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“Forget the Past”

Isaiah 43

Pastor Gary Hamrick

If you have no regrets in life, it’s probably because you haven’t lived long enough! We all have regrets. We have regrets about things we’ve done or said, things left undone or unsaid, things that have happened to us or things that never happened that we had hoped for. What do we do with our regrets is the difference between someone who moves forward and someone who is stuck in the past. God tells us in Isaiah 43:18 to, *“Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past.”* In this message, Pastor Gary shares biblical insights about what this means and how we do what God tells us to do.

Historical Background

1. Isaiah prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah, circa 700BC, and this prophecy about the coming judgment of Judah was given approximately 100 years before the Babylonians became a world power.
 - a. The Babylonians would conquer the Assyrians and then make their way south to Judah, circa 606BC.
 - b. When the Babylonians conquered Judah they took prisoners, including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and sent them to Babylon (located on the Euphrates River, in what is modern-day Iraq).
 - c. In 586BC, the Babylonians overpowered the city of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, and they completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple of God, in addition to taking all of the sacred articles of the Temple back to Babylon.
 - d. Isaiah’s message to the people of Judah was to be aware of the coming judgment of God, which was going to come upon them due to their rebellion, idolatry, and wickedness.
 - e. When the Babylonians were conquered by King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire, Judah had been in exile 70 years

- i. The Babylonians were conquered by the Medo-Persians because they were too severe in their harsh treatment of the Jews.
 - f. King Cyrus gave the Jews permission to return to Judah.
 - i. It's interesting to note that Isaiah prophesied about King Cyrus, approximately 150 years before Cyrus was born!
 - 1. **Isaiah 45:1, 3** - *"This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor... so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name."*
2. The remarkable thing about Isaiah's prophecy is that he spoke about the coming judgment, as well as the forgiveness and restoration they would experience; all of which was to take place far into the future!
 3. When God spoke through Isaiah, he delivered an unusual message, he told them to forget the past, which was still in their future!
 4. Pastor Gary said: "God [was] looking toward [a] wonderful time of forgiveness and restoration. That's our Father's heart for us. ... He's always looking ahead to the future, [to his fulfilling his promises, to our redemption, our restoration, and our forgiveness]. We are the ones who get stuck in the past; not God."
 5. Pastor Gary shared the story of Abraham as an example of the ways God looks forward to the future!
 - a. Abraham was 75 years old when God came to him when he was nothing more than a Gentile, pagan man living in Ur, who worshiped the moon god!
 - b. God gave Abraham a promise that through his seed, a great nation would come into being, and from out of that nation a Savior would come.
 - c. Abraham had to wait until he was about 100 years old for God to fulfill his promises.
 - i. **Romans 4:17-25** - *"As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is*

why it was credited to him as righteousness.’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

1. Sarah was about 90 years old when Isaac, the son of the promise, was born.
6. Pastor Gary also shared the story of Moses, and how God saw, not what was, but what was to come for the Israelites through Moses.
 - a. **Hebrews 11:24-26** – *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because **he was looking ahead to his reward.**”* (Emphasis added)
 7. The apostle Paul also wrote about leaving the past behind and looking ahead.
 - i. **Philippians 3:12-14** – *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but **I press on** to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal** to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* (Emphasis added)

Forget The Former Things

8. **Isaiah 43:18a** – *“Forget the former things...”*
9. Pastor Gary said: “What does it mean to forget? How can we just forget something that is seared in our mind, because of what we’ve done or something that was done to us? ... Well, when the Bible says [to] forget... it’s not trying to be unrealistic. [As though] you can just push it out of your mind, and then maybe one day you’ll never think on this again. Look, I do believe that God can take away memories [that are painful] for our benefit, and he can just erase those things. But, generally speaking, when it says here to forget, it doesn’t mean that somehow, you’re no longer going to remember. What it means is no longer give it its weight. And you can see [this] clearly [in] this chapter in reference to the way that God forgets concerning our sins. ... How is that possible? God is omniscient. God knows all things. [He] can’t forget things. [It] would be inconsistent with his character to say that he’s absent-minded or he no longer

remembers, or he just forgot. ... [What this literally means is that] he chooses to no longer hold our sins against us. It is the idea that he's placed the weight of our sin onto [Jesus]... and therefore, now he has rendered our sin powerless, because he has removed the weight of it and it no longer has the same [weight]."

- a. **Isaiah 43:25** - *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."*

Do Not Dwell On The Past

10. **Isaiah 43:18b** - *"... do not dwell on the past."*
11. Pastor Gary said: "This speaks to the problem we all have of replaying something over and over again in our minds and rehearsing it and reliving it. [Thinking] to ourselves, 'If I had just done this differently, maybe this wouldn't have turned out this way, and if I hadn't been at this particular place at this particular time, maybe this wouldn't have happened.' ... This is what God is saying to us, 'Don't do that! Don't dwell on the past!' ... If it's something that you did, ask for forgiveness, and then walk in that forgiveness. The key to ending the rehearsing and reliving [is] forgiveness. It starts with asking God to forgive you, and then, because he forgives us through his son, we have to learn to forgive ourselves."
12. When God forgives us, but we don't forgive ourselves, we elevate ourselves above God!
13. **Psalms 103:12** - *"[As] far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*
 - a. East and west never intersect, so what God is saying is that he never "intersects" our sins!
14. **Micah 7:19** - *"You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."*
15. Pastor Gary said: "[This] also works in [regard to replaying what other people have done to you]. Not just when you revisit your past, but when you revisit the past as it relates to what others have done to you. The same word applies: forgiveness."
 - a. **Colossians 3:13** - *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

Look For The New Thing God Is Doing

16. **Isaiah 43:19** - *"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."*

- a. The implication in this verse is that it's possible to miss the new thing that God is doing.
17. Lot's wife is an example of someone in the Bible who looked back.
- a. [Genesis 19:26](#) - *"But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."*
 - b. The Hebrew word for "looked back," is nabat, which means to look longingly.
18. The bad report given by ten (only Joshua and Caleb believed God!) of the twelve spies Moses sent to recon the Promised Land caused the people to want to go back to slavery in Egypt!
- a. [Numbers 14:1-4](#) - *"That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader to go back to Egypt.'"*
 - b. The entire generation of people who were unwilling to believe God died in the wilderness, and they missed the new thing that God was doing.
19. Pastor Gary said: "God is the God of new beginnings. God is the God of second chances. God is always interested in looking way ahead to your forgiveness, redemption, and restoration."

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Isaiah 43:14-25](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of the unusual nature of Isaiah's prophecy about sin, judgment, and restoration, all of which was in the future. (See #1 through #4 above).
3. Spend time reading and talking about the Scriptures and Pastor Gary's remarks, concerning the way Abraham, Moses, and Paul looked to the future. (See #5 through #7 above)
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about forgetting the former things. (See #8 and #9 above)
5. Read and discuss the Scriptures and Pastor Gary's remarks about what it means to not dwell on the past. (See #10 through #15 above)

6. Read and discuss [Isaiah 43:19](#). (See #16 above)
7. How has the Lord helped you forget the former things, not dwell on the past, and look forward to all he has for you?
8. Spend time talking about the ten spies, the Israelites, and Lot's wife, and how they missed out on all that God wanted to do in their lives. (See #17 and #18 above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about new beginnings. (See #19 above)
10. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).