As you take the train from Kenosha in southern Wisconsin south towards Chicago the view out the window changes drastically. Starts with the rolling hills and farm fields of southern Wisconsin. Next comes the outer suburbs of Chicago where the cities have very little rise to them. Tighter and tighter the cities get packed in. Further south towards the big city you realize the most impressive cityscape is still to come. On the horizon just barely is the glimpse of the towers rising out of downtown Chicago. That view is good, but there’s something better coming that’s going to be great. God would say the same thing to Israel and to you and me. The former things were good, but the new things will be great.
Fast forward in Israel’s history and again they’re in an impossible situation. This time in captivity in a place called Babylon far from their home territory held against their will. When they’re released there’s no great splitting of a sea, no pursuit by angry armies, not even a large group goes. Just a small remnant of believers leave Babylon but they quickly stare into a huge wasteland of a place called the Arabian Desert. There are no pathways and worst of all no water. Home is a long way and they aren’t going to make it alone.

Isaiah shares what God will do. “I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.” God was with them. This was the promise of a miracle to come since Isaiah wrote when Israel wasn’t yet in captivity in Babylon. But they would be. And the promise is that God will give them a return. He would give them a safe passage back home with water for the journey. As great a miracle as that would be, it still couldn’t compare to the even greater rescue God would bring about. Mentioned earlier in the chapter of the first lesson, the servant would bring about a far greater promise. God would send his servant and his servant would save the world. It was like the entire world was living in a desert because of sin. No way the world could rescue itself, didn’t even care to rescue itself. People were hopeless without assistance.

You and I exist in that same desert of our sins. We have no way out and no way of helping ourselves. We’re in trouble. Sure good things have happened to us and those were from God. But those rescues can’t compare to the great thing God has done for us. “Because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.” Suddenly in our wasteland of sin is a pathway. We don’t walk it to God, he walks it to us. God enters our miserable situation. God graciously approaches us. Jesus came not only as God but as a human being. He walked in our world, through our desert wasteland. We are his people. People he made and formed for himself. We are God’s by the work of Jesus our Savior who showed God’s mercy as the new great thing. It is the gospel rescue, the best thing we could’ve hoped for. His forgiveness is like a cool refreshing drink of water in the desert.

Something even better is coming where the new things will be great. God promises us relief when we get to heaven. Safety in the eternal protection of heaven. Strength even now for our worst days because we are his people. God uses his power for our good, carrying us right through the middle of our lives with promises his grace through Christ has prepared a better place.

Because we are God’s people we recount his glorious deeds. Call to mind the great things God has done and praise him. Share them with others. Look around because others are also in the same desert of sin, lost and condemned, and in trouble. God alone provides rescue. He provides the Savior. Believers have no purpose other than what God made us for. Our value comes from him. He made us and we exist for him. He redeemed you and me so our value is great. He redeemed us at great cost to himself. We are his.

Good things in our past. Even greater things to come. That’s God’s promise to us. He’s got the rescue plan. The Savior came to us so we belong to him. Now we can wait, remembering the former things which were good and looking forward to the greater things that will come.