



**FOMO Christians**  
**Isaiah 43:16-21**  
**March 17, 2013**  
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One evening a couple of weeks ago, I went to my local GVR to use the treadmill. Often, I get home too late to walk outside, so the rec center is the next best thing. As I was walking (and doing Sudoku puzzles) in came a young man who went over to the other treadmill, placed his cell phone on the console, and began to run fast on the machine.

5 minutes went by, and he suddenly stopped running. He picked up his phone, read something and texted. He put the phone down and began to run. 3 minutes go by, and like before he suddenly stops, picks up the phone, reads intensely and texts. He puts the phone down and begins to run.

This happened over and over again. And I thought, "What kind of work out is that?! Does he have to stop every time a message comes through?"

You have all experienced that with someone, haven't you? Especially someone younger, such as your children and particularly your grandchildren. Not too long ago, I was meeting with a young couple, and they placed their phones in the middle of the table between us. Their eyes gravitated toward their phone every few minutes.

People today have FOMO – fear of missing out. In his book *iDisorder*, author Larry Rosen describes the stranglehold that tech obsession has on our culture. His research shows that 50 percent of teens and young adults become "moderately or highly anxious when they can't check their technologies as often as they would like." Almost two-thirds check their texts every 15 minutes or less.

FOMO is exploding in our culture, and it even shows up in our scripture passage today. As I read it, see if you can pick out who is afraid of missing out. I invite you to turn with me to Isaiah 43.

Prayer: Holy God, wake us up if we are asleep, calm the storm if we are overwhelmed, or hold us fast if we are running -- whatever it takes, open our hearts and minds to hear

your voice as you speak a new and life-changing word to us. Because of Christ we pray, Amen.

Read Isaiah 43:16-21

Did you figure out who is afraid of missing out? Isaiah, the prophet, fears that Israel may miss out on the new thing God wants to do. The Hebrews seem to want to live in the past. They have FLOP: Fear of Losing Our Past.” So, Isaiah writes to them, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.”

But this is the strange part. Our passage starts with remembering the past – it retells the story of the Exodus when God saved the people from slavery in Egypt. I can imagine the people nodding their heads in agreement as Isaiah said, “Remember when God made a way for you through the sea, and the chariots and horses of the Egyptians lay there, never to rise again?” And the people say, “Yes, isn’t it wonderful what God did for us so long ago?” Countless biblical passages refer back to the original exodus. This is a key event in the OT. This story, the Exodus, is their identity.

This memory is so ingrained in the people’s lives that when they heard God’s words, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past,” they are stunned. Aren’t we supposed to look back at what God has done in the past? Isn’t it strange that Isaiah asks us not to remember former things right after telling the wonderful story of a former thing – the Exodus? What about the commands to “remember” that occur all throughout scripture?

What is going on here?

You need to know that the Israelites are again in captivity when they hear these words. And God is saying, yes, the Exodus was great. I heard you then. I saved you then. And I hear you now. I will save you now, but it will be different. What happened back then is a springboard for the new exodus I am bringing. Back then, God says, I turned the sea into dry land, but now I am going to do a reversal. I will turn the dry land into water. See, I am doing a new thing.

Now, don’t get me wrong. When God says, “Forget the former things,” this does not mean forget them completely or throw the past away. Keep that memory because it informs the present.

This past week, Marti Long sent me a video that is making the rounds on the Internet these days. It demonstrates the new thing, but shows the past is not dead. It’s a French commercial, and opens with a mother and daughter coloring together on the kitchen table. The husband walks in, (“Emma,” he says), and shows them that they can color on the iPad. Ah, the new way! The scene changes to the husband looking at post-it notes

the wife has put the frig. “Emma!” he says and shows her that she can do post-it notes on the iPad. The new thing! Forget the old!

The scene shifts to the wife doing a Sudoku puzzle on paper. “Emma!” says the husband and shows her Sudoku on the iPad. This is the new thing! Forget the paper! The scene shifts again as the husband and wife are in bed. She is reading a book – on paper! He is reading from his iPad. He looks at her and shakes his head. She is so old fashioned.

