

The New work of our Lord, His greatest work of all

Isaiah 43:16–21

Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; ¹⁷ Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow. ¹⁸ Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. ²⁰ The beast of the field shall honour me, the jackals and the ostriches: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. ²¹ This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.

Dear Christian Friends,

Our Lord God has performed many mighty works, which to this day are denied and belittled by men. He brought the forces of the universe, the matter of this world, the finely tuned laws of physics, and the incredible diversity of intricately designed life into existence with nothing but the word of His mouth. Now men, whose very hearts cry out that there is a God, deny Him with their lips, and demand that the world must not be made by any Creator at all. The Lord performed many other miracles in the sight of His people Israel. He brought the twelve plagues upon Egypt, parted the waters of the Red Sea, caused the Sun to reverse its course in the sky, and raised the dead. Intelligent men call these things myths and legends. It is not all men who deny the Creator or His miracles, but only some. Others accept the possibility or believe that there is a God who intervenes in the affairs of men., for their conscience, and the heavens themselves, declare that it is so. But there is one work which our Lord has done, his greatest work of all, that almost the entire human race is united in denying: that God came to men in the person of Jesus Christ, and became a Redeemer of pure grace for everyone in the world. All manner of miracles they will accept, but this they cannot. Their hearts do not know it. Their minds cannot comprehend it. But this work, this New Work, is so magnificent, so much the capstone of all that God has done, that everything else can be forgotten, everything else is unimportant, if you know the work of the Christ the Lord.

Christ Jesus is the new work of our God. It is a new work because it supersedes the former things of old. Everything before Him was a type and symbol, a prelude of better things to come. He is the reality. The covenant that was before Him was a covenant of Law, but He is filled with mercy and grace. The people of God that were before Him were mostly limited to a small country in the earth, but now all men everywhere are invited and urged to become God's people. Let us learn why this work is new unto us, and why this work makes all that went before it as but a memory that is forgotten.

After the creation, the first great work of our God which the Scriptures reveal is the Exodus, the deliverance of the

people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. One could speak for hours describing the many ways in which God demonstrated that He alone is God, and that all the idols of the world are nothing. His power and might cannot be defeated. Egypt had their own rival gods, which served as prototypes for the gods of all the nations in the known world, down even to the present day. Almost every case of idolatry in the civilized world can trace itself to the gods of ancient Egypt. God brought down the twelve plagues upon Israel, and in so doing showed that all these gods in which men trusted were powerless. Furthermore, God saved His people from the same plagues, and showed that He is near and a Savior to all who call upon Him in truth. After the plagues, there is the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. This climax of the Exodus is remembered all throughout the Scriptures. Here also we see it in Isaiah, in a most beautiful telling. God made a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters. There He caused His people to pass to safety. When the horses and chariots, and all the strength of Pharaoh and his army pursued Israel, God brought the mighty waters down upon them so that they shall never rise again. The light and glory of their might was snuffed out as when the flaxen wick of an oil lamp is quenched. So it is for all the kingdoms of men, and every earthly power. None can stand against the Lord God.

This Exodus is memorialized in Psalms, in the Laws which God gave Israel on Mt. Sinai, in prophecy, and in countless applications in the Old and New Testaments. Yet here, in Isaiah, after the telling of it, the Lord declares "Remember not the former things, neither consider the things of old." Were God's people indeed to utterly forget that He had delivered them? No. Nor do the Apostles forget, but recount the old things many times in the New Testament, even as Jesus Himself did the same. No, the forgetting here is not of the facts of the events. Instead, they were to forget that these things had anything to do with their identity as God's people, for God would do a new work. Whereas all of Israel until that time thought of themselves as the people whom God delivered from Egypt, after this new work, they would identify themselves as the people that God had delivered from sin, death, and the power of the devil. *This* deliverance makes the Exodus seem a mere footnote.

The new work of which the prophet speaks is the Salvation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It exceeds all the former works of God in every way. First this work is greater because all the miracles that God had done before, be they ever so mighty, were but a type and shadow of the work He would do in Christ Jesus. The Israelites remembered the Exodus every year at the feast of the Passover, for God had passed over their houses because they were marked by the blood of a spotless lamb. Jesus is the Lamb, our Passover, Who was sacrificed for us. His is the blood which even now marks us and our children, so that death might pass over us, even as the

children of this world are being struck down into the eternal death of hell. The lamb of the Passover was a shadow of Christ, but now Christ is here. The shadows and types are past. It is a new day! The Lamb of God has now come to men, and He shall make only one sacrifice, for all sin, and it will be sufficient not only to cover the people of God, but the entire world of sinners. The Lamb which was slain for us will never be slain again, but lives and reigns over His people.

