

This promise came from God to the children of Israel at a bleak period of their history. They are in captivity, they have lost everything they thought they would keep forever, and they were homesick for the land and the blessing God had promised them.

In ch 42 Isaiah announces God's punishment on Israel because they consistently refuse to obey God, but our reading starts with the promise of redemption, *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."*

God's promises still apply to his people today. The reliability of any promise depends on the personality that makes the promise, their capability, their integrity and their generosity. When we examine God based on these qualities, we can see that His words and promises are very reliable, and we will receive the blessings if we can wait on Him and wait for Him.

The first thing I want to talk about today is:

1. Repositioning for the New Things

We need to remember that God is speaking to the Israelites, not individuals. Of course, the promise can be applied to individuals, but that's not the context here, and I want to focus on what this means for us as part of the Church. The 1st step to embracing the new thing that God wants to do in the life of the church is to change the focus: stop looking behind and start looking ahead.

43:18 says -

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. If you are continually looking behind you cannot see where you are going.

Paul shared with us this great secret of success in life and ministry. **Phil 3: 12 - 14** ¹²*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* ¹³*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,* ¹⁴*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

(how can you forget)

Of course we must learn lessons from the past, but only so that we can be better equipped to move forward.

If we are ever going to move on to new things in Christ we must learn that:

i. We Cannot Depend Upon Past Victories To Sustain Us

- The Church of Scotland (and church in Scotland) has been a force for good in the past, culminating in the high point of church attendance in 1958. This has never been a majority Christian country although it has been profoundly influenced by Christians and faith. (in this area for 900 years)

The children of Israel had many victories in their past:

1. Leaving Egypt
2. Conquering the Land of Canaan
3. Fighting of prospective conquerors

4. Survived a split in their country

- But now they are in captivity. All their previous victories were doing nothing to set them free. They needed a new work, a new miracle, a new victory.

- The question isn't what has God done –the question must be:

What is God doing in the Church right now?

ii. We Cannot Allow Our Past Failures to Possess Us

The children of Israel had failed God miserably. Every time He blessed them with good things, they returned to Him evil things:

1. God gave them the Temple - they gave Him idol worship

2. God gave them truth - they lived and proclaimed a lie

3. God gave them His commands - they lived like they were suggestions.

4. God gave them wealth - they used it to abuse the poor

5. God gave them Himself - they gave Him nothing except rejection.

The children of Israel did not deserve to receive anything from God. Yet He still loved them and He earnestly wanted to help them change.

I wonder if, for Scotland, it might read:

1. God gave them church buildings – and they worshipped them

2. God gave them truth – but they never read the bible regularly so they could put it into practice

3. God gave them his commands – but they imagined that was only for the very holy to obey

4. God gave them wealth – and they ploughed 700 million into buildings

5. God gave himself – and they celebrated it two or three times a year

Notice God's Message: Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!

God was not condemning them for their past, they could do nothing to change it. Instead God was holding out the hand of hope. He is in effect saying: Forget about your past -- I am giving you an opportunity to start over. Isaiah 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

If we come to God looking for forgiveness we can be sure that he will not condemn our past either – we can't change it, but we can have a totally different future.

iii. We Cannot Live on Yesterday's Faith

The children of Israel had experienced great spiritual blessings throughout their history. From the first Passover, to the crossing of the Red Sea, to the conquering of the Land of Canaan, to the building of the temple, the children of Israel had seen the hand of God at work in and through their lives. Their past was a mix of failures AND successes; good and bad.

Yet their faith in what God had done was doing nothing to deliver them from their present situation. Their old faith was not sufficient enough to deliver them from their present problems.

They needed new faith, a new vision for what God could do. They needed a new portion of the faith that had brought to pass all the victories from before. **Psalm 85:6-8** *Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you. Show us your unfailing love, Lord, and grant us your salvation. I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly.*

1. We need to reposition ourselves to what God wants to do now, by taking the following actions:

1. Genuine repentance over all known and unknown sins
2. Forget those things in our past that, in anticipation of the glorious new thing God wants to do for you.
3. We position ourselves by calling on the Living God
 - God has promised to do a new thing. Do you wish God would work as He did in days of old? Are you ready for a new beginning? Are you ready for God to do a new thing in your life?

2. Revelation of the New Things

The 2nd step to embracing the new thing that God wants to do is to clarify our focus.

