

To God Alone Be The Glory

A nine-year-old boy constructed a wooden ramp for his bicycle. After practicing quite a while, he was ready to bring his father out to look at his achievement. The dad said, “Wow, what do you do with this ramp?” as if he had not built a similar ramp for his own bicycle 35 years earlier. “Just watch,” said the son eagerly as he pumped the peddles to pick up speed. Up the ramp, half second hang time, flawless landing. “Wow!” said the dad. “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet,” responded the son. “Watch this!” When he left the ramp this time, he did a stunt—which shall remain un-described lest little ears get big ideas.

We are God’s children. The Lord is our Father. Today he would have us switch places with him. Oh, he still intends to remain our heavenly Father and keep us as his dear children through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. But today, and in fact for the rest of our lives, we get to play the part of the impressed person, and our Lord, the world’s only Savior, gets to say: **YOU AIN’T SEEN NOTHING YET.**

In today’s Old Testament lesson God is pointing his people back to something impressive he did for Israel. Can you tell what Bible history lesson he’s referring to when Isaiah writes this by inspiration of the Holy Spirit? ¹⁶*This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters,* ¹⁷*who drew out the chariots and horses,*

the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick.”

Can you tell what story this is from? It’s the exodus from Egypt, God’s great rescue of Israel from slavery! When the Lord wanted to remind his people in Old Testament times just how good and gracious he is, how worthy of their obedience and praise he is, he would point to his rescue of Israel from Egypt. And what an awesome rescue it was!

But consider the rescue from Egypt’s point of view. Imagine how the Egyptians feel after seeing their land ruined by plague after plague after plague, because their king, the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt, won’t yield to God, the almighty Lord of all? Wasn’t the blood-filled Nile enough? Apparently not. It has taken a lot more convincing. Pharaoh’s people have endured the frogs, the gnats, the flies, the loss of the livestock, the boils, the hail, the locusts, the darkness, and especially the death of all those first-born sons. No wonder the Egyptians are so eager for Israel to go. “Please leave.” “Well, before I go, may I have all your silver and gold?” “Yes. Fine. Take it. Go! I’m tired of your God hurting my family and my nation. Leave now!”

And then, after Israel marches out of Egypt in full view, Pharaoh changes his mind. “What have we done, letting Israel go? Who will do the slave labor for us now? We must go get them back!” Meanwhile the Lord leads the

children of Israel out onto a peninsula where they are hemmed in on three sides by water. And Pharaoh's army stands on the fourth side. And God's people say, "We're gonna die." And the Lord says, "What are you crying about? Pack up. Head out." And Moses raises his rod over the water. And a dry path through the sea appears overnight. When the Israelites are almost all the way through the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army decides to follow in hot pursuit. And when they get to just the right point, the Lord makes the wheels fall off their chariots, and the walls of water come crashing down. And they all drown, every last soldier.

Now I don't know about you, but I'm thoroughly impressed. The Lord hoped his people in Isaiah's day would be impressed too, because the Lord was about to say: YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET. Only he's not so slang about it. Listen to God's awesome poetry. ¹⁸*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.* 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.* ²⁰*The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*

Now, when you are used to regular rains and a nice lake full of water a few streets away, it's only natural to ask, "What's so impressive about providing water?" But if you had ever spent time in the dry middle eastern wilderness, or seen video

of it, you would more likely react with a "No way, man! There's no way there is ever going to be streams in that wasteland." Sand, sand, and more sand. And for a little bit of variety, rocks, rocks, and more rocks. People don't live there. Only a few animals, and they're scraggly lookin'. Traveling through the desert on foot? Fuggetaboutit. There are no roads. There's no need: people don't go there.

Of this desert scene, the Lord says, *I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.* God is going to make the desert deviate from its dryness drastically. The place where 'pretty much nothing grows' will become a place where people will want to live and travel. "Okay, that's impressive! But what point is the Lord making through Isaiah?" He's saying that to build highways through the desert and make streams of water break forth there is so contrary to nature that even the desert creatures which regularly suffer under parching drought are moved to praise the Lord for this unaccustomed relief! (see Pieper, p 227) ²⁰*The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*

"Okay, I can appreciate the picture God has painted. But what does it mean?" It's a spiritual message. The desert is a picture of 'life on earth apart from the Lord.' 'No water' means 'no life, no ability to help ourselves spiritually.' In Isaiah's day many of God's people didn't want the

