

Good News for a New Year – Isaiah 43:18-21

Introduction: As we come to the last Sunday of 2009, it's not only the last Sunday of the year, but also the last Sunday of this decade. And what a decade it has been! This decade began with a day that many thought would change our world forever - Y2K. Well, that didn't happen, but just a little over a year later, the day came that did change America, - Sept. 11, 2001.

In this decade we've gone from a war in Afghanistan, to a war with Iraq, and back to a war in Afghanistan. It's all part of a war on terrorism which is a new kind of war for us. We're not sure who the enemy is or where they are. It's not a question of if, but when and where we'll face another outbreak of terror.

In this decade, the world has experienced the earthquake and tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean in December, 2004, killing over 300,000 people, and Hurricane Katrina which hit the Gulf Coast area in 2005 causing massive destruction, and economic catastrophe to that area that is still being felt today.

In this decade, we've been introduced to some new terminology such as "*wardrobe malfunction, googling, texting, tweeting, blogging, phishing, and identity theft.*"

In this decade, we've experienced the worst economic downturn since the Depression as the housing market plummeted, unemployment rose, and retirement accounts dwindled.

This is the reality that this decade has brought us - that the world is a more dangerous and unstable place to live than it used to be. The only real safe place is in the center of the will of God, because God is always in control and is always present in the midst of every situation.

So, when we come to the end of this year and this decade, we sure could use a little good news. We need some encouragement and hope as we enter into a new year.

The place to go for encouragement and good news is the Word of God. In Isaiah 43, we can find some good news. Isaiah was the dominant Prophet of the eighth century BC. His message had a great impact on God's people who were now living in exile in Babylonia. Now it would be two hundred years before the people would get to return home, but Isaiah's words brought a renewed hope to some very discouraged people.

Even though this was spoken long ago, it has application to us because God's Word is timeless. Just as Isaiah was preaching to a discouraged people whose lives had been filled with bad news, He now speaks to us who are living in similar circumstances. **Read Isaiah 43:18-21 (NIV)**

Isaiah's good news was that God was going to keep His promises and do what He said He would do by bringing the captives back home to Jerusalem.

Now the people had a hard time believing Isaiah because all they saw around them was hopelessness and despair. Israel was once a great nation, and God had led them to accomplish many great things. But now, all that was just a memory. It seemed that those days were gone forever. All the people could see was gloom and doom and despair. But to those people Isaiah said, "*God is doing a new thing! He's going to keep His promise to you.*"

You see, the people Isaiah spoke to lived in two worlds. They lived in a world of what they saw. Their reality was a world of bondage and slavery in Babylon.

But they also lived in a world of faith. God had said to their ancestors, *“You are my chosen people. I have a plan for you. I have a kingdom for you, and I’m going to bring you to it.”* Faith said, *“God will keep His word to you,”* but sight said, *“It won’t happen.”* Which would they believe? Would they believe in the world they saw, or would they believe in a promise they couldn’t see? Would they believe that God would do what He said He would do? Could their faith be renewed in a God who promised, *“I am doing a new thing?”*

Does any of this resonate with where we are today? Do you see that we too live in two worlds? We live in the world of sight. Our reality is a world of danger, fear and pessimism. It’s a world of economic uneasiness. It’s a world of where godly values and morality has been turned inside out, and in a lot of areas, is virtually non-existent. That’s one world we live in.

But we as Christians also live in a world of faith. We live in a world where God is exalted; where worship is experienced; where the Bible is believed; and where brothers and sisters dwell together in unity and encouragement. We live in a world where we can help a family pay their rent, or provide a group of underprivileged children with Christmas. We live in a world where it’s still right for children to honor their parents, and live by the golden rule. We live in a world of faith.

But then Monday comes, and many people find it so easy to move out of the world of faith and go right back into a world of sight. And like the people of Israel, we have to decide. Will we believe God, or will we believe what we see? Will we believe the circumstances, or will we believe our convictions? Isaiah spoke to a people who faced that kind of decision, and I believe he’s still speaking to us who face the same decision.

God wants to do a new thing in our lives, but it’s hard for some to see it. You see, in many ways, we’ve grown accustomed to the idea of being believers. What I mean is that we can get so comfortable in our religious life that we don’t realize that the most important thing is not what’s happened in the past, but what God is doing right now and what He’s going to do in the future. God says he is going to do a new thing, and I believe this is good news for us in the New Year ahead.

Now, if we’re going to receive and believe this good news, there are some things we must be grounded in. First, we need to understand that:

1. We Were Created by Design

We are not here as victims of circumstances or because of some evolutionary accident. **Isaiah 43:1 (NIV)** says, *“But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. God says, “I am your Creator. I am the One who formed you.”*

We were created by design. If we are going to experience this new thing that God has for us, we must remember that the God who designed us, has a plan for our lives. If there is no plan, then there is no rhyme or

reason to life. We can't explain anything that happens unless we understand that God has created us with a purpose. But when we understand that, then we can face the uncertainties of life. We don't understand all that has happened, and we certainly don't know what's going to happen. But if we know God has a purpose for our lives, it helps us to accept and to experience this new thing that God is doing in our lives.

