

Discussion Questions

To be used alongside John Tucker's Sermon "God is Doing a New Thing."

Summary

For many of us, the last two years have felt at times like a wilderness. Extended lockdowns, vaccine mandates, financial pressure, regular pivoting, constant uncertainty, have all taken their toll.

Perhaps, like the people of Israel in exile, you've felt a little displaced, disoriented, disillusioned. In this message John Tucker, Carey's principal, shares from Isaiah 43 on the promises of God to people in need of hope. What God said to the Israelite exiles, he says to us:

"I am passionately committed to you, my people. And I am present with all my power to bring new life, both to you, and to the neighbourhoods in which I have you placed you as my witnesses. See, I am doing a new thing!"

Questions

1. God spoke these words in Isaiah 43 to Israel at a time when they were in exile – displaced, disoriented, discouraged, disillusioned, despairing. Where in your church, or in our wider society, do you see this kind of disillusionment and despair?
2. This passage consists of two poems, each beginning with the phrase, "This is what the Lord says." The first poem (vv. 14-15) is framed by a striking cluster of names for God. These names all speak of God's passion for his people, God's faithfulness towards his covenant people, even when they have been unfaithful. Where, among your family or your friends, or the wider community, have you seen this kind of passionate faithfulness in action?
3. God says to his people in v. 14 that it is "for your sake" that I will "send" the Persian emperor, Cyrus, to conquer Babylon and free Israel from exile. The implication is that God will cause the Persian empire to rise, and the Babylonian empire to fall, because of his faithful love for his covenant people. God will rearrange global forces in order to rescue and renew Israel. How does that make you feel? Why?
4. In vv. 16-17 the Lord reminds his people of the Exodus, when he rescued them from slavery in Egypt, demonstrating his sovereign power over Pharaoh's chariots and the mighty waters (Exodus 14). But in vv. 18-19 he then promises them a new Exodus. He says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" Where does the church in New Zealand need God to do a new thing? How are we in need of another Exodus?

5. The image of this new Exodus in vv. 19-21 is one of cosmic transformation, in which all creation rejoices. God is promising that he will renovate and renew his entire creation – all people and places. And with Jesus, it's begun. The One who calls himself "the way," the One who offers "living water" to those who are thirsty, says, "Come, follow me, join me in the new things that I am doing." How might we do that?

Activity

Take a couple of hours this week to walk through your neighbourhood, focusing on the streets around the place where your church family gathers. As you do that:

- Ask God to help you see what he sees, to delight in what he delights in, and to grieve over what he grieves over.
- Pray for the blessings of God's kingdom for your neighbourhood.
- Look for signs of God's kingdom.

Afterwards, write a short reflection on what you've experienced. Note down in particular:

- What you've seen and heard
- What you've noticed and want to know more about
- What you prayed for
- What you felt prompted by God to act on.

If you can, meet with some others from your church to discuss your experience and to explore what the Lord might be saying.

- Where is the Spirit leading you for the sake of gospel renewal in your neighbourhood?
- What new thing is God doing?

