

## Wednesday, December 28, 2022

Hi everyone, hope you're having a wonderful holiday season so far. Today's devotional comes from Isaiah 65:17-25.

[17] "For behold, I create new heavens  
and a new earth,  
and the former things shall not be remembered  
or come into mind.  
[18] But be glad and rejoice forever  
in that which I create;  
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,  
and her people to be a gladness.  
[19] I will rejoice in Jerusalem  
and be glad in my people;  
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping  
and the cry of distress.  
[20] No more shall there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not fill out his days,  
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,  
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.  
[21] They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
[22] They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
[23] They shall not labor in vain  
or bear children for calamity,  
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,  
and their descendants with them.  
[24] Before they call I will answer;  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.  
[25] The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
and dust shall be the serpent's food.  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain,"  
says the LORD.

This passage, which was written centuries before Christ, paints a picture of a world radically changed by a new thing that Yahweh will do. God promises to do a new thing. He promises to create new heavens and a new earth. Originally, it was written to encourage the post-Exilic

Jewish community. They were home, but home wasn't heaven, not by a long shot. They needed hope that it would get better. But we know that this was a prophetic word of hope not just for the Israelites but for us today because of Jesus. Jesus told us in Mark 13 that heaven and earth will pass away, and Revelation 21 tells us that it will be replaced by the new heavens and new earth when Jesus Christ returns. So this hope of a restored Paradise has already come through Jesus but it has yet to come in full until Christ returns.

The God who created the universe out of nothing will create a new universe, a new heaven and earth, in place of the old one ruined by sin and evil. It will be so "good" that people won't remember the former things. Instead, people will simply rejoice forever in what God will create. It won't be a mere earthly and temporal joy, but it will be an everlasting joy, a joy that lasts forever. And in saying that, Isaiah alludes to the new heavens and earth that will go on forever.

But what will it be like? Well, verse 17 tells us that the "former things will not be remembered." The new heavens and new earth will be missing "the former things." What are these "former things"? Well, at the time, there were troubles that the Jewish people faced. They had experienced the destruction of Jerusalem, the city of God, the center of their social, political, and, most of all, religious life. Even rebuilt, it was a shadow of its former self. Even re-inhabited, it was a place in which weeping and crying filled the air. God had once forsaken his own city and it seemed that he still wasn't there as he had been before.

But in the new heaven and new earth, God will dwell in the midst of his people, as he had back in the Garden. To symbolize that, God says, "I will create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness." After centuries of conflict, during which God was often angry with his people and even sent them away from the city, God will love his people with pure joy and delight. Because of that unconditional love and approval, the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more. Then Isaiah goes on to describe what things will exist no more. No more infant mortality or the pre-mature loss of a grandparent. And no more futility in work or at home. Instead of endless, futile labor by the sweat of your brow in the midst of thorns and thistles, your life will be endlessly, increasingly fruitful as you enjoy the works of your hands and minds. So many of the former things that make life sad and difficult will be "no more" in the new heaven and new earth.

God promises to recreate "Jerusalem" and to dwell among his people in the new heavens and new earth, as symbolized by Jerusalem.

Then in verse 23, we receive a reason for why God promises to do this. It's so that the people and their descendants will be blessed by God. After centuries of living with the curses of Genesis and the wrath of God against their covenant unfaithfulness, Yahweh will once again, and forever, bless his people. Here is a dramatic reversal of history: Paradise Regained, the world re-created, because God has done, is doing, and will do a new thing.

So often, we lack the holy imagination to let our souls be captivated by the promise of the new heaven and new earth. But I invite you to imagine according to God's Word and the help of the

Holy Spirit. I ask that you pause for a certain amount of time right now and imagine a new world where there is complete shalom, a complete restoration of peace on earth. In that new Jerusalem, on God's holy mountain, there will be no more sin, no more sorrow, no more futility, no more harming or destroying. This will come and this will happen. Let's wait eagerly for that Day by living for Christ today.

Let's pray.