

**+ Isaiah 43:16-25 + Victory Is Ours Through God's Work + 5th Sunday in Lent + 22 March 2015 +**

Have you ever forgotten something that you should've remembered? We've all done that. Have you ever remembered something that you should've forgotten? We've all done that too. It really doesn't matter how old you are. Kids and teens forget and remember just as much as adults, although the older we get, we might have more to forget—or more to remember.

You could say that forgetting and remembering are at the same time two of the hardest and easiest things to do. Forgetting happens so easily when you have information that you need to remember whether that's information for a test, directions to a job interview, where you placed your car keys, when you have an appointment, or so-and-so's birthday.

But forgetting what you should forget? That's not so easy. In fact, in a case like that, remembering suddenly becomes easy. Just think about this. Do you ever have a hard time forgetting what someone has done to you—especially if what they have done has made your life more difficult? Do you ever have a hard time forgetting some painful sin that you've committed in your past, even though you'd love to remove that from your memory?

You and I also have trouble putting old ways behind us—not just the ways of sinful words or sinful actions, but that deep, old desire to try to “make up” for past mistakes. That inborn desire to try to get ourselves right with God is always there, but no matter how hard we try, it's never enough. We somehow always forget that every attempt to get right with God has failed. So the next time we sin, we try to do it all over again failing to forget.

Back in the days of Isaiah the prophet about 700 years before the birth of Christ, God's people had a similar problem. Now it was a very difficult time for God's people in Israel because they were caught between the great powers of the Ancient Near East battling for supremacy. First it was the Assyrians, then the Egyptians, and then the Babylonians.

What made matters worse for God's people was their difficulty with remembering what God wanted them to remember and forgetting what God wanted them to forget. Over and over again, the Israelites made the same mistakes. They forgot about the countless ways that the Lord had poured out his merciful love on his people—protecting them from their enemies, blessing their crops and businesses, and providing clear reminders that the Messiah was coming to deliver them from sin and death.

Instead, all they could remember was this foolish belief that was actually similar to that of their pagan neighbors. They thought that if they simply offered the required sacrifices and celebrated the appropriate festival days and minded the food they ate and kept God's laws perfectly, then God would bless them. They tried to make up with God for the countless times they turned their backs on him. They forgot what was important and remembered the wrong.

Now the Lord of grace had accomplished some pretty amazing things for his people in the past. About 750 years before Isaiah, the Lord had rescued their ancestors with some amazing miracles. He had brought the mighty Egyptian empire to its knees with a series of ten supernatural plagues. When mighty Pharaoh let the Israelites go, but then changed his mind, the Lord demonstrated his amazing power over all creation by delivering his people through the Red Sea. God parted the waters and held off the Egyptian army until every last Israelite had crossed over on dry land.

Isaiah describes what happened when the Egyptians pursued them. ***“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...”*** The Lord of grace and glory destroyed the Egyptian army with the waters of the sea.

A pretty amazing miracle, right? The story of that miracle was passed down from generation to generation all the way to Isaiah's day and beyond. “Remember what the Lord of grace has done!” So you can imagine how surprised Isaiah's readers were when the Lord told his people, ***“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past...”*** “Forget what the Lord of grace has done in the past? Don't think about it anymore?” Well, not quite.

You see, the Lord wanted them to remember what he was going to do. ***“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. The wild animals 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.**” The Lord wanted them to forget what they were trying to do and to pay attention to what he was about to do.

The Lord of grace was going to bring life to the human wasteland of sin with the coming of Messiah, the One who would rescue his people from their sins. He was going to refresh the thirsty souls of his chosen people with the Water of Life that would flow from the Savior and lead to his eternal praise.

Now why would God do this? Why would God be so willing to deliver a people who took every opportunity to turn their backs on him? Why would God make such plans to save a people who continually forgot that they could do nothing to earn his favor—and failed miserably when they tried? God sought to deliver his people purely out of grace—his undeserved love.

To help them remember, the Lord of grace carefully explained why his grace was going to deliver them. **“Yet you have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense. You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.”**

God in his grace had called them and made them his people. God in his grace had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, from enemies and oppressors, and from famine and hardship. This deliverance was always freely given with no strings attached. In fact, when God did command sacrifices and burnt offerings, they were meant to remind the people of the even greater deliverance that God was going to freely provide in the Messiah.

Those sacrifices were opportunities for the people to put their faith into action rather than to try to appease God or to coax him into blessing. Rather than make his people slaves, God took the burden of their sins and offenses on his own shoulders. Then he freely delivered them from those sins, freely forgetting the guilt of their sin for his own sake through the Savior to come. **“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”**

Like those Israelites, you and I have trouble remembering what God wants us to remember and forgetting what he wants us to forget. Led by your sinful nature, you turn your back on your gracious Lord and forget about his love and mercy. Then when you sin, you fail to remember that no sin is forgiven because you perform some action to earn God’s favor. You fail to remember that even a lifetime of good effort and wonderful intentions and heartfelt sacrifices cannot cause God to forgive even a single sin.

So what does the Lord of grace tell us when we have such a hard time with forgetting and remembering? **“See, I am doing a new thing!** Look at what I’ve done and continue to do for you in Jesus!” We look, and what do we see? We look at God’s activity, at that **“new thing”** that brought life to the desert wasteland of sin in our lives—and all we see is God’s grace.

We look at how the eternally begotten Son of God left the comforts of heaven and took on our human flesh. We look at how he led a life of perfect obedience to God’s holy Law in thought, word, and action. We look at the cross and the once-for-all sacrifice for sin—both yours and mine, and what do we see? Grace and grace alone from the hand of our God.

We look and see that none of this would’ve been necessary if we were not sinners, but the result is that we are no longer counted as sinners before God. Why? God did it all through our Savior Jesus. In Jesus, we see God alone blot out every stain of your transgression and my sin. In Jesus, we see God choose to forgive every last one of those sins and remember our sins no more. Then we look at an empty tomb and see life eternal and the gates of heaven opened forever. Why? The Lord forgives us for his own sake.

When you see **“the new thing”** that our God has done for you and all mankind, then you can put behind you that sin that you can’t seem to forget and that inclination to try to earn God’s favor. Of course, since it takes more than one look, you and I need to continually gaze at the new mercy of our God in Christ, at the forgiveness he freely and fully offers day after day through the Gospel. Then because our God did it all, because he remembers our sins no more, and will bring us to heaven someday, we can remember that victory is ours through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.