Cedar Valley, strengthening his church, doing things in different ministries? I'm so excited about how I sense God at work. I agreed with him.

He said, I'm doing a new thing. I'm going to make a new way. To make new rivers. I'm going to pour out new water. And here's what he says. Why? To give drink to my people. To let them be satisfied. Filled. These people that I formed for myself. That they might declare my praise.

He's not just the past way maker. He's the current and future promise keeper. Way maker. No matter what we'll face. That is a revelation given to us in the Old Testament.

John was given a revelation about the future. He said, I saw a new heaven, whole new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. The sea was no more. And he said, I saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven. I heard a voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling place of God is with man. And he's going to come and wipe away every tear. Death will be no more. No more pain, no more crying. No more sadness.

And then he who is seated on the throne, John said, said, behold, I am making all things new. And then he said this to John for us. Write this down. Write this down. For these words are trustworthy and true. We can count on it.

Friends, we're living between what Isaiah said and what John saw in the future. And we're a part of the work that God is doing. Paul spoke about it this way.

God is doing this work through. His son Jesus. We're going to celebrate him here in a moment with communion. Some 2000 years ago, he came, and I was talking with the children about it, paid the penalty for our sins so that we could be forgiven. And then he made it possible for us to be his children and be made new ourselves.

And Paul said it this way. If we come to Christ. If anyone does. They're an entirely new creation. The old has gone and the new has come.

I have really one deeper goal in 2026 myself, and that is to live more fully in the new nature that God has given me. And peace and hope and Joy. Not in the fear of man, not in worry, not in anxiety, but in the newness that Christ has offered. And friends, if we as a church will all more fully live into the new natures that God has given us. Who knows what God will do?

We're coming to a time to celebrate communion. All this is from God, who through Christ is reconciling us to himself. As we celebrate today and look back, I would encourage you just to be mindful of how much God loves you, how valuable you are to him, and what it really means to have all of your sins forgiven. And if you've never opened your heart to him. Today would be a great day to say, Lord, come into my life, be my leader, be my King, be my Lord, forgive my sins.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your word which teaches us how to live. We thank you that it teaches us what to believe. Thank you that you have made revelation of yourself as a God who always keeps your promises, who is deeply loving, and who made a sacrifice for us that we might be your children.

I ask today, as we start this new year, that you would in our hearts, speak to us in a way that only you can ground us deeper. Those of us that know you in a confidence in you, give us, by your grace, a greater ability to walk in the newness of life that you've offered us.

I pray that you, even now, as we come before you and celebrate the gift of your son, that you remind us that Christ is the centerpiece of our lives, the whole reason we're alive, that he is the hope of the world. We ask that you work this in us, father, in a way that only you can.

And father, if there is some among us who have never opened their heart by faith to you, work in their hearts today to bring them to the knowledge of your son, that they could too could walk in the newness of life. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.