You must develop a faith that can see the invisible. Like Moses saw the Egyptians perish, David saw Goliath's defeat, and the three Hebrew men saw their God delivering them. God says: *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*

What do you see when you look at the future of the church? Do you see possibilities or problems? Notice what God said: I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

The children of Israel had a choice. They could view their past and the problems of their present, or they could focus upon what God wanted to do in their lives. It's the same for us today, of course there are difficult issues and problems to face, but the future looks very different depending on whether we choose to focus on the problem, or the possibility.

In order to discover what God wants for us:

i. We Must First See Yourself as God Sees Us

The children of Israel felt as though they were getting just what they deserved because of the way they had lived. Some even believed that God would never have anything more to do with them. But they were wrong.

You may feel like your past has made your life a wasteland but in God, your life can become a stream of life. Romans 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*

ii. We Must See Our Possibilities as God Sees Them:

I am making a way in the desert. 43:19

God is able to transform the desert areas of our life into fields of blessing and abundance. God can take a dried up useless life and transform it into a life of purpose and grace. He can take a Church that seems in terminal decline and bring renewal.

We don't need to understand Him, or know how He will do it, we only need to believe Him and hope for His manifestations.

Why will God do a new thing?

1. God will always do a new thing to show His glory
 - If you are desperate to give God the glory, you are already ripe for a new thing
2. It is to give His children miracles in order to draw them closer
3. So that the church can be a wonder to many.
 - He wants the unbeliever to see His glory in your life and in the church, so that people will be drawn to him.
4. To demonstrate His faithfulness to His children
 - He will bless His children, to make them know that He is enough for them in every situation.
5. To show His supremacy.
 - God is bigger and greater than other gods, He will always do something new to demonstrate this
6. To set His people free.
 - He came for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil in our lives, so that we can be free.

Certain things will hinder the new things that God wants to do:

1. Laziness
 - Laziness can prevent us in taking certain necessary steps towards receiving the new thing God wants to do for us.
2. Foundational battles
 - learning to put God first, to trust in his word and learn how to hear his voice.
3. Living an UNBROKEN life
 - God is not blessing us to become proud, but to show forth His glory
4. When we have not experienced Holy Spirit filling us to overflowing
 - You cannot use common sense in the things of the Kingdom, you can only use Holy Ghost sense, we also need His empowerment to believe and receive the new thing God will be doing in our lives.
5. Living in unrighteousness
 - Sin will hinder and cancel out what God wants to do, so we must repent from our sins and pursue after righteousness at all times.

Repositioning for the New Things

Revelation of the New Things

3. Revolution by the New Things

When God says to His children He will do a new thing, it means we will move to a level of freedom we have never known before.

It also means that God is about to surprise our enemies beyond recovery. The Lord is starting a new thing in the life of the Church of Scotland, and in Scotland. Are you prepared for it?

The Lord has promised to do a new thing. The new thing God is about to do in our lives will make rivers flow where there were none.

However, a new thing can mean different things to different people. We need to hold on to God's word and promises, trusting that he has what we need for this time, and the future.

God had already set into motion the events and people who would lead Israel out of captivity and back into the land of blessing. But it was still up to them to decide if they wanted what God was offering. If they had decided not to follow Moses that entire generation would have remained in captivity, indeed hardly any of them saw the promised land because they kept looking back to Egypt.

So, the question for us is, are we prepared to follow God's direction? What if it means another union of two, three or four congregations? What if it means giving up this building? I'm not saying it will, I'm simply asking, "what if..."

There are Principles to follow in embracing the new thing God is doing:

i. Don't evaluate what God is about to do by what He did in the past.

- God, who had brought Israel out of Egypt and had destroyed the Egyptian army, was promising to do an even greater thing

- God is saying that glory of the former things cannot compare with the glory of the new thing that is coming

ii. Don't live in condemnation over past sins and mistakes.

- Stop evaluating your future by what you experienced in the past

- Instead of living under the weight of the past, we must call upon Him, pray to Him, seek Him, and search for Him with all of our heart.

iii. Believe in the God of a new beginning. Behold, I will do a new thing

- This new thing is a work of revival and restoration of His people. Our end will be greater than our beginning

iv. Expect God to be working it out now. Now it shall spring forth

God is saying: See, I have already begun, reach out with expectation to receive the new thing and you will not be disappointed.