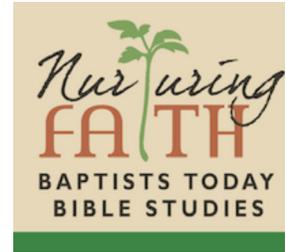


Adult Teaching Resources

March 13, 2016



Season of Lent (February 10-March 26)

When Old Becomes New — 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

God's New Thing — Isaiah 43:16-21

The Dark Night Before the Dawn — Luke 23:1-49

Ladies First — Luke 24:1-12

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God's New Thing

Isaiah 43:16-21

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Do something that makes your room different. For example, put a new picture on the wall or have a fragrant candle lighted before class members enter. Have blank paper and pens for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

What is one “new thing” you own or have experienced in the last 30 days?

A new restaurant opens in town. Are you one to be among the first to try it out? Or, do you wait for others’ reviews?

Information

Did you notice anything different about the room today? What was it?

On a scale of 1-10, how radical a change would you say that makes to our space? (With 1 meaning “no change” and 10 meaning, “I felt I was in a different room!”)

It may that some of you did not even notice the change. Why is that? (not paying attention; not significant enough to notice, etc.)

Today’s lesson has to do with paying attention. God was at work in the world this week. The question is, did we notice?

[Have a class member read Isaiah 43:16-17.]

What event in the life of Israel is Isaiah referring to? (the exodus from Egypt; crossing the sea; Pharaoh’s army unable to reach the Jews, etc.)

This is the foundational story of the Hebrew people. They were slaves but God brought them out of slavery to make them a new people. Imagine that.

What kind of things would be new to a newly freed people? (where you live; creating a new government; setting up an economic system; being able to stay together as a family; making your own decisions; establishing your own business, etc.)

So, practically speaking, everything would change!

Information *continued*

Think about what the exodus story says about the power of the Hebrew God over nature. What are some things you remember from that story? (a burning bush that is not consumed; plagues; parting of the sea; the sea falling back on the Egyptian army; the provision of manna and quail, the provision of water, etc.)

God has power over nature. The Egyptians believed that about their gods, too. Most religions that have gods believe their gods have power over some elements of nature. What makes the Jews' perspective different? (Other gods were capricious in their use of power; other gods used their power to tempt or to taunt humans; the Jews' God used power over nature to benefit God's people, etc.)

So in this one verse, we find that God has power over political situations and that God has power over nature. God can change situations for the benefit of God's people. Sometimes those changes are as radically life-changing as an exodus from slavery. Nothing is the same, everything is changed.

[Have a class member read Isaiah 43:18-21.]

Isaiah gives the people a visual picture of the exodus — the parting of the sea, Pharaoh's chariots and horses, the struggles of escape and the joy of deliverance — and in the next breath says, "Now, that's all in the past. Forget about that."

Why do you think the prophet would say such a thing?

[Read or summarize: "The command is surprising and serves as an effective rhetorical device to get the people's attention, for the prophet is not content to have the people wax nostalgic about the 'good old days.' It is not on the past as the past that the prophet wants the people to concentrate. The prophet aims to create an imaginative space in the minds of the people so that their conception of the past can transform their understanding of the present and, thus, the future." [Callie Plunket-Brewton, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1647]]

It will be helpful to consider the context of this prophecy. After 60 or so years of exile from their homeland, forced to live under Babylonian captivity, the prophet is declaring that the captivity is nearing its end. This was unheard of. No country that captures another country's residents lets them go back to their homeland. Why would they? The captives were beaten. They were the spoils of a military victory.

So, if you were a Jew in captivity, what would be your assumptions about where you would spend the rest of your life?

What would be your assumptions about the Hebrew God?

Under normal circumstances, this is a hopeless situation. The Hebrew people are, if not enslaved as in Egypt, seemingly cursed to live and die on foreign soil.

What stands between the Jews and the Promised Land? A political system and a natural geographical formation — an ocean of sand. Sound familiar?

Information *continued*

The Jews were stuck. They were stuck in Babylon. But they were also stuck in their faith and in their imaginations. Probably, there were naysayers.” Facts are facts. Things never change. You’ve just got to accept things the way they are.” Isaiah disagreed. If God could make a way for slaves to leave Egypt, God could make a way for exiles to leave Babylon. “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

How do other translations word verse 19?

“The Israelite tendency was like ours: they tended to forget what they should remember and remember what they should forget. What should they remember? what the past tells us about the character and nature of God. We should remember all the evidence of his power, his faithfulness, and his love that his actions in the past have demonstrated. We should forget how he has acted in the past and believe that his power, faithfulness, and love will be applied to new situations in new ways.” [John N. Oswalt. “The God of Newness.” Calvin Theological Journal, 39 no 2 Nov 2004, p 387.]

Transformational Exercise

Pay attention! God is at work. New creations are happening. Angels are rejoicing at converted lives. God is raising up new liberators. However, we are often so occupied with the burdens from the past or the fears of the future that we do not “stop, look, and listen” for God at work.

[Distribute paper and pens.]

There are simple exercises we can experiment with that will strengthen our awareness of life around us. One of those exercises is to be still, be silent, and simply listen.

