

January 5, 2020

Embracing The Future by Pastor Ed Terry

Revelation 21:1 – 8; 1st Corinthians 2: 1 – 16; Galatians 5:13 – 26; **Isaiah 43:14 - 21**

God used Isaiah to deliver this message of hope to the Israelites who were captives in Babylon. When Israel turned away from God, God withdrew His protection from Israel and God allowed the Babylonians to capture Jerusalem and take the Israelites back to Babylon as slaves. The Babylonian army was powerful, the city of Babylon was well fortified, and the Israelites had lost hope. While the Israelites were captives in Babylon, God called Isaiah to remind the Israelites that their past mistakes did not need to dictate their future. In this prophesy God was looking beyond the seventy years of Babylonians oppression and captivity to the complete restoration of Jerusalem and Judah. But the Israelites needed to quit dwelling on the past, they needed to return to The Lord, and they needed to embrace the exciting future God was planning for His chosen people. Notice the boldness in Isaiah's proclamation, "***Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.***" (Isaiah 43:18)

I am sure some of you are wondering what this 2700 year old prophecy has to do with us today. After all we are not captives in a foreign land nor are we slaves to a foreign country. No; not physically but we are spiritually. Our sins can enslave us. Jesus said; "***Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.***" (John 8:34) If we are not actively serving The Lord in all that we do and say then we are serving Satan. And Philippians 3:20 reminds us that "***our citizenship is in heaven.***" The good news is that as believers we have been given the gift of The Indwelling Holy Spirit and The Holy Spirit gives us the power to resist sin and temptation. But like any gift we must accept the gift and we must put the gift to use for the gift to be of any benefit to us. That is why we are commanded to be filled with The Holy spirit each day. (Ephesians 5:18)

In our lesson from Isaiah God is calling on Israel to embrace their future and today God is calling each of us to embrace our future in Christ Jesus. Embracing the future does not mean that all of our challenges and difficulties are over. The nation of Israel would face a few more years of oppression and bondage. But God promised to hear Israel's cry each time they turned to Him and to bring deliverance to them. God promised Israel that He would do a new thing that would surpass all that He had done in the past. And today we can claim that same promise from God. Galatians 3:29 says; "***If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.***"

But our lesson from Isaiah also contains an unwritten caution. The danger is allowing past successes and /or our past failures to limit our expectations of the future. Looking back at the past can give us an appreciation for all God has done through the years. And we can use our past as a tool for learning and gaining wisdom. The past can also serve as a launching pad for the future that will allow us to go forward with a new vision and determination. But we are not to dwell on our past sins and beat up on ourselves. When we are truly sorrow for our sins, when we confess our sins, and when we repent God never uses our past actions to judge us. But continually focusing on past sins and disappointments will blind us to the exciting future God has planned for us. God had planned a bold, new and wonderful future for Israel. Their

deliverance from the Babylonian oppression would surpass all that they had previously experienced, but they needed to embrace the future.

This morning God is calling us to embrace the exciting future The Lord has planned for us as individuals and for us as Mt Paran Presbyterian Church.

In Philippians 3:13 &14 The Apostle Paul says; ***Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenly in Christ Jesus.***”

If we as individuals and we as a church are going to embrace our future the first thing we must do is not to focus on our past sins, past failures, and past disappointments. (Isaiah 43:18)

Today there are backward thinking people and backward-looking people. Churches can also be mesmerized by their wonderful history. Think about this if you try to drive your car forward by only looking in the rear view mirror how far do you think you would go before you crashed your car. The rear mirror deserves an occasional glance, but a driver’s attention must be focus on the windshield. We must learn the art of looking back without living in the past. When we continually dwell on the past we become fearful of change and we are become paralyzed to move forward.

Mt Paran has a rich and wonderful heritage. God has blessed this church, protected this church, and provided for this church for over 304 years. During the 21 years I have been here I have witnessed many blessings as well as a number of miracles God that God has performed. We must never forget the miracles and never forget the blessings because recalling them strengthens our faith in the promises of God. We need to glance back and remember what The Lord has done but we should expect even greater things! Our God has not changed, God’s power has not been diminished, nor has God’s grace been exhausted. But dwelling on the past can blind us to our present condition and rob us the preparations we need to make to experience the exciting future The Lord has planned for Mt Paran. Not only can the past blind us to our future opportunities it can also blind us to our present condition. We must be aware of our present condition and the need for us to serve this present age.