Lord in their lives. Do you know anyone in Lake City like this? They are just like the desert: dead, unable to make themselves spiritually alive—the same way we were when we were born, the same way we get when we get away from God for a while. Because God’s people would not repent of pushing God’s Word away from their hearts, the Lord was going to send them into exile in Babylon. There the truth would finally sink in: “We’re helpless apart from the Lord. He wants to show us mercy. Let’s stop rebelling against him. Since he loves us, let’s find out everything he wants us to believe and do—and let’s follow his ways faithfully, eagerly.” Just that change, my friends, just that change—brought about by the Holy Spirit so that people can see their sins and how the Lord is intervening in order to save them—do you understand what a miracle that change is? If you don’t think that’s miraculous, then you haven’t remembered or understood or acknowledged how stiff-necked and rebellious your sinful flesh is. Your flesh loves defiantly giving God the finger. Or if you’re more polite, your sinful flesh “conveniently forgets” what you have heard from God’s Word. Whenever we do the opposite of what God wants, we show that we still have that stiff-necked, rebellious sinful flesh. So we are “desert,” that is, until the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in the first place, or until the Holy Spirit brings us back to Jesus after we’ve strayed. I hope you’re impressed with the Holy Spirit’s handiwork in your heart, because the Lord

is ready to say it again: YOU AIN’T SEEN NOTHIN’ YET.

But first let’s go back and understand the cool thing Isaiah reveals to God’s people in the chapters near our sermon text. The Lord tells his people through Isaiah that he will someday rescue his people from captivity in Babylon. “Wait,” they might have asked. “We’re going into captivity in Babylon?” Yes you are, you Old Testament people of God, because you won’t listen to God’s Word and repent of your sins. But you will, when he makes things difficult enough for you. And then the Lord is going to rescue you from Babylon. Cyrus the Persian will come to power, and in his very first year as king, he will decree that you Jews can return to Jerusalem—all expenses paid. The Lord will never do this for any other nation! It will be as if the desert wilderness is newly crisscrossed by roads and rivers.

But if you Old Testament people of God think that’s impressive, YOU AIN’T SEEN NOTHIN’ YET. Someday, the Lord intends to send his own Son. This Son of his will be born of a virgin. That’s right—no human father to corrupt his flesh. This Son of God will grow up like a normal child—except without sin. (Just imagine how his earthly parents will get spoiled by what a good child their oldest son Jesus will be. And then imagine them pulling out their hair trying to deal with the rest of their children, each of whom will have a sinful flesh.) After Jesus grows up, when the time is

right, he will go forth from Nazareth and proclaim the Good News that he is the Savior from sin. He will back up his claim with all kinds of miracles. After several years of this preaching and healing ministry, he will die on a cross willingly, taking our punishment for us, the innocent suffering for the guilty. If you close your eyes, people of God, you can almost see it raining in the desert, raining so much that pools of water are forming. And now they are overflowing. And now streams are running throughout the desert. It's not a wasteland anymore. It's alive! You're alive! You're not desert anymore!

Do you think it's impressive that the Lord would let his own Son die for people like you and me? I sure do. None of you would give up your child for me. I know because I've asked many of you. No one ever answers, "Oh, yes, Pastor, I would let my child suffer and die instead of you." Our heavenly Father did. Jesus died for everyone in the whole world! Everyone has been declared not-guilty of all their sins.

But how can the people of the world, whose lives are like a dry desert, a parched wasteland—how can they know that the Lord has made peace with them? That's where you come into the picture. Listen again to the Lord. *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. Do you get it? You are the way in the desert. You are the streams. Through you the Lord intends to share the living water (John 4), the life-giving Good News about Jesus. Through you the parched people are going to drink up the good news about Jesus. Look at how they grow spiritually in Christ! Is it not one of the most awesome things to see the lush green plants, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, growing in people? But then, you remember what a difference the Lord made in you, O former deserts. Through your witness the Lord intends to make the same change in the lives of others. We are the ²⁰wild animals, the jackals and the owls, who honor the Lord. And why? because he *provided the water of the gospel to give drink to his people, the ones he chose from eternity, ²¹the people he formed for himself that you may proclaim his praise.**

Praising the Lord—that, my friends, is the function for which we were formed. It is our purpose in life to give glory to God. And not just in church. We get to praise our Savior by how we treat those we work with or go to school with or have a home with or have a spat with. And if you think praising him here on earth is impressive, wait till you get to heaven. **YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET.**