

Isaiah 43:16-21
 March 21, 2010 Lent V

Hampton Baptist
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“The Windshield View”

Have you ever compared the size of a rearview mirror to a windshield? That is a great picture of how life is to be lived: we look back and enjoy what we see, but ahead of us is a great view. We commit no wrong by looking in the rear-view mirror; seeing where we have been is a worthwhile exercise. In contrasting the size of the *mirror* to the size of the *windshield*, we realize where we should spend most of our *focus*. There is a reason that the windshield is bigger than the rear-view mirror; we should give more attention to our future than to our past.

As we look in the rear-view mirror and see where we've been, we can gaze with confidence through the large windshield at our bright future, for we will move with confidence knowing from where we have come. As we look through our expansive windshield, we see clearly and can follow the road better. Attempting to drive when our vision is fixed on the rear-view mirror results in mishaps and crashes.

The *past* has a richness to provide; memory is a *gift* to be employed so we never forget. But we also have the present *and* a future which through the windshield look very promising, and we know that when God is driving, all things are possible.

Living in the most historic area of our country, we have numerous opportunities to look in the rear-view mirror. Finding ourselves in the oldest, continuous English-speaking settlement in North America can become a source of pride. In July, Hampton celebrates its 400th birthday; our city is only one year *younger* than the group of people called Baptists, whose roots can only be traced back to 1609. Our city is one year *older* than the King James Version of the Bible, which was translated into English in 1611.

I love Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, and the Victory Center at Yorktown; I am a student of history, but I *choose* to live in the 21st Century. While I enjoy *glancing* in the rear-view mirror, I choose to *fix* my gaze through the wide, expansive windshield.

In reading our Old Testament Lesson, we sense a *joyful* mood; with anticipatory language, the prophet encouraged the listeners to continue moving ahead, that the best was yet to come. The prophet was looking forward to and praying for God's salvation understanding this basic axiom: God is more interested in our futures than in our pasts. These hopeful words were offered to a community not yet set free; they were still in Babylonian bondage. They were not *yet* hopeful. The present did not look bright. Their stories of the past were *fond*, but far away. These words concerned a future that only God could bring.

While the prophet recalled the glorious acts which God had offered to the Children of Israel when they fled Egyptian bondage, the captives were urged to not *remember* the former things or *consider* the things of old. The omnipotence of God is underscored as being the Lord, their Holy One, the One set apart and the one whom had set *them* apart. This God was their Creator and King. Sure, this all-powerful God had delivered them across a dry seabed when they were being chased by Egyptian chariots; the fact remained that the chariots, horses, and army were engulfed when the waters resumed their rightful place.

No one could deny the historical veracity of those statements, nor could anyone argue with their history. But that story was to be seen in the rear-view mirror. The prophet reminded them that they did not live there any longer, but instead God was about to do a new thing. They were encouraged to view the life ahead of them; that what happened was behind them, yet God still was working to provide them with a future. If their focus remained in the rear-view mirror, then they

certainly could continue to appreciate where they had been, and how good God had been. But the vision in a rear-view mirror is limited; it is small. God calls us to look through the expansive windshield, to see what is ahead of us, knowing that God continues to want to be the Creator, fashioning order out of our chaos just as happened in Genesis 1.

The audience, which the prophet addressed, was far from hopeful. Given their present plight, their rear-view mirror offered a more pleasant outlook. They could remember when times were better, when God had delivered their ancestors from Egypt. They found comfort in the stories of the past, much like we enjoy looking at old photographs of a by-gone era. Now they found themselves in Babylon, surrounded by pagan influences, away from their homeland with little to no hope of ever returning.

Being hopeful is an endeavor fixed upon the future. We are not hopeful that our *past* can change; that is an impossibility, except in comic books and fictional novels referencing time machines. Hoping to change the *past* becomes an exercise in futility, an unrealistic expectation. Hoping to change the *future* is a windshield view.

Even the great saving acts of the past will pale in significance to the new things which God will do. The “new thing,” which the messenger indicated God would do, is to free the exiles from Babylonian bondage and return them to Jerusalem. God’s *new* thing would be to take them from their present captivity to their Promised Land, from hope-*lessness* to hope-*fulness*. In their rear-view mirror, they could see where God had brought them through the sea, so now in their windshield view they can see God take them through the desert. In the rear-view mirror, they could see where God had fed their ancestors with daily manna and also brought water from a rock, but from their windshield view they can witness God making rivers in the desert and even transforming wild beasts into instruments of praise to God.

