

Looking Ahead through God's Viewpoint

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Isaiah 43:18-19:

“Do not call to mind the former things or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new. Now it will spring forth. Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.”

“But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do now. Behold, I am going to do something new. See, I have already begun. Do you not see it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”



I love the confidence of these Bible verses, and the sweeping imagery of a mighty God bringing his people out of the desert and wilderness of sin into the land of salvation, where springs of life-giving water flow.

I also particularly enjoy preaching on the topic of highways in the desert when I come out here to Las Vegas. When you live in New York, as I do, you're surrounded by millions of trees, and it's often wet and it's always green. It's hard to get into the right mindset and feel a real connection with the people of Israel.

The prophet Isaiah was speaking at one of the lowest times in the history of the children of Israel, centuries removed from the high point of their release from Egypt. When God brought the people out of slavery, it was an inconceivable miracle that a small, oppressed group could really have a victory over the mightiest nation in the ancient world.

The victory over Egypt sustained the people of Israel for a long, long time. They were able to endure through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, after which Joshua and Caleb brought them to the Promised Land. Even there, life wasn't easy. They found that land was occupied by other peoples and tribes and they had to work to claim the blessing that God wanted to give them, and they did. Their past victory sustained them.

It reminds me a bit of my New York Giants football team. I'm from New York. Every year we lose most of the games, but we will always remember the two times we beat the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl. Nothing can take away that victory, even though it was a long, long time ago!

Then for hundreds more years, the children of Israel had to defend their inheritance. It wasn't just theirs for free. They had to continue to invest if they were to keep a tight grip on the blessing of God. Eventually they reached the point where they could establish a kingdom, ruled successively by the three kings: Saul, David and Solomon.

The nation of Israel continued to prosper. Finally they were able to build the temple that they had longed for, for hundreds of years, and there was peace in the land. Even after Solomon's death when they were faced with the challenge of division and the country split in half, the people still survived. For hundreds and hundreds of years God sustained them, loved them, and delivered them.

Then suddenly, appallingly, it all seemed to be over. The kingdom was lost, Jerusalem destroyed and the people taken as slaves again—captives and refugees in Babylon. They were depressed and beaten.

In today's language, they thought they had blown it completely. They already received everything that God promised them. They had His blessings in their hands, and they let them go. Many felt crushed and convicted by the realization that they had in fact betrayed God. They felt that it wasn't just by chance that they found themselves once again slaves in a foreign land, right back to square one.

I travel to a different community every week and I have to tell you I do run across people who seem to be in their own period of exile and captivity. They openly wonder if our movement has already seen its best days and that now we are fated to decline. But I tell them no, my own conviction is that the best days of our movement and the best days of God's work in the world are ahead of us, not behind us. God's kingdom will be built!

Mind you, I've had to work through these feelings of depression and hopelessness myself. A couple of months ago I was in Korea for the third anniversary of True Father's Seonghwa. For those here as guests, our founder, Rev. Moon, passed three years ago. We have just finished the three-year period of mourning traditional in oriental culture.

When all the ceremonies were finished I was suddenly burdened with the vivid realization, "He's not coming back." I wondered if our movement would really be able to gain energy to move on, and I felt lethargic myself. My conscience told me: "Well, walk on up to the Holy Ground and pray there!" But that holy ground is on a steep little mountain, and it takes considerable effort to go up there. So my lazy self told me, "No, no, you don't have to climb up that mountain. It's hot, it's sticky, and it's hard work. And in any case, he's not coming back and you're wasting your energy. There's nothing for you up there anymore."

Well, I wavered to and fro, but finally, I decided I *would* climb up the mountain. Sure enough, it was indeed very hot and very sweaty, and when I got to the top I just closed my eyes in exhaustion. I didn't have any words to pray.

Suddenly, True Father whispered like a breeze in my ear, "I've been waiting for you for three years. Thank you. Thank you for coming. Let me share with you what I'm going to do new." Then True Father told me, in spirit, that God loves new things. God is always looking forward. He doesn't look back and count our failures but looks forward in hope of better things.

I wasn't convinced. I told True Father in prayer that I felt really ashamed that I hadn't done more to witness and testify to True Parents. Little by little I got more and more depressed, thinking about all the opportunities I had and didn't take, the times when I didn't speak up or I didn't make the effort to attend an event. I was working myself into a real miserable space.

This time I felt True Father say, "Look. Shut up. I'm not actually interested in what you didn't do before. The only thing I want to hear from you is, what are you going to do from now on? That's what's important."

I came to realize that God, the lover of new things, has a simple three-step formula to help us create new miracle in our lives, to look forward and to move in a new direction.

The first step is: we have to stop looking behind us.

We have to stop looking at the past, and consciously decide, "From now on, I am going to look forward." Why is looking back such a bad idea? There are two main reasons.

The first one is our tendency to savor on our past victories and successes. That's not a bad thing in itself, but we don't want to take it to excess. In my travels, I often ask people, "Would you share with me why you're a member of this church? Why do you believe in the Divine Principle? Why did you commit yourself to the work of the Unification Movement?" Everybody has fantastic stories, but on the average, I would say eight out of 10 people choose to tell me about the very beginning, the time that they first met the Unification Church, the time they first heard the Divine Principle, or the first time they met True Parents. And for most people these experiences were 10, 20 or more years ago.

