

Korea Staff Conference (12/5-7): 1st Message
Daniel Byeon, SNU 3 (Gwanak 3rd Chapter)

I am Doing a New Thing!

Isaiah 43:1-21

Key Verse/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 wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

The tragedy in Ukraine, which began when the Russians invaded, has been going over nine months now. It is so devastating to see not only the loss of innocent Ukrainians but also the loss of countless Russian youths who have been dragged to the battlefield against their will. And around 2,600 years ago, Israel was also invaded by Assyria and Babylon, the most powerful nations of the time, and its land was devastated, and many people were killed or taken captive. This was because the Israelites had left God, worshiped idols, and committed many atrocious sins. God poured out his burning anger and merciless judgment on the Israelites (Isaiah 42:25). If you look at today’s passage, it begins with the words ‘But now’ to inform us that the situation has been turned around. Now God declares salvation to the people *who have been lost* by war. This salvation is a “new thing” that is far more glorious than anything we have seen before. And this “new thing” is still being continued to this day. I pray that you will find out what this “new thing” is through today’s message, and I pray that we may be used in the “new thing” of God’s work in 2023.

Let’s read verse 1 together. “But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” At that time, the people of Israel lost their country to war, were taken captive by foreign countries, and had to live a life of slavery for 70 years. Even moments before being taken into captivity, they had prided themselves in being the chosen people of the eternal God. They believed that God would one day set them high above all nations. However, in reality, it seemed as if God had regretted calling them, and so God had abandoned them to the hands of foreign nations. When they thought they were abandoned by God, they were overcome with sadness and fear. But to these Israelites, God calls them, “Jacob,” “Israel,” and tells them, “Do not fear.” God had created them in His image in the beginning. He redeemed them from a life of slavery in Egypt. He called them “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). God reminds them of all these, and tells them, “You are mine,” “You belong with me.” These words are words of comfort and love for the Israelites, and He tells them that He never has and never will abandon them.

Please read verse 2. “Waters” and “fire” refer to life-threatening troubles and tribulations. Specifically, it refers to the trials that the Israelites were experiencing while living in captivity in Babylon. The Israelites lived a life of slavery in Babylon, in which human rights were not guaranteed. The Babylonian Empire enslaved prisoners of war to build fortresses and to build roads. They mercilessly whipped the slaves and threatened to throw them into the Euphrates River, which flows right in the middle of the Babylonian capital, if they did not obey. A few smart, elite youths were lucky enough to be employed at the court to serve the king. However, with just a

word from the king of Babylon, they too could be killed at any moment. In fact, Daniel's three friends who were in captivity in Babylon were thrown into a fiery, blazing furnace for disobeying the king's command to "worship the image of gold" (Daniel 3:19-23). But God was with these people of Israel. And so, He did not let the water of the Euphrates swallow them. And He did not let the flame consume Daniel's three friends (Daniel 3:25-27). Rather, He washed away their sins and refined them like gold.

See verse 4. No matter how often a child hurts their parents, or no matter what state they are in after leaving their home, there is nothing more precious to their parents than that child. Similarly, in God's eyes, the Israelites He had created and saved are still precious and treasured even though they've sinned and are living in captivity. And that is why God was with them and was protecting them with His unconditional love. When I became the director of our chapter a few years ago, I had to be responsible for taking care of all the people and the work of our center, in addition to being responsible for the student ministry. Not only did I have to deliver the Sunday message every week, but I also had to oversee the unexpected construction of our center. I put in a lot of hard work in this, and often I couldn't go home and had to sleep at the center. But my hard work wasn't enough. Most of my coworkers are alumni of Seoul National University, and I lacked the character and skills to serve such excellent coworkers. Some people left because I couldn't serve them well. My inadequacy and faults were constantly exposed. Satan kept attacking me, and he tried to destroy the Gwanak 3 center by making me fall.

