

new things

QUESTION ONE: How does God do new things?

1. God doesn't _____ us from _____ places; He _____ us
_____ places

2. God provides _____ and _____ in
_____ places

QUESTION TWO: How can we make sure we see new things?

1. Choose new _____ over old _____

2. Choose new _____ over old _____

“Want to get away?”

Southwest Airlines ran an ad campaign a few years back that asked that question at the end of every commercial.

They would feature people that got themselves into crazy, awkward situations, and just as the awkwardness reached it's peak, the voiceover would ask that question.

I know that feeling.

I couldn't have been more than 8 or 9 when my sister talked me into a very awkward situation, and I can remember the horrible feeling when I realized I was exposed with no way out...literally.

I streaked in front of my mom.

It went horribly wrong, and like the Israelites in Isaiah 43, I was held captive as a result of my own bad choices.

I wanted to get away.

In our passage, we find the people of God in captivity, too. They are being held in Babylon and to a man (and woman), I'm sure that they, too, wanted to get away.

When we are in that situation, it is not hard to want new things, and so they must have been thrilled when they heard the words of verse 19 for the first time: *“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”*

For me, there are 2 very fundamental questions in this verse that I want us to answer this morning:

1. How does God do new things?

The short answer is: not the way we would!

First off, let's admit something: when we think of new, we think of an easy button.

We want out of the situations we consider old, cold, and hard, and so the first way that God does new things is going to take some getting used to, because...

- a. God doesn't remove us from hard places; He moves us through hard places
 - Verse 2 says He moves us through the waters, the rivers, and the fire
 - Verse 16 says He takes us through the sea and through the mighty waters
 - Psalm 23:4 says the we walk through the valley of the shadow of death
 - There are surely times in Scripture that God miraculously seemed to push the magic button and remove people from difficult situations (Peter being blown out of prison in Acts 12 comes to mind), but the vast weight of Scripture is that God doesn't use the easy button to remove us
 - Energy comes from friction; diamond comes from pressure, your best comes from the fire of hard things (Proverbs 27:17)
 - He isn't telling us to blink, click our heels 3 times, and wish ourselves away
 - He's calling us to stand firm even after we've done everything we know to do (Ephesians 6:13)
 - The power of the gospel isn't that God is powerful enough to get us out of hard things, but that He is powerful enough to meet us in those hard things and help move us through them
 - The obvious question is, of course, how does He do that?
- b. God provides direction and protection in hard places
 - Look at the last part of verse 19

- God promises the 2 things we don't want in the last place we want them
- He provides direction by making a way, but we don't want direction, we want a destination
- He provides protection from the heat by giving a river, but we don't want protection, we want perfection
- We want to be picked up and placed at our destination in a perfect environment, but God actually wants His provision in the hard places to display His greatness.
- In fact, verse 20 says that even the animals will praise God because of how He takes care of His children in the hard places.
- No wonder God asked the question in verse 19: "Do you not perceive it?"
- That leads us to the last of our 2 questions:

2. How can we make sure we see new things?

Before I give you 2 tips that can keep us from missing the new things, let's take a minute and unpack the Hebrew word for "perceive" in verse 19.

This is so much more than just seeing something. It is an active knowing, a discerning. It is the same word used for sexual relations in marriage, and so let's at least recognize that we will always miss the new things that God is doing if our brand of Christianity is one of sitting back and waiting for God to wow us into submission.

Another way of phrasing this question could be, "Look! I'm doing something new right in the place of your hardest battle. Will you engage in it with me?"

Here are 2 ways that you can ensure that you're engaging in what God is doing:

a. Choose new mercy over old misery

- Lamentations 3:22-23 - the Lord's mercy - His great love - is new every morning
- It isn't meant to be old; it's meant to always be new
- Choosing the new mercy He provides you every day leaves no room for the leftovers of the past like grudges, offenses and revenge-seeking
- Mercy leads to betterness; misery leads to bitterness
- Hebrews 12:15 is clear: choosing bitterness causes trouble and short-circuits our ability to receive grace from God

b. Choose new strategy over old insanity

- Most of us have heard the quote that insanity is trying the same thing over and over again but expecting different results.
- It's always amazed me that we'll run the vacuum over the same thread multiple times and then bend over, pick it up, and drop it right back down to try and get it again
- So many times we want to see the new things that God is doing, but we can't because we don't do anything differently than before
- Look at what God says to His people in verse 22
- He says that they haven't been calling on Him; they've been tired of Him
- But what does He say in verse 26? Now, let's try something different; a new strategy
- In other words, God says, "I'm doing something new, but if you keep ignoring me, you'll miss it. So come and state your case. Talk with me."
- Let me challenge you: try some new strategies with God this year

- Never read the Bible? Take the G90X challenge with us.
- Never really given yourself to missions? Be a part of "I Love My City" with us.
- Never really felt connected to people? Stop staying at home this year and plug into one of the Community Groups starting next week.
- Never seemed like you had a handle on your finances? Take a step of faith and trust God with a tithe.
- Engage yourself with the new things God is going to do in you and in The Gathering this year, and I can guarantee you that you'll find a greater and greater revelation of God's new activity in you life than you've ever had before

One last thing before we wrap this up:

- This is a process
- When God begins to do new things, and we begin to engage with those new things, we often find ourselves feeling like we're living a double life
- Philippians 3:12-14 is a classic passage about forgetting the old and moving toward the new, but I want to highlight what Paul wrote in verse 13: "I haven't taken hold of it yet."
- In the process of moving toward what we don't fully have, there is the reality that we aren't what we were, but we're also not yet what we'll be
- That reality demands grace, and it demands that even as we continue to be in the desert, we will continually choose to see the rivers He places there