It's very rare that somebody shares with me a testimony from today or yesterday, a really recent, fresh, new experience with God. From this I would conclude that many of us are living in the past, resting on our laurels. But we cannot survive and prosper and grow on yesterday's faith, or yesterday's experience. No matter how many successes we've had in the past—and we have had many as a movement, as individuals and as families—we cannot keep cashing them in and thinking only about what we've already accomplished and telling ourselves that's enough. It isn't.

For example at the time of this message from Isaiah, the people of Israel had indeed had many successes. They had beaten Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, conquered Canaan, and built the temple and the kingdom. But all of that was long ago. It wasn't helping them anymore.

Whenever I meet True Mother, our founder, she's not interested in asking about yesterday. She's asking about today. She wants to know, "What is God doing in your life right now, today? And do you know what God wants you to do tomorrow, what He wants you to do this year or next year, toward 2020?"

To repeat: great though the past may have been, we can't rely on the victories we won yesterday or the day before. We need new victories, new encounters.

The second drawback of always looking behind us is that we tend to obsess about our failures and all the mistakes that we have made and lose our power. Of course, to be honest, we've all made mistakes and continue to do so. God knows that, but He also doesn't want us to dwell on past mistakes, get caught up with them and end up depressed.

The people of Israel had indeed many mistakes. God allowed them to build the temple, and what did they do? They filled it up with idols of other religions and faiths, and began to worship false gods. He gave them the truth, the commandments of God, and they gave it lip service but often lived completely opposite to the principles. God gave them His commands and they treated them like they were suggestions or just optional advice. They were poor and He made them rich, but then they used their riches to oppress the poor and to become more and more greedy.

Finally God gave us Himself, and has experienced nothing but rejection. In the circumstances, it would surely be natural for anyone in their right mind and consciousness to think, "Given our bad track record, surely God doesn't want to have any more to do with us; He's had it."

But that is 100% false. In fact, God will always love us and always wants to help us change. God doesn't blame us for what we did wrong in the past because He knows we can't change it. Instead He's encouraging us, "What can you do from now on?"

Step two is to see ourselves as God sees us.

In the Divine Principle we learn that some of the greatest failures in God's providence came when the central figures, chosen by God, began to see the situation from their own perspective rather than the viewpoint of God.

That started right in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, who had been told clearly by God the secret of how to live happily in God's kingdom, allowed themselves to listen instead to the voice of the devil. The devil said, "Did God say that you should not eat of the fruit? I tell you, you should eat it and you will know everything." Once they listened to that lie, they saw God's word as a needless restriction rather than a guide to ensure their safety.

Later, John the Baptist received a revelation from God that Jesus was the son of God and the messiah, and he believed it for a few weeks, even baptizing Jesus. But then he began to start assessing the situation using his own wisdom, his knowledge of scriptures, and his life experience—but all of these things, which could've helped him in the end, started to turn his view from the viewpoint of God to the viewpoint of men. Finally he asked Jesus in despair, "Are you he who is to come, or should we look for another?"

When we see from a human perspective, we almost put ourselves at a disadvantage. When confronted with the reality of division within our movement, divided as it is, and when we look at a world that is still full of starvation, conflict, disease and difficulty, we may hear voices calling us to 'give it up.' In other words we only see the desert, the problem, the difficulties. We may compare our own situation today unfavorably with the past, saying, "Before, I was younger, fitter, stronger, more hopeful... now I'm not so sure."

I think a lot of our church members secretly feel that way. But God does not see it that way. God's

viewpoint is always one of the possibilities to come, not of the problems that already exist. That's why God said, "Behold, I am making streams in the desert and a road—a highway—in the wasteland." That is the work of God. How can we learn to see the streams and the highway, and not just the desert and wasteland?

Let me share with you a little story. A couple of weeks ago I went to Salt Lake City to attend the Parliament of the World's Religions. For those of you who are not familiar with the event, every four years the religions of the world gather for a big conference. It's a huge event; there were over 10,000 people there this time.

In the months before the Parliament, people who knew I was going kept asking me, "Oh, is that a Unification project? If there is a World Parliament, then shouldn't we naturally be the Prime Minister? Isn't the whole project of a world parliament something True Father spoke about often and said that he would support?"

I had to say, "Yes, it's true, True Father did mention it, and he did support it, that was then and this is now. We are not the Prime Minister. We are just one small exhibitor among two or three hundred exhibitors." I was also supposed to give a speech, but there were 3,000 other speakers and in the end the speech got canceled. They chose their speakers based on first come first serve and I was off the ticket.

It wasn't an encouraging start. I'm not speaking anymore, and certainly not the Prime Minister, just a lowly exhibitor. I thought, "Well at least we can put on a good show, because we have a lot to share." We have True Parents, the living messiah, and we have the Divine Principle.

So we set up our stand, but it was really quite a humble display, just 10 foot by 10 foot. Other groups had three or four times the space. After we set up I thought I should meet some of our exhibition neighbors, so I went to the very closest one and asked, "What do you believe?"