To make matters worse, my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. When she underwent surgery, we found that the tumor was already in its final stage at 12 cm. The chemo weakened her body, causing her to sprain her leg three times, breaking her bones in more than seven places. Her intraocular pressure (eye pressure, IOP) then rose, causing her glaucoma to progress rapidly. So, about half of the optic nerves in both her eyes were damaged. Once, she fell down because she couldn't see well, and she hit her nose on a tree, fracturing her nasal bone. So, she had to undergo major surgery and had to breathe only through her mouth for a while. My wife once thought that God, having taken her only son, would not give her any greater suffering. However, when her suffering continued, she cried out to God to take her life. Her two little daughters also cried with their mother. There was always crying and weeping in the house. It really felt like the whole house was going to fall apart at any minute. So, I stayed up all night, singing hymns and praying with tears.

Before, I used to fall asleep within 10 seconds of lying down at night. But gradually, sleepless nights became more and more frequent. So, at night, I had to boil some instant noodles (짜파게티) to fall asleep. As a result, I weighed over 80 kg. The doctor did an ultrasound scan on my stomach and said that the scan results were white because of all the fat and that he couldn't examine any of my organs. The doctor also told me that because of my high fatty liver index, I was in danger of developing liver cancer. I knew how devastating cancer was because I was serving the late Missionary Joshua Jin, who was battling stomach cancer at the time. Since I was the only staff shepherd at the center, it seemed that if I was hospitalized with cancer, it would ruin not only my family but also God's ministry of our center. In addition, I also suffer from gout and spondyloarthritis that would recur three to four times a year, making me walk with a limp and use crutches. Whenever I sat down and stood up, I had to go through excruciating pain when trying to straighten my knee, which was swollen due to inflammation. And in all these times, many of those who cared about me have recommended

exercise to me. However, besides overlooking the entire ministry, I was busy teaching the Bible to more than 10 teams every week and serving the sheep and leaders. But now it seemed like I shouldn't continue ignoring my health issues anymore. So, I earnestly prayed to God to let me exercise for an hour a day. So, I began to jog around the campus for more than an hour every day after prayer time, and have since lost more than 15 kg (33 lbs). And when I consistently stuck to this workout schedule, my body slowly became stronger and more muscular. Then, one day, at around 4 a.m., while praying alone at the center, I fainted from my bladder stones. I barely mustered up enough energy to call my wife, who called 911. While I was in the ambulance, I faintly saw the center moving away from the car, and I thought, "If God calls me to him, I'll have to leave this world without saying my goodbyes to my family or to the shepherds at our center!" I realized that prayer was the only way to live, so since then, I woke up before 3 a.m. and prayed, and for a while, I prayed for 3 hours a day. When preparing for Sunday messages, I would revise them at least 20 times throughout the week, and I preached the message relying heavily on the Holy Spirit. Whenever I had the chance, I studied the Bible deeply and struggled to understand the creation and the gospel of the cross and resurrection. And I prepared Bible study materials to persuasively teach the creation and the gospel to the leaders and sheep. As I put all my strength into prayer and the Word, I developed the strength to endure whatever test and attack Satan, who is jealous of the work of the Holy Spirit, throws in my direction.

Then one day I heard my wife say that the depression she had been suffering from for nearly 20 years was gone. When she realized that resentment and complaint were sins and repented, she was completely healed. Truly, her face was filled with joy and thankfulness. My wife was as beautiful as an angel. She told me that she would like to share Jesus with everyone she meets. So, unlike before, she served the patients with the heart of Jesus at the hospital and prayed for each and every hospitalized patient. And when the patients opened up, she invited them to one-on-one Bible studies and even to the Sunday services. Because of this, she was selected as the kind doctor of the year for the first time since becoming a physician. God also transformed the center into a new community of love. In our center, I am the only staff member, with no intern shepherds or assistant shepherds, but God raised up many full-time shepherds who married Jesus and who only love Jesus. And He raised many devoted lay shepherds. When I saw all these people, I gained the strength to actively serve the campus ministry once again.

God's love does not stop at simply keeping us alive in captivity. In verse 14, God tells the Israelites a specific plan of salvation in Babylon. Let's read verse 14. Here, God will send a person of God's choice whom He will use to save His people. That person is King Cyrus, who founded the Persian Empire. At that time, the capital of Babylon was divided between East and West by the Euphrates River. The powerful rulers of Babylon spent their time cruising on the river. They brought in talented musicians from Israel and forced them to sing "La la la" for the entertainment of the Babylonians. However, later, when Cyrus' army invaded as God prophesied, the Chaldeans, the ruling class of Babylon, fled the scene on their cruise ships.