God had called once; that could be seen in the rear-view mirror. That calling was made quite evident to their ancestors, but God was calling again. The Israelites were being asked to observe the life ahead of them, to look through the broad windshield to receive the blessings God had in store for them.

Like individuals, churches also have options. If the primary view is in the rear-view mirror, that vista will be reflected in decisions that are made. If the primary view is through the windshield, then the decision-making process goes through that filter. Keeping things the same way places more emphasis upon the rear-view mirror; focusing on how “it used to be,” or how “the former leaders did it” short-circuits what can be *seen* through the windshield. Being satisfied with the status quo means that what’s behind us may be the best we can ever be. Rear-view mirror living is safer and less risky than the windshield view. Looking forward presents challenges like blind curves and not knowing when the blacktop might end.

Yet God, through the prophet, continues to say to us, “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing.” Allowing God to work in us to do a new thing requires looking with hope to the future.

Our Epistle reading is also forward-looking. Writing from a *prison*, the Apostle Paul quoted his pedigree and then told them that his advantages and achievements were in his rear-view mirror, and he preferred the windshield view. Paul’s history included being one of the *most* religious of those who were *called* the most religious. What he had accomplished in the name of *piety* was applauded by those who shared that same ideal. Yet given those accolades, he wrote that he was forgetting what was *behind* him; for him, what was in the rear-view mirror was unimportant. Instead, he was pressing on toward what was in *front* of him, the panorama that the windshield provided was certainly worth the journey. Ahead of him, even in prison, was a brighter future. The call of God upon his life prevented him from being satisfied with what he had accomplished, and many consider Paul to be the greatest missionary of all time. The person who provided us with most of the books in our New Testament said

that he was forgetting what was behind him and was straining forward to what was ahead of him. The Philippian readers certainly recognized his analogy; using a sports theme, he was comparing his life to a race, and now he was headed to the finish line. For Paul, the future was more important than the past.

During the season of Lent, we take inventory of our lives in preparation of our Easter celebration. On Wednesday nights, I have enjoyed leading the study entitled, "24 Hours that Changed the World." This look at the last hours of Jesus' life includes betrayals, denials, abandonment, hopelessness, physical pain, and death. But all of this happened just prior to Easter.

My favorite preacher, Dr. Tony Campolo, was by profession a sociologist. He tells the story of a little preaching competition that he had with his pastor during services at the church where he attends in West Philadelphia. Dr. Campolo tells how he preached the perfect sermon, perfect in every way. He had taken the congregation to the heights of glory. And as he sat down beside his pastor, Dr. Campolo patted him on the knee and simply said, "Top that." The older African-American pastor looked at him and said, "Boy, I'm gonna do you in," and he did.

It was a simple sermon, consisting of primarily one line which he preached for an hour-and-a-half. "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming." That doesn't sound like it would knock your socks off; nothing so spectacular about that statement, but the older minister started softly, and began building in volume and intensity. "It was Friday, and my Jesus was dead on the tree, but that was Friday; Sunday's a-coming! On Friday, Mary's crying her eyes out; the disciples are running in every direction like sheep without a shepherd. But that's only Friday; Sunday's a-coming! On Friday, those are looking at the world and saying "as things have been, so shall they be." You can't change nothin' in this world. But they didn't know that it was only Friday; Sunday's a-coming! Friday, them forces that oppress the poor and keep people down; them forces that destroy people; them forces that seek to control people don't know that it is only Friday. Sunday's coming. On Friday, people are saying darkness is going to rule the world; sadness is everywhere, but they don't know that it's only Friday! Sunday's a-coming!

That's the good news!

(http://www.tonycampolo.org/mp3/Its_Friday_But_Sundays_Coming.mp3)

As Christians, we are called to be *Easter* people, rather than *Good Friday* people. While you may consider today to be filled with gloom and it may appear that darkness reigns, if you continue to look through the windshield, you will know that it's only Friday; Sunday's a-coming. Because of Easter, we have a *spectacular* windshield view, a future filled with promise and opportunity. As we approach Easter, resist the temptation to become fixated into the satisfaction provided by what *was* and press on toward the calling of what could be. Be thankful that God is more interested in our futures than in our pasts.

Thanks be to God for allowing us to have a windshield view.