They answered with great confidence: "Well, we believe the messiah has come again and he's bringing a new revelation of truth to the world, and here is the book, and here's his picture, and he's just finished a 40-year course to inherit the mission of Jesus."

That sounded rather too familiar!

So I walked down a row a little more and I asked the next group, "What do you believe?"

They said, with equal confidence, "Well, God has sent us a new revelation to share with humankind, and it will unite Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. And here is the book of our teachings. It starts off by explaining God's ideal. Then it talks about how the ideal was lost, and finally about how God is going to fix it."

Again, very familiar!

I move on to the next stand and asked again, "What do you believe?"

"Oh, we believe that the Maitreya Buddha is on earth. In fact, he's the second coming of the leaders of all faiths. He's also the second Christ and the returned Mohammed. Here's our book. It's a new book of revelations and here it is. It's free. It's the first new revelation of God to humanity in 1500 years."

All of this was just a minute's walk away from the Family Federation display. I thought to myself, "Oh my goodness. Not only are we not the Prime Minister of this parliament, not only are we not speaking, but everybody else here also thinks that their messiah is on earth and bringing a new revelation. Yet they don't think it's True Parents. We have no chance to make an impact!"

Then I went on to another stand. This was a Sufi group. They also had a big picture of their teacher, so I asked, "Who's that?"

The man said, "Oh, this is the Savior of the new age, and he's come here to bring a new truth to humanity, and our movement is growing. We already have a million members."

My spirit sank further, but then something unexpected happened.

The group had produced had a nice big photobook showing their teacher being greeted by various dignitaries and getting various awards. The representative opened the book to the middle, there, covering the whole center spread, was an Ambassadors for Peace certificate! "He was appointed an Ambassador for Peace by Rev. Moon," they said with great pride. I felt a little bit better. I thought, "That's not so bad. Maybe we have made an impact after all!"

I went back to our little stand and a real miracle happened. One after the other, people came up and started sharing about how True Parents had touched their lives. There was a woman who had been on the first Youth Seminar of World Religions back in 1986. It had changed her life. There was a very senior Muslim who had all True Father and had dinner with him. Dozens remembered going to one of True Father or Mother's speeches, and how long they were! Sixteen were Ambassadors for Peace. Others came

by and said, “You know, I was a member of the Unification Church in the 1970s, and I’ve been wondering how to get back in touch.” Again and again and again this happened.

I felt God telling me, “Look, True Father and Mother have been planting seeds that have flourished all over the world. You need to learn to see what has been done and how many people have been moved, and you have to think about how this great army of faith can work together. You don’t have to do it alone. The Unification Movement does not have to do it alone.

I remember True Father often told us about the road ahead to the Heavenly Kingdom. He said, “I already levelled the mountains. I already built the highway. I’ve already prepared the car. I’ve even put gas in it for you. You just need to drive it.”

God opened my eyes to the astonishing fact that many of the 10,000 in attendance had already been touched by True Parents. Many said that it was True Parents who helped turned them toward interfaith. Yes, they may not have stayed closely in touch with our movement, but they never forgot that encounter and they went on to commit their lives to making peace and harmony between the faiths.

I saw how different God’s viewpoint was from my own. When I looked from my own, limited human perspective, I just saw the problems, how we seemed to be the least of the least, with the smallest booth, the smallest congregation. But God corrected me, saying, “True Parents’ foundation is much, much bigger than you understand. Don’t even think that I’m only working in the Unification movement. I’ve been working throughout the world, and I’m ready to build my kingdom, and I’m already doing it. You just have to have faith and recognize that I have a big plan, much bigger than your small understanding!”

This is the key to success: when we look ahead, we have to see things from God’s point of view, not our own.

And after we do that, we have to take the third and most important step: we have to actually commit ourselves to God’s plan and to take action, to move forward.

We have to trust that God has already set into motion the people and the plans that are going to build His kingdom.

God always has a plan. When Adam and Eve fell, God didn’t waste time agonizing in self-pity, thinking, “It’s all over, my children have fallen.” No, He immediately got started working on a new plan, to have Adam and Eve’s children solve their parents’ problem by uniting together and forgiving each other. Nevertheless, when they didn’t do that and killed each other instead, God immediately went on to His next plan to work with the family of Noah.

When the time of making offerings and sacrifices that people couldn’t understand was finally over, God gave laws and principles that they could grasp and practice. Later on, when the letter of the law became more important than the spirit, God reminded us through Jesus that love is the key and center. History shows us God is always moving forward.

Some people feel that all that innovation and progress must have stopped when God sent True Parents and revealed the Divine Principle, but that’s not true either. The Divine Principle itself explains that religious scriptures are textbooks, and there’s more to come. There will always be more to come.

God will never stop revealing new things to us because He created us as His eternal sons and daughters. If there truly was only a limited amount of ways that we could know God, how boring that would be! I want to conclude by telling you we should never be afraid of new things. We shouldn’t be afraid of God leading us in new directions because that is His true character and nature. Our challenge, as Isaiah says, is to see the way God is working and move forward together with Him. Let’s always “Look ahead!”