Then, in order to bring the Israelites back to their homeland, God gave Egypt and the city-states Cush and Seba to Cyrus as Israel's ransom (3). Historically, King Cyrus wanted to conquer all three nations to secure a bridgehead. So, he sent the Israelites back to the Judean land of Palestine, which was located on the way to those three nations, to rebuild the country. At that time, both the fall of Babylon and the liberation of Israel

were news that amazed the whole world. Indeed, God's prophecy was something really difficult to believe unless one saw it happen. So, God reminds them of the events of Exodus to help the Israelites believe in His prophecies. See verses 15-17. At that time, the enslaved people of Israel escaping Egypt was something unimaginable. Moreover, in front of the Red Sea was blocking them from going forward. And behind them, the highly trained troops of Egypt were chasing after them on horse chariots. However, even in this desperate situation, God, the Creator, and the true King made a way in the middle of the sea for the Israelites to cross (15-16). The chariots, horses, and the warriors of the Egyptian all fell down and were extinguished, snuffed out like a wick (17). God reminds them of the exodus from Egypt in the past and helps the Israelites to believe that God will make the exodus from Babylon come true.

Let's read verse 18. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past." God, who will now carry out the exodus of Babylon, tells them to forget the humiliating captivity they experienced in Babylon. The Israelites shuddered when they thought back on the 70 years in Babylon. They felt shameful when they, the chosen people, were looked down on by the Gentiles. There must have been resentment, hatred, and anger toward the previous generation that led them to live in captivity. And among the previous generations, those who survived must have felt remorse for the fact that their children's generation became stateless and suffered shame and humiliation. However, God now tells us not to forget these bad memories and not to dwell on the past.

We think that we can never let go of the past unless we get our revenge on what had wounded us, or on what has destroyed our past lives. But hatred and vengeance do nothing but destroy our souls. When we keep holding on to the painful past, we get depressed. We experience panic attacks that keep killing souls. And when we do that, we cannot walk with God, who dreams of new things and does new things. Now, we must leave our past to God, put all our hatred and sorrow at the foot of the cross of Jesus, and forget it all.

Moreover, we must also forget the glorious past of the Exodus. But it is God who brought Exodus up, and now He's telling us to forget it! How are we supposed to understand God's whims? No, it is telling us to not obsess over the splendid past and dwell in the past. Now we have moved on from the past and face bigger and more glorious things God has in store for the future. People who have accomplished great things in the past cannot easily forget the past. Every time they open their mouth, they boast about their past, saying "Back in my day..." Such people cannot be faithful to the present and cannot move on into the future. Memories of past victories and glory must be washed away.

Then, what is the greater and more glorious work that God will accomplish in the future? Let's read verse 19 together. "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." God parted the sea during the Exodus. However, now, in the exodus of Babylon, God will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. In the wilderness, there are steep and rocky mountains as well as deep lowlands. It is very difficult to pave the way there. However, God says that He will build a highway through large-scale civil engineering works, such as cutting down rocky mountains and filling in the lowlands. He promises to let the Israelites come out of Babylon and safely return to their homeland, the land God had given them. In addition, He promises to make a river by springing up streams in the barren wasteland and promises to give the Israelites a stream where anyone passing by can stop for a

drink. See verse 20. When that happens, the many people that pass through deserts on foot will drink water from the streams that run down the wasteland, and will joyfully praise God. Then, the wild animals in the desert, such as the jackals and the owls, will also come to respect God as they see God's amazing works.

The work of making a way in the wilderness and making streams in the wasteland tells us of the exodus of Babylon. Ultimately, however, it also tells us of the salvation of mankind that will be accomplished when God gives Jesus Christ the be killed on the cross as the ransom. About 500 years after the exodus from Babylon, Jesus came to this earth to redeem mankind. Jesus was nailed on the cross and shed his blood to atone for our sins. Because of this, the way of life, the way to God the Creator was opened for those, who were dying in the wilderness (Hebrews 10:20). When we believe in the gospel of Jesus who died and was resurrected for us, the spring of water in us will well up to eternal life (John 4:14; John 7:38). Through them, the gospel entered the Gentiles, who were like wild beasts, and they also respected and praised God. As a result, bright and beautiful flowers of life began to bloom splendidly all over the globe, which had once been filled with darkness and death. This will continue until Jesus returns. When Jesus returns, everything, including the stars shining in the night sky, will be restored, and the New Jerusalem will come down and the heavens and the new earth will spread throughout the universe (Revelations 21:5). Jesus will redeem those who believe in Him from the kingdom of sin and death, and will lead us into the eternal kingdom of God. This work to be done in Jesus is truly a "new thing" incomparable to the parting of the sea to temporarily save the earthly beings.