Now you might be thinking, "*But preacher, I don't know what God's plan is.*" Well, guess what? It's not up to us to figure out what God's will is. Our part is to simply submit to Him and to accept whatever His plan is for our lives. I mean, look...God created us and provided us with the opportunity for eternal life. And our thankful and humble response to Him ought to be, "*Yes Lord! Whatever the question is, my answer is 'yes.' I will obey you. I will serve you. I will live for you in whatever circumstances come my way. I will accept your plan even before I know it.*"

If we understand that God has a plan for our lives, then we can know that whatever happens to us, God will use it to accomplish that plan. It doesn't matter if tragedy strikes, if sickness comes, or my money runs out, I'm still going to trust in God's promise of **Romans 8:28 (NIV)** "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" God has a purpose and plan for your life. And if we'll believe and accept that, then it will open us up to the new things God wants to do in our lives. Second, we need to understand that:

2. We Were Created to Know God

Again, look at vs. 1. God says, "*I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.*" **Isaiah 43:1 (NIV)**. God wants us to know Him, but until we do, there will be emptiness in our hearts and confusion in our minds about life.

Now, there's a difference between knowing God and knowing about God. Everyone knows about God or has some sort of concept of God. But we need to understand that we were created to know God and have a personal relationship with Him.

That is one reason God sent His Son into the world, so that we might know Him. If you recall, the angel told Joseph in a dream that Jesus' birth was a fulfillment of the prophecy which said, "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel*"--which means, "*God with us.*" **Matthew 1:23 (NIV)**. And Jesus Himself said, that, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*" **John 14:9 (NIV)**. So God wants us to know Him, and we need to understand that if we're going to be able to receive the good news God's wants to share with us in the coming year. Third, we need to understand that:

3. We Were Created to Succeed

Isaiah 43:2 (NIV) says, "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*" Notice he didn't say "*IF*" these bad things happen, but "*WHEN*" these bad things happen. The fact is; life is filled with all kinds of problems and trials and unexpected hardships. But it's

also a fact that God created us to succeed. He said that in the midst of all those hardships, they will not defeat you because God will be with you. So, we can face any problem or trial knowing that nothing can defeat us or destroy us if we know God. Whatever the New Year holds for us, if we understand that we were created with a purpose and created to know God, and if we're walking in the presence of God, we can succeed.

Let me give you a great promise to start the new year off with. In **Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)**, God says, *"For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* When we understand that, we will look at life differently. When we accept it, we won't be as apt to live our lives in fear or hopelessness, even when difficulties come our way. We'll understand and believe that we can make it through any circumstance because God is in control and we can succeed. God plans to prosper us and not harm us. God's plan is to give us a hope and a future.

Now we'll have to move beyond our past, in order to succeed. We can't move forward very well, if we're constantly looking in the rearview mirror! Living in the past will keep us from the new things that God is doing for us right now.

We'll also have to believe in a God who can make a way where there seems to be no way. Isaiah was speaking to people who would have to cross what is modern-day Iran, Iraq, and Jordan to get back to Jerusalem. There was just no human way they could do it. But God said that He'd make a way.

Many folks find themselves in a similar situation. They're hooked on drugs and can't quit. They're tormented by guilt or depression and can't find relief. There just doesn't seem to be any way out. But the good news is that God says He will make a way where there is no way. If we understand that we were created for a purpose, that God has a plan for our lives, that He created us to know Him, then we can find the hope to succeed.

We can succeed because God says that He will provide us with whatever we need to succeed. In our text, Isaiah talks about God providing streams in the wilderness and drinking water in the desert (18-21). There are not any rivers in the wilderness, but God says even when we find ourselves in situations where the resources don't seem to exist, He'll provide what we need.

What I'm trying to tell you is that God created you with a purpose and a plan for your life. He created you to know Him, and He created you to succeed in the plan that He has for your life. So, He will provide whatever is necessary to make that happen. And finally, God wants us to understand that:

4. We Were Created for Eternity

In **Isaiah 43:25 (NIV)** God says, *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."*

God created us for eternity. That's why we can't be content with what we see. We can't make enough money or become popular enough to satisfy the longing of our hearts. Real satisfaction and real peace can only come through the forgiving and cleansing and eternal presence of Christ in our lives.

You see, this life is just preparation. None of us will live on earth forever. But we'll all live in eternity. Think about it. How long is eternity? Well, perhaps this little illustration will help you understand it a little better. Suppose there was a mountain of granite a thousand miles square. If a little bird came by once every thousand years and sharpened its beak on the granite, when that massive rock is worn to the ground, then eternity would just be beginning. Folks, eternity is a long, long time. And we'd better be making our preparations for it.

Isaiah's message to his people was good news. The message of Jesus Christ is good news to us. And the good news for the New Year is this: God created us by design with a plan and a purpose. God created us to know Him. He created us to succeed, and He created us for eternity. That's good news.

Whatever happens in the coming year, if we can understand those things, and live in the presence of Christ in our lives, then it will be a good year, because God has promised to do a new thing in our lives.