As believers in Jesus Christ, our past is not our future because of Jesus’ death on the cross and Jesus resurrection from the grave. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all of a believers past, present and future sins. Believers have been declared righteous. We have the power to prevent Satan from tormenting us with our past failures and sins by focusing on Jesus. We can only embrace our future if we do not focus on our past failures, disappointments, and past sins.

Secondly, we can embrace the future if we are willing to accept God’s promise of a new thing! Isaiah 43:19 ***“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”***

Most are excited over a new year, a new home, a new car, and / or a new job but sometimes it can be difficult to believe change will come. Sometimes when the newness begins to fade we get disappointed again. Some people find it hard to believe God that God will do a new thing in their life. For other people, a new thing means change and a fear of the unknown. To them the present situation feels like a comfortable old shoe and they dread breaking in a new pair of shoes. Yet God promises to do a new thing.

I trust you noticed God's promise is not optional, nor is God asking for our permission: God is not saying; "may I" or "I desire to", but rather God is declaring, **"I am doing a new thing!"** (verse 19) This is the present tense; **"I am doing a new thing"**. The question for us today is; **"Are we as a congregation willing to participate in God's new thing?"** God is truth and God cannot lie. If you have been impressed with the miracles God has done at Mt Paran in the past 20 years get ready to be completely awed. God has planted the seeds of a new thing and although we cannot see the new thing, we have God's Word and it will happen. Nothing can or will prevent God's plan. A new thing is on the way. We can embrace our future if we really believe God's promise of a new thing!

Thirdly, we can embrace the future if we recognize that there will be difficulties ahead. Isaiah 43:19 states; **"I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."** God's new thing will bring new challenges and even some difficulties. The statement, **"I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland;"** means we will be required to venture into uncharted territories and to try new things. It means walking through some dry places but the journey will certainly be worth it if we persevere! Our God is all powerful and our God is a miracle working God. God will make a way even though right now there is no way. We cannot allow what we see to control what we believe. We are **to live by faith and not by sight**. (2nd Corinthians 5:7) When a farmer put a seed in the ground, the farmer has confidence that the harvest will come; it is just a matter of time. We as individuals and we as a church can embrace the exciting future God has planned for us because our victory is just a matter of time.

Next, we can embrace our future if we are willing to be a witness for The Lord. **"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, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise."** (Isaiah 43:20 -21)

The wild animals, the jackals, and the owls represent those people who do not know about the love of God and the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ. Sadly many people fail to recognize God, or The Lord's blessing, or how The Lord is working in their life. God has chosen to work through people. God needs a witness. As Christians, Jesus has called each one of us to be a witness for Him. Acts 1:8 is a command; **"You shall be my witnesses."** And in 2nd Corinthians 5:20 we are called to be ambassadors for Christ. Listen again **"the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise."** As a church we need to get serious about becoming involved in our community. Mt Paran does not exist for our comfort and / or for our enjoyment.

God has protected, provided, and preserved Mt Paran for 304 years because God has big plans for Mt Paran. The Lord is calling each one of us to embrace His plan and for all of us to be actively involved in accomplishing His plan for Mt Paran. Jesus said **"whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me.** (Matthew 12:30) So the question is; *do you want to experience the exciting things The Lord has planned for Mt Paran?* If you do, you need to make a commitment to be an active participant in accomplishing God's plans?

Remember The Children of Israel were slaves in a foreign land because they left God out of their life, they pursued their own personal interest, and they abandoned their duty to be God's witnesses to an unbelieving world. We need to learn from Israel's mistakes.

We will only experience the exciting things The Lord has planned for Mt Paran if we all are fully committed to The Lord, if we all are fully committed to Jesus' way of life, if we all are faithful witnesses, and if we are all available for Jesus to use us to accomplish His plans. So the question is; *do you want to experience the exciting things The Lord has planned for Mt Paran?* If you do, you need to make a commitment to be an active participant in accomplishing God's plans?

AMEN