God has done this "new thing" in our UBF for the past 62 years. In the early days, more than 800 students participated in GBS at the Gwangju campus. In the 1990s, about 100 missionaries were sent out every year, and a total of over 3,000 missionaries have been sent out so far. In particular, we broke through the iron curtain in the Soviet Union, which was closed like an iron fortress until the 1980s, and paved the way for the gospel in Moscow and throughout the Soviet Union. Everywhere our missionaries went, God made new ways and streams of life. As a result, many university students around the world who were once like wild beasts returned to God.

However, in the 2000s, Satan became jealous of God's work and unleashed a merciless attack. Satan made leaders fall and created distrust and enmity between regions, between generations, and between lay and full-time shepherds. The centers all across the country split up, and many members scattered like people who had lost their country. Those who stayed around lost their vigor. Satan had created an anti-Christian atmosphere not only within us but also throughout the Korean campuses. Recently, the president of Seoul National University said he will declare Universal Human Rights, another name for the anti-discrimination law, within this week. The Declaration of Human Rights makes people liable for punishment when they do not accept homosexuality. When and if this Universal Human Right is declared, it will also affect many other campuses across the country. If that happens, Christianity will lose its place on campus even more. In addition, recently, it has become difficult to even approach students on campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has been going on for years. On-site worship or offline meetings have become difficult. A senior shepherd from our center once went out to evangelize on a Sunday, and a student gave him the finger. However, the shepherd persevered and went to different parts of the campus to evangelize. But the student followed him to elbow the shepherd, who is nearly 60 years old, in the stomach. When the sisters went out to evangelize on campus, a

group of student council members wearing came to take away the invitation cards they had given to the students and stopped the sisters from evangelizing. According to a report recently released by the Data Institute of Ministry, Christian college students who turned away from faith have nearly doubled in the past five years during COVID-19. Not only is evangelism becoming difficult, but we are also in a devastating situation where sheep are also turning away from the faith. Indeed, the spiritual reality of the campus has become like a wilderness and a desolate wasteland.

The shepherds of our center did not give up even in the midst of all this and went up to the campus to fish and meet the students. Even though the sheep looked like they were average students at Seoul National University, in reality, they were suffering from mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia, obsessive thoughts, and panic disorder. Some sheep suffered from suicidal thoughts, and one even sent pictures of himself cutting his wrists or sent pictures of blood after saying he wanted to kill someone to his shepherd in the middle of the night. At times like these, I wonder whether I should continue to serve campus ministry, whether this path is right, and whether God has abandoned UBF.

As I prepared this message, I listened carefully to what God was trying to say to me. God said to me, "Do not fear." "I am your Creator, your Redeemer, and I have summoned you by name to be the shepherd of the campus," He said, "You are mine," and promised me, "I have never abandoned you, and I will continue to be with you and protect you." As I continued to study the Word, I came to know that God is the One who is doing new things by making a way in the wilderness, no matter how difficult the campus situation is. Come to think of it, God was already doing something new.

Our Gwanak 3 co-workers continued to go to the campus to evangelize even though it was difficult to meet the sheep due to COVID and persecution. And so this July, God sent us many sheep to the Summer Bible Conference that was held outdoors for the first time since COVID-19 and accomplished the great work of the Holy Spirit. We started off our fall semester with the Pilgrim's Progress Symposium in which 17 brothers and sisters participated, and we held Genesis Bible School every Wednesday on campus, with an average of more than 20 undergraduate students attending. At the beginning of this year, I studied Genesis anew whenever I had time, and updated my Genesis notes for young sheep to understand. With this new understanding of the Bible, I also trained the lay shepherds to deliver testimonial messages, and many sheep received much grace from the messages, just as we did in the past. Many sheep shared their testimonies of joy, saying that they were moved. And even the shepherds who had listened to the message of Genesis countless times listened with joy as if they had heard the message of Genesis for the first time, and later asked for the manuscript for them to keep.

