Isaiah 43:18-19 Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

Well here we are again in the book of Isaiah. As we are doing our Old Testament series in preaching have you noticed how many times Isaiah is used? In the series we are going through right now Isaiah is used 11 times. Why? Well, it is because of the wonderful and unique nature of what Isaiah wrote, what he wrote under the inspiration of the Lord our God.

Here is what Luther had to say about Isaiah. *“Isaiah handles two things. First he preaches a good deal to his people and rebukes their many sins, especially the manifold idolatry which has got the upper hand among the people…Second, he prepares and disposes them to expect the coming kingdom of Christ, of which he prophesies more clearly and in more ways than any other prophet” (LW 35:275f).*

Yep, Isaiah was a preacher of the Law and sharply and soundly condemned his people for their unbelief and abandonment of the true God. Yet at the same time, Isaiah preached such wonderful and sweet gospel. He pointed ahead to the Christ, the Son of God and what he would do and accomplish. Without a doubt, the Isaiah reader must keep in mind what Jesus himself said about the Old Testament. Jesus said, **“Do you think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”** (Mtt. 5:17). Or in John 5 Jesus says, **“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me and have life”** (39-40). Or think about Jesus with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus after the resurrection. There we are told that Jesus, using Moses and the Prophets, explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. In other words, we need to look for Jesus when we study the Old Testament!

The same is true of our text for today. It is a prophecy and without a doubt I believe this a prophecy about Jesus and what He will do. Our theme will be: **GOD’S PROMISES. 1st. OT glory. 2nd. Forget that! 3rd. NT Wonder.**

If you are like me you are filled with wonder at how this section of Isaiah starts. It starts off by reminding us of the power and the goodness of God for his people. Listen, **“This is what the Lord says—he 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.”** I am going to guess that almost all of you understand the references that are being made in these words.

These words are reminding us about the events of the Exodus from Egypt. While all the events are not mentioned here and only the ultimate destruction of Pharaoh’s army is highlighted it is clear that the writer wants his people to think for a moment about these things. And what awesome and wonderful things they are. How God in grace and mercy delivers his people from harsh slavery. How God in love, calls his people to the land of Canaan, the very land he promised them some 400 years earlier. In other words we see God acting and moving to keep his promises exactly as He said.

And what an awesome and wonderful picture of the power and majesty of God those events show. God acts in total goodness for his way and cause. The people of God, through whom the Messiah, the Savior of the world was promised, needed to be brought to the land God said would be theirs. And wow, how God is so thorough. Even the slavery the people endured, the harsh slavery was an act of God’s grace and mercy. It was done that these people, who by and large tended to ignore God, would be ready and willing to leave Egypt. And so with miracles and wonders, with displays of power that clearly showed anyone involved that you shouldn’t mess with God the people were freed, freed that they might go off and be what God was calling them to be.

By the way, it has always fascinated me that you could argue two perspectives in this history. From the Jewish point of view, God is clearly acting with love, grace and care as he delivers them from Egypt. But from the Egyptian point of view, you could possibly argue that God was cruel, judgmental and damning, after all, by the time this history is done, Egypt’s power is pretty broken and crushed.

Yet, let me remind you that such a belief toward God would be wrong. Do we fail to see how in these actions God was working to bring the Egyptians to see his grace and love, to come to a knowledge of the True God and faith? The Egyptians were pantheists, who even believed Pharaoh himself was a god. Look how the true God starts with little things and works up to big. Why? To get the Egyptians to turn from idolatry and believe in the true God. Yet they stubbornly refuse. So notice how the plagues get more and more destructive as God brings the lesson of his power home. And even at the end, when the army is drowned, lay the blame for that on Pharaoh not God. Why? After all that the Egyptians had seen and experienced, why would you have your army charge into that alley of sea with the walls of water? The only reason for that is because you, Pharaoh believe you can keep your army safe and you can keep the waters from falling in on your army. Talk about being wrong. Talk about not hearing, not believing the very facts of God as you have seen them! Ultimately, it is Egyptian fault, this rejection and spurning of the True God. Please, do not blame God for the foolishness of man!

