

"Stay focused. Be in the moment." Coach's first words to his team at halftime. They have the chance to advance. In fact, they're in the lead right now. Coach is depending on his players. His players are depending on one another. Thousands of brackets are depending on them. A lot is at stake - "Dwell on the present and stick with me here. Don't get ahead of yourself. You're not in the championship yet. Don't rest on your past successes. Just because you cruised through a few rounds doesn't mean you're guaranteed victories now. What matters most is what's going on for the next twenty minutes, so dwell on the present."

It's not hard to be nervous or on edge when so much is on the line. Athletes struggle to keep composure. Even the fans who watch these important games at home clench their fists, they rock back and forth, they pace around the living room to the point where it becomes their longest workout of the week. Nearby friends and family need to settle them down and that's no easy task. And we're only talking basketball at this point, could you imagine being in the Israelites' shoes and having to face the battles that they did? The Israelites were not afraid of who was on the other side of the bracket, no, they feared the nations that were next door. Nations that had the might of armies, the brute force of soldiers, and the security of ships. The Lord came to the Israelites and told them to not be afraid. He tells them there's no need to fear because he has formed them and created them for his glory! The Lord promised that he will be their Savior. He's only one they need and he is the only one who could carry out their salvation.

Glory is undoubtedly something which God has had for a long time. Banners of God's glory are strung up all around his creation, and they've been there since the beginning. God's control and command over nature is remarkable and unparalleled. God also has a track record of bringing deliverance, of coming through in the clutch. You see that all over Israel's history. God is the one "who made a way through the sea" and "a path through the mighty waters." God provided the way out of a seemingly sordid situation. Are you aware of how much effort was put into defeating the enemies of God and delivering the people of Israel during the Exodus? God set aside the rushing flow of the sea to make walls of water. He led his children through on dry ground. He drew out the chariots and horses of Egypt, strong and powerful, and took them from their high position and brought them low to the point where they were "never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick."

The brightest and best of Pharaoh's army had a lapse in judgment, not just in that moment by storming through the Red Sea without stopping to question exactly how the water got stacked up on each side, but also by refusing to know the Lord and choosing instead to trust themselves and their own might. Egypt was an advanced society. Egypt had plenty of chariots and horses that kept them at the peak of innovative warfare at the time. Not a far cry from our own nation. America's army is top notch and prepared for any task. The government is poised to really effect change and create advantages in all aspects of life. Technology is moving at an increasingly faster pace over the years, what can't it accomplish? Do we pledge our allegiance to national pride? Have we committed our undivided attention and time to our devices? Do we trust in the paper that says "In God we trust" more than we trust in God himself? If we're honest with ourselves are we more interested and enamored with humanity's advances than God's advances?

God's advances are truly impressive. Impressive feels like an understatement when attaching that word to the miracles that God does. There are no limits to his power. In this chapter of Isaiah God reminds us, "When I act, who can reverse it?" It's not simply bringing the entire Israelite community through that large body of water, the Red Sea, to avoid captivity in the land of Egypt. The Old Testament is filled with records of God using miraculous means to rescue his chosen people.

But what did God encourage his people to do in terms of those victories he's won? Forget about them! How unrealistic would it be to have any team willing take down their championship banners and strip their trophy case clean. For Badger fans to stop talking about the glory days of 2014 and 2015 tournaments which resulted in back to back Final Four appearances (beating Arizona along the way each time)? That sounds crazy! Leaving behind the best times and diminishing the victories by forgetting the past. But that's what the Lord said. Pay no attention to the former things. Let go of the past. Why? Because he doesn't want them to miss what's coming up next. God hasn't stopped working or winning victories.

"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." Whenever God does a new thing, it's always jaw-dropping. The land, the sea, the creatures everywhere, the plants he created at the beginning of the world were good. Adam was made in God's image and he made Eve from the first man, formed without fault, they enjoyed God's perfect creation. When Korah and his clan rebelled against the Lord and his representatives, God did something new and opened up the earth to swallow them alive in judgment! When God delivered the Israelites by taking them through the Red Sea to escape from Pharaoh's army he did so by a miracle not seen before.

But now Isaiah implores his audience to forget those miracles! Don't get so wrapped up in the past miracles that you miss out on the present miracle of grace! God's making a way in the wilderness. He's crafting streams to stroll through the wasteland. What is this way in the wilderness? Who is this life-giving stream? It's Jesus! Jesus is the way. Jesus is the life-giving stream. God in human flesh, born under the law to redeem those who are crushed by the law, unable to bear its weight. Jesus took on that weight, all of it, by carrying his own cross up to the hill of Calvary. On that hill Jesus would sacrifice himself. A pure, blameless sacrifice for impure, blemished people like you and me. This is his present miracle of grace. Dwell on the present miracle of grace, the present truth - Jesus lived and died for me.

God gave life in the middle of a worthless land, a place that had nothing to offer its inhabitants. God gives life today in the wasteland that is so familiar to us, the very earth we travel. We wander about in this wasteland which is laid bare from sin and sorrow. God saw us many years ago when he sent Jesus. God knew that we were all stuck in our sins and unable to get ourselves out. Instead of leaving us alone, he reached out and did something about our poor condition. The past no longer holds us down. The sins we committed cannot withhold God's love from coming to us. Dwell on the present, your present condition in Christ.

God's chosen people were formed to declare his praise. You were made for this purpose! When the time comes, you'll use your mower to take care of your lawn when the grass grows tall. I'd be beside

myself if I saw you out there on your hands and knees using your scissors to work through the yard a few blades at a time. That's not what they were made for! The mower is meant for that project. And I don't want to see you lugging the mower inside for your art project either. The scissors work much better for those smaller cuts. They work best when they are used for the purpose for which they were made. God made you for a purpose. He made you to proclaim his praises! The life of every Christian is one of proclaiming praise. This praise can only come from knowing your Savior, Jesus. The Savior who was proclaimed over and over in the Old Testament. The Savior, Jesus, who proclaimed salvation to those who trust in him throughout the New Testament.

How can you fulfill that purpose of proclaiming God's praise? If you're worried that it's too hard, this might not necessarily require a huge change, plus your ultimate peace is that God has prepared these good works for you to do in advance. Perhaps you've been proclaiming God's praise by making meals in your own home, providing for those whom God has placed under your care. Maybe you set aside time for devotions with those same family members or have time for just you and God's Word, one on one. Your way to proclaim praise for you Creator might be encouraging those people around you to use their gifts to serve. Proclaiming the praise of God doesn't have to shake the earth, the God who saved the earth empowers you to do all things whether big or small in your eyes.

God had Isaiah direct Israel to dwell on the present, to see what wonderful new thing God is doing. The new thing was a victory claimed! But not like any victory before... it's going to overshadow God splitting the Red Sea! It's going to stand out like a shining diamond compared to the past deliverance over the great nations of the earth. This victory is Jesus covering you in his righteousness. The message of God's salvation is relevant for you every single day. Heaven is your home, not the wilderness or the wasteland. So dwell on the present. Dwell on God's present miracle of grace given to you. Amen.