Last month's fall student conference was attended by 25 new sheep obtained through fishing during the fall semester. Currently, many new sheep are attending the worship service. During last week's service, the seats were filled to the back of the new worship hall, which was built to be 1.5 times larger than our old worship hall! A freshman in the Physics Department met Jesus personally at this year's Summer Bible Conference and was born again, and he continues to attend our worship services. Not only that, but he is also starting to join us in fishing recently. Another brother, a freshman, grew up in a broken family. He lived without his mother, and he

earned money by working part-time jobs such as lifting heavy objects to serve his father and younger brother. During all this, he got into Seoul National University. And after hearing Luke's Gospel during the Sunday worship services, he decided to start tithing and enter the tent (communal living).

When I was in college, I suffered from severe schizophrenia to the point where I couldn't concentrate even for a moment. I was always anxious, and every day felt like hell. However, when I sang hymns of Jesus' blood for an hour each day and repented of all the sins that I could think of, God healed me with the grace of the precious blood of Jesus on the cross, and gave me peace in my heart. When I look around at our center leaders, I see that many had also experienced healing through the precious blood of Jesus on the cross, just as I had done when I was in college. They also had depression, severe fear of death, and obsessive thoughts in the past, but now they have all become good competent shepherds. As I recently realized this, I came to have faith that healing and salvation through the forgiveness of sins will occur in the hearts of many brothers and sisters who are currently coming to our center, just as we have experienced. So, I actively planted this faith in the leaders, and I also encouraged them to accept and serve everyone and anyone, no matter how seriously ill they were. In the future, I pray that we can invite them to live in the newly purchased tent, and I pray that we may heal sick young people with the gospel of the cross. Therefore, I pray that 7,000 Seoul National University students will be healed by the gospel of the cross of Jesus in the future and that they will soar like eagles to fly to Ukraine, Russia, and the world by 2041.

God has been preparing us for a while through various hardships and trials including the COVID-19 pandemic. The new thing that God will do through us in the future will be so glorious that the glory of the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s cannot be compared to this new thing. So, let us no longer talk about the past few days. Instead, I pray that we may speak of the greater and the more glorious new thing that is to come.

But what was the reason and purpose of God giving the Israelites such amazing salvation? It is for them to testify that God is the true God, the Creator. Look at verse 9. God asked the peoples of the nations and asks which of their gods predicted the fall of Babylon and the liberation of Israel. Everyone was speechless. And now, God is calling the Israelites who had been brought out of Babylon and raised as witnesses. Now, the Israelites must testify that all the idols that Babylon worshiped, such as Marduk and Nabu, aren't real, and that only God is God the Creator and the Redeemer. If you look at verses 5-6, when Israel was captured, the people were scattered. Families and relatives were separated, and no one knew whether they were alive or dead. However, God called all the people who were scattered to the east, west, south, and north to gather again. No matter how far apart they are, God has gone to the ends of the earth to meet them. And He has done that to summon us to become witnesses of the one and only God, the Creator, and Redeemer (11-12). See verse 21. God's purpose for people when he created them was to let them praise God (21). So, as witnesses, we must live accordingly to the purpose and praise God.

Currently, there are international students from 120 countries on the campus of Seoul National University. I'm sure other colleges are in a similar situation. Indeed, God called the sheep from all directions, east, west, south, and north. If we serve and help these students well, we are doing a World Mission in our own homes. But how can we save people from different cultural backgrounds? In verse 20, the first-person singular pronoun is used.

The new thing is not done by people, but by "I." In other words, it is not me, but God, the Creator, who gave Jesus as a ransom. If we believe in this God, God will use us for this new thing. God has already started doing this new thing among us. I pray that God will continue to use us in the new things in 2023. I pray that God may use us in his work of sending 100,000 missionaries to 233 countries by 2041. And lastly, I pray that God the work of being God's witnesses and praising God as the one true God on campuses all over the world may be started through us.