[Read or summarize this illustration:]

Marion Aldridge writes about his attempts to notice what he normally lets go unnoticed. Sometimes he simply makes a list of every sound he hears or every texture he feels. Once, while waiting for a tire to be repaired, he paid attention to the layers of sound in the dealership’s building. There were “intrusive noises such as horns honking, radios blaring, metal clanging; secondary noises such as overhead conversation or traffic on the nearby highway; and hidden sounds such as the hum of the air conditioning unit...On another occasion, I sat in a cemetery...[and] listed forty different sounds...everything from church bells to lawn mowers, from the wind whistling to water trickling, from the cackle of crows to human conversation, from hurrying footsteps to crying babies. What a delightful world we live in, if only we will be still and quiet long enough to notice.” [Marion D. Aldridge. *Overcoming Adolescence: Growing Beyond Childhood to Maturity*. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys. 2011. p. 24f.]

Paying attention takes practice. Let’s practice this exercise of paying attention for the next few minutes. We will be “still and quiet enough to notice” the sounds around us for the next two minutes. Jot down everything you hear.

Transformational Exercise *continued*

[After a few minutes of silence and writing, invite class members to share what they heard. You might ask the members to share one thing each until there is no more to share.]

What would happen if we make this practice a regular part of our lives?

[Close in a prayer something like this: *Give us sharpened vision, so we can see that you are at work, O God. Give us a broad, holy imagination, so that we can join you in the new ways you continue to bring your Kingdom to fruition. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Rivers in the desert — When Isaiah spoke of God bringing rivers to the desert, the exiles would have understood the imagery. Mesopotamia, home to the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations, found its lifeblood in the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which created a fertile band of land in an otherwise desert area. The name “Mesopotamia” derives from a combination of Greek words meaning “between the rivers.”

The Mesopotamians learned early on to exploit the river system, digging an intricate web of canals to extend the rivers’ life-giving water into the desert areas surrounding them. When the Israelites were carried into exile, at least some of them (including the prophet Ezekiel) were assigned to a settlement near the city of Nippur, in a place called Tell-Abib (Ezek. 3:15). The place was southeast of the city of Babylon and located on the “River Chebar.” The Tigris and Euphrates were the only true rivers, so the Chebar was probably a canal dug from the Euphrates. The expression *n^ehar-chebar* could also be translated as “Grand Canal.”

Israel’s ticket home — When Cyrus took control of Babylon, he adopted a different strategy for dealing with conquered peoples. Instead of exiling officials, the wealthy, and educated folk from home in order to “decapitate” nations of potential leadership, Cyrus believed it was best to allow people to live in their own lands as vassals, so long as they remained quiet and paid tribute.

Cyrus made this known through publishing various decrees. A much-abbreviated form of his decree regarding Israel can be found in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and repeated in Ezra 1:1-4. A longer and different version is found in Ezra 6:1-12.

The photograph below, of a document known as the “Cyrus Cylinder,” is formed of clay and imprinted round about with Akkadian cuneiform. It is a lengthy and self-congratulatory



decree in which Cyrus attributes his victory over Babylon to the favor of Marduk, the chief Babylonian god. The royal decree allows several people groups to return to their homelands and rebuild their temples, offering to provide financial assistance for the projects. While Israel is not named on this cylinder, a similar one may have been prepared to record the decree granting the Hebrews and others in Palestine their right to return.

Metaphors — Jesus, like Isaiah, spoke in metaphors, but very meaningful ones. The gushing spring of living water Jesus promised (John 4:14) would not arise in the desert that separated Israel from Babylon, but in the barren wilderness of a lost people who had

Digging Deeper *continued*

no hope outside of what God could do. Fortunately, God is in the business of helping people who are at the end of their ropes. God does not help us by teaching us new mental paradigms or by giving us productivity pointers, but through self-sacrifice and abounding love. God in Christ suffered and died in our behalf, demonstrating the extent of divine love, offering life and hope to all. The water of life has its source in the wellspring of blood Jesus shed on a lonely hill outside Jerusalem.

Don't be surprised — Many people expect their problems to be over once they become Christians, but temptations and struggles will always be a part of life. Paul may have been the most devoted Christian who ever lived, but he experienced trials and frustrations even after he became a Christian, even as he labored faithfully as the first missionary. But Paul refused to spend his time looking back. He chose instead to look forward. To the church in Philippi, he said:

“This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13b-14a).

We can't live in the past. Not as individuals, not as a church. There may be wonderful memories in the past, but we must live in the present, and with an eye toward the future.

Something to think about — Are there ways in which you feel in exile, apart from others and separated from God? How does Isaiah's message offer hope to you?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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To remember, or forget?

Careful readers may note something that appears curious about Isaiah's oracle. It begins with a reminder of how God's power had been shown in the past, recalling how Yahweh had delivered Israel from Egypt through parting the sea for the Hebrews, then returning the waters to render Pharaoh's army powerless and drowning:

“Thus says the LORD,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
 they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick” (vv. 16-17).

The deliverance at the sea was for many years Israel's most commonly cited memory of what God could do. They found strength and encouragement through recalling it. Yet, though Isaiah used that memory to remind the people of God's power and care, he quickly (and surprisingly) told them to forget it:

“Do not remember the former things,
 or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
 Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
 And rivers in the desert” (vv. 18-19).

As long as the Israelites remained stuck in the distant past, they could not look with hope to the future. The prophet challenged them to quit longing for the old days and start looking forward to the “new thing” God was preparing to do. He wanted them to stop living as if God's power had been extinguished or God's grace exhausted.

Notice also how Isaiah neatly reverses the imagery. Upon their exit from Egypt, the Hebrews had found themselves trapped between Pharaoh's army and a span of water they could not cross. God, in a mighty act of deliverance, parted the sea, removing water from the path. In Isaiah's promise of deliverance from Babylon, the people faced a daunting desert that could not be crossed due to a lack of water, which Yahweh promised to remedy by calling forth fresh rivers. Whether water was the problem or the solution, Yahweh could deal with it.