There is no doubt that the Exodus was an awesome and gracious act of God for the sake of his people and ultimately for the sake of the world. And we can marvel at these acts, we can marvel at all the wonders and miracles God did in the Old Testament but in that marvel we need to keep a clear perspective. God’s perspective. And that is why our text then says to us, **“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.”**

What? God doesn’t want us to remember the wonders of the past? Well, yes and no! Again there is nothing wrong with studying the history of the Lord and seeing how He acted and moved for the good and salvation of mankind. But to study those miracles and to make them the definitive point of your faith is foolish. Are you going to spend all your time wishing God would act and move the same way in the world of today? Are you going to make the focus of your faith today, the idea that God must do miracles and wonders, that God must act and move among us as He did in the past? And I want you to know, there are many Christian churches who do just that. They hype and proclaim all kinds of miracles and signs that God is with them, because well, that’s how God acted in the past. But what does this prophecy say? It says, **“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.”**

Those activities and miracles are not the end all and be all of faith. So what is? Listen again to this prophecy. **“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”**

A new thing is being done, we are told. Now if you are just going to limit that new thing to the fact that God is going to have the Kingdom of Israel carried off by the Assyrians to disappear and then 100 years later have the Southern Kingdom of Judah carried off to Babylonian captivity for 80 some years, then I don’t think you get this prophecy. I believe the key to understanding this prophecy is to understand it in the context of other prophecies.

For instance, the next part of verse 19 says, **“I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”** In an earlier prophecy of the Messiah we hear these words: **“Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert…and a highway will be there”** (Is 35:5-8). Please note that in all of the passages similar to this we understand the spiritual bent we must grasp them with. When Jesus came the first time did streams and highways appear in the desert, any desert? Yet clearly such words and promises are connected with the Savior. But how about when the Christ returns the second time? Will the deserts still exists? Will the rough places of the earth still be rough or smoothed out?

I think you see what I am getting at. Many of the prophecies about the Messiah actually point to things that will be when He returns the second time and completely renews and restores this world to the perfection of the original creation. Before any of this can be done, something different, something new has to take place and I believe that something new and different is the life and ministry of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, the first time.

The ministry of Jesus is new because up to this point the majority of religions are all based on works. What we must do to save ourselves and accomplish eternal life. Yet in Jesus, you do not find this same old message of the false religious world, you find a new message, a better message, a message of life and hope for all.

The new thing is the life and redemptive work of Jesus. How Jesus will come and win for us eternal salvation. How God will provide a sure and certain gift of eternal life that does not depend on us. It depends on Jesus. What he has done and accomplished. That Jesus paid for our sins. That Jesus in his resurrection from the dead declares to all who believe eternal life and salvation by grace through faith. It is not about our pitiful works. It is not about our offerings or sacrifices, our personal goodness and piety. It is about God’s love displayed in Jesus.

Now to drive this home, I want you to look at the rest of this verse. It says this, **“The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”** If this prophecy is to be taken literally, then tell me how water for the animals of the desert will make the people proclaim the praise of God? And what does water in the wasteland have to do with the fact that the people of God are chosen and formed by God? It is in asking these questions that you grasp the spiritual nature of the prophecy.

I believe the wild animals are a spiritual reference to the people who this point are unbelievers, that is, those lacking the living water of life from God. In Jesus’ day and even today, the Gentiles, those who were not believers have been welcomed as God’s family and are now a part of the chosen, the people of God who proclaim the praise of God, because of the spring of water provided. What do you think we are doing today? We are fulfilling these words because of the new thing, the Jesus thing that God has done. We are here to praise and thank God for the gift of eternal life and salvation, for the living water, the steams of living water flowing to us from God because of Jesus. Here I believe is the true bent of this section. God’s promise of salvation in Jesus. God’s promises of something new, the clear and the unmistakable teaching of “salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.” That is something far greater, far more memorable, and far more important than any earthly miracle of the past. Forget that, focus on Jesus and the sure salvation that is ours in Him. Focus on the NT wonder. Amen.