The final scene: the husband is sitting on the toilet and he looks over to find the toilet roll is empty. There is no toilet paper. “EMMA!” he yells. The iPad comes sliding under the door...with a picture of a roll of toilet paper. Across the screen are the words, “Paper is not dead.”

Do not forget the old thing entirely because it has its value for it informs the new thing.

God’s people are to remember their God is a rescuing God – never forget that fact - but they are not to anchor their expectations in only what God has done before – as though what God had done before is all that God can do. If you have FLOP (fear of losing the past) and you hang onto it, you aren’t going to see what’s right in front of you. Or, maybe I should say, WHO is right in front of you.

One man said this (Scholar Geoffry Grogan), “We are meant to reflect on the past with gratitude and stimulated faith but not allow it to stereotype our expectations from God.”

Let me give you an example of what happened to someone in the Bible who expected God to act the same way as in the past. His name is Moses. Moses and the Israelites are wandering in the desert and they are thirsty (Numbers 20:12). God tells Moses to speak to the rock in front of all the people and water will come out. Instead, Moses bashes the rock with his staff – twice. Drinking water comes out of the rock, but God gets angry, and tells Moses he cannot enter the promised land.

What!? Why would God do such a thing? Moses, faithful Moses, who has lead and put up with these people for almost 40 years, now cannot enter the promised land? People down through the ages have scratched their heads over this passage. Why did God do that? Why was God so mean?

It actually has to do with the past. Back in the earlier years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites are looking for water (Exodus 17). God tells Moses to strike a rock with his staff. He does so, and drinking water gushes out of the rock.

Did you catch it? In the past, God tells Moses to strike the rock. In the present, God tells Moses to speak to the rock. Moses, however, remembers what happened in the past,

and therefore, Moses acts like the past. He strikes the rock, like he did before, thereby disobeying God right in front of all the people with devastating consequences.

Do you live in the past? Do you look back on your past and wonder why God doesn't work like God did in your life 20 years ago? It could be that God is working in a new way, but you are not perceiving it because it wasn't how God worked before. "I am about to do a new thing," God says.

It's like a woman who mourns a past relationship that is gone and looks so much back at the past that she doesn't see the new potential love standing in front of her.

It's like a person who saw God physically heal a loved one in the past and wonders why God isn't doing it the same way again, yet is missing out on a new way God is healing.

It is like a person who so bemoans the closed door in his life that he misses the new window that has just opened up.

It's like a church that had a wonderful past, and they are looking so much back at the past that they miss the wonderful new thing God is doing in their midst right now and rejoicing in that.

What a surprising message: God will not act in the same old way to accomplish new things. So, don't keep obsessively looking back to even the finest of what God has done. Instead, actively anticipate the new thing God is bringing about. What God did long ago is astounding, and yes, remember and rejoice in it. But look forward as well because what God is about to do is even more awesome!

And oh yeah ... one more small thing. While God was promising liberation to the Israelites, God was foreshadowing the ultimate liberation through Christ, the Messiah.. Human leaders had bailed Israel out in the past, but they needed to be ready for "a new thing." The Christ child would be their final Redeemer. Talk about a new story – yet rooted in the past of a delivering, saving God.

The past is wonderful, but let's not get stuck in it. Like Israel, we can FLOP or FOMO. But let's revise FOMO; let's give it a new meaning: "the Fun Of Moving On!" There are signs of new life breaking out all around us. God is always doing something new and the theme runs throughout scripture. God says, "I will make a new covenant with you. I will place in you a new heart. I will give you a new spirit. I will give you a new name. You will sing a new song. I will give you new wine." The Apostle Paul says the same thing when he writes, "If anyone is in Christ Jesus, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come."

And then finally from the book of Revelation: Revelation begins with a beautiful scene of worship to God...and God is silent. The book of Revelation goes on with plagues, wars, battles, Satan thrown into the abyss. Through it all...God is silent. All the way through the book of Revelation, God is silent on his throne. We finally come to the end of the book. There is a new heaven and a new earth, and God gets ready to speak. And what does God say? "Behold, I am making all things new." (Rev 21:5) Amen and amen.