So also, the people of Israel were delivered through the waters of the Red Sea, and after that they wandered in the wilderness, where they all the same spiritual food and drink, for they drank of the Rock, who is Jesus Christ, before they even knew His name. The Manna and the Water from a rock were symbols of Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-5). but now He Himself has come! Today we pass through better waters than the Red Sea, for the waters of baptism are a washing of regeneration, a new birth which God offers to all people. And this work is not limited to one small nation of Israel. He sends out this rivers of life and salvation into the desert, where all the beasts of the earth can partake of it and live. The jackals and the ostriches, that is, the Gentiles from every nation, who are now privileged to be able to call themselves God's own people, His chosen. This new work God performs among His people every day, delivering the souls of men and their children not from human armies, but from the far more fierce foes of sin and death.

After the Exodus, the next great event which we see take place is the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. This Law is not only the Ten Commandments. Those alone are enough to keep all men busy for the rest of their lives. Given also were many other laws, which Israel was to keep faithfully if they were to be God's people forever. The Law which was given by Moses was a tremendous burden upon them. It grew old very quickly. In mere days, Israel turned themselves over to idolatry, and worshiped the golden calf. Then the Lord showed them what His Law demanded, not only in the keeping, but also in the breaking. The most wicked of them were killed, all the others punished. Thus a repeating pattern was set up from the very beginning. The Law is given, the people hear it, break it, and are punished. They return to the Lord, hear the Law again, and start the process all over. Sometimes the punishment came in the form of new captivities, that would bring to their minds the captivity of Egypt. Even so, the Lord was teaching them that none but He could help them. Now all those Laws had a function. They were a hedge which God set up, to separate Israel from the rest of the world, to preserve them into the future, and to keep pure the bloodline which God had ordained as the means by which He would bring His Son into the world. Therefore when Christ came, the giving of the Law receded behind Him. Right and wrong, good and evil, black and white stayed the same, because truth is truth and evil is evil. But all the others laws, governing

food and drink, clothing and cattle, festivals and days of worship, marrying and having children, the many laws which were a hedge, which preserved the people until Christ came, all of these were absorbed by the coming of Christ. He superseded these old laws, because once He arrived, the Law had fulfilled its purpose.

But for you also Jesus has superseded the Law of God. Evil is evil, and good is good. Sin is still the transgression of the Law, not the Law of shadows and types, but the pure Law which God has given to men because it is true. He even has written it upon their hearts, so that all the nations of the world might model their own laws after God's perfect holiness. To Israel and to all his people, God gave the Ten Commandments which are still binding upon us, for in their heart and core, they mean nothing other than love. Love the Lord thy God with all your being. Love your neighbor as yourself. That Law never passes away. But even that Law is fulfilled in Christ. Ceremonies and cleansings, sacrifices, and rituals are easy to keep. Such things the old Law demanded. But the unchanging Law of love? That is another matter entirely. There God makes demands upon every action and thought, and judges everything that men do and say and think to be corrupt, and good for nothing but the fire.

In the New work, the perfect Law of love is not destroyed, but kept more perfectly and more completely than all the efforts of Israel combined. Christ Jesus is Himself God's Love come down from heaven. In a mystical way which none of us can comprehend, God made Him to be our substitute. He lived His entire life in the place of all the men of this world. He was charged with keeping the perfect Law of God on behalf of all men, yes, even the countless ceremonials laws which God gave to Moses. But the greatest manner in which Christ Jesus overtook the Law on our behalf took place on His Cross. There the collective guilt of sin, and its wages of eternal death were poured upon Christ. But in that horrific death, all the Law of God was fulfilled, both in the keeping and the breaking. Now for all who are in Christ Jesus, the Law and all the other former things are past. The Passover, Exodus, Mt. Sinai, Manna, and countless other miracles recede into the background.

When we look backwards today, when we stop our busy lives and gaze into history, there is one shape and one hill which looms higher and more glorious than everything else that God has done. It is the hill of Golgotha, and the cross of Christ. It was for Christ a cross of pain. It is for us the Cross of glory and salvation. It is the instrument whereby God has formed for Himself a new people. We are His people. Therefore let us show forth His praises, for this is our high calling upon this earth. Let us marvel and rejoice in the new work which our Lord has brought into the world in His Son. May the streams of his mercy ever refresh us in the wilderness of this world. Amen.