

Sermon for November 13, 2016 – Saints Triumphant

Isaiah 65:17-25 (NIV84)

Theme: Imagine what it will be like. . .

- 1) *Unending joy!*
- 2) *No curse!*
- 3) *Perfect peace!*

¹⁷ "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. ²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

There certainly seems to be a lot of fear and uncertainty in the world today. There are protests over here and shootings over there. Various dictators are threatening war. Our society seems to have thrown the virtues of civility and common courtesy to the wayside. In many places Christianity is being persecuted worse than ever before, and great numbers of people are falling away from the Christian faith.

All these things are signs that the end is near, as Jesus once predicted: " ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. . . ⁹ . . . you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other . . . ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.ⁱ

Yes, everything that is happening in the world today testifies that the end is coming soon. But what should we do about it? Should we try to hide our faith in the world so that no one bothers us? Should we worry about every bad news story we hear and live our lives in fear? No, this is not what our Savior wants our reaction to be. Rather, he wants us to lift our heads, redouble our evangelism efforts, and look forward to his coming at the End of Time.

And why should we do that? Because God promises to raise the dead on the last day and deliver believers to a wonderful, new paradise where all the evils of this present age will no longer affect us.

When faced with the many problems, concerns and temptations that come into our life on this evil earth, the LORD wants us to lift our eyes to him and find comfort in his promised salvation. With the prophet Isaiah as our guide, let us listen to the LORD describe our future home under the theme: **Imagine what eternal life with God will be like.** *There will be: 1) unending joy, 2) no curse of sin, 3) perfect peace.*

Part One: There will be unending joy.

Our text begins with the LORD making a wonderful promise to all his faithful followers who face all sorts of problems on this evil earth. It's as if he is saying: "Don't be afraid. Don't despair. Trust in me. Look at what I am doing."

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The Bible says that, when Christ comes again, our current earth will be destroyed.ⁱⁱ God will create a new home for us out of its ashes. That new home will be similar to the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve fell into sin. There will be no suffering or death on that new earth – nothing that would ever cause us any heartache or pain.

The LORD says:

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

Does this mean that believers will forget everything they ever did while living on this earth? Not necessarily. What it means, rather, is that if we have memories of our past, they will not bring us any sorrow or pain. Why is that? Because Christ's atoning sacrifice for us on the cross has paid for our sins in full. The forgiveness and peaceful conscience we possess now by faith, we will have in all fullness after Christ returns. Our sinful nature will be gone for good. Our consciences will be absolutely clean before God with no regrets or thinking of past sins with horror. Our focus will be completely on the LORD and His great love for us.

¹⁸ *But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.* ¹⁹ *I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.*

God promises that believers (who are pictured as Jerusalem in this text) will always be happy. O, I can't tell you how I look forward to that reality! Let me explain why.

Have you ever battled with any sort of depression? It stinks. You have this constant sadness and anxiety inside of you that just makes you want to curl up in a ball and cry. You feel drained of

all energy and want to avoid all contact with others. You feel helpless, worthless, and like a total failure. You might even be tempted to wonder how God could ever love you.

But look at what God promises: a place where there will be no crying, sorrow, worry or depression, but only joy forever. Imagine what that will be like: always having a smile on your face and feeling good all the time. And that is what we will experience in heaven, all because of the saving love God has for us in Christ.

Yes, whenever you are tempted to feel depressed, let yourself be comforted with the paradise God is preparing to give you on the last day. Imagine what it will be like – living with God in unending joy. This will be your reality as you hold on to Jesus in faith. How do I know? Because God loved you so much that he gave up his one and only Son to save you from your sins.ⁱⁱⁱ The Bible says so much. Let this truth sustain you through every dark, hopeless period in life: Jesus is coming again soon to take sin's curse away from you, so you can live in unending joy.

Part Two: There will be no curse of sin

What will the new heaven and earth be like? Knowing that our human minds can't even begin to comprehend the joy that awaits us there, God uses a series of understatements to describe it - focusing our attention on how sin's curse will be removed.

He says:

²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

The Bible is clear: wherever there is sin, there will be death. The two go hand and hand. The fact that youth and infants die on this earth, shows how deeply sin has corrupted our world.

But can you imagine a world in which no mother has a miscarriage and no father will ever have to bury his child? Can you imagine a world in which you call a 100 year old person a youth, and whose death (if he were even able to die) would be considered a great tragedy and curse because he died so young? That's what life on God's new earth will be like. People will live forever and never die. Why? Because sin's curse will be removed forever. And where there is no sin, there can be no death.

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat.

The people who lived in ancient Israel lived in fear. They were tormented by foreign raiders who would ruin and steal anything the Israelites planted or built. How the people prayed for relief!

But God promises a future where we won't have to cry out for His relief because we will already have it. No one will be allowed to take away the blessings God gives us, or prevent us from having joy in them. All the dangers and frustrations we have in this present world will be gone.

For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.

Did you know that there are trees alive today that seem to have germinated thousands of years ago - shortly after the flood? Those trees seem to have lived forever! When Christ delivers us to his new earth, we will live forever - enjoying all the blessings he gives us. There will be no toil, labor or frustration – no sorrow or misfortune. All those things will be replaced with peace, security, joy and satisfaction in all we do. Why? Because sin's curse is gone. We will be a people blessed by the LORD – holy, precious and loved. All the evil we experience on this earth will be removed forever, and we will live with God in perfect peace.

Part 3: There will be perfect peace

²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

On this earth, the LORD doesn't always answer our prayer right away. He makes us wait patiently for his answer in order to strengthen our faith. And that waiting is often hard.

Can you imagine what it would be like if God answered our prayers, even before we got to Amen? Talk about comfort and assurance – never having to wonder or worry how He will answer our requests! This is exactly what God promises to do on the new heavens and new earth. He will immediately give us everything we ask for in prayer. Why? Because we are his dearly loved children – who will be living in all holiness and righteousness with him in paradise. We will be at peace.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

Can you imagine a world in which predators and prey actually got along? That's what God's new heavens and earth will be like. Rich or poor, young or old, black or white, male or female, republican or democrat: we will all get along in perfect peace and harmony in God's kingdom. Why? Because when Christ comes on the last day, he will remove the sin that keeps mankind divided. All fear and suspicion will be taken away. Believers from every corner of the globe will be united in peace. Every living creature will live in perfect harmony with us and each other. None will kill and eat the other. They will all eat the vegetation God provides – except the snake.

And why is that? Probably as a reminder of what happened on this earth when the devil tempted Adam and Eve into sin. When God cursed the snake he also made a promise that a special

descendant of Adam and Eve, would restore the relationship they lost with God when they fell into sin. The snake's continuous humiliation would serve as reminder of that promise, and of the Savior who fulfilled it!

Yes, because Jesus died on the cross for our sins we can stand before God free, forgiven and righteous through faith in him. We are no longer slaves of the devil, but children of God – children who will live in perfect peace with God and each other when Christ comes again on the Last Day.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are living in dark and dangerous times. We are constantly being tempted to give up our faith. How are we to face and overcome all the trials we face in life? By remembering Christ and the wonderful paradise he won for us through his life, death and resurrection.

Imagine what it will be like living in unending joy, facing no curse or consequence of sin, and living in perfect peace and harmony with God and each other forever. Let those thoughts strengthen you as you look forward to Christ's return, remembering what the apostle John wrote:
²⁰ *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus .* ²¹
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.^{iv}

ⁱ Matthew 24 select verses (NIV84)

ⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Peter 3:12,13

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. John 3:16

^{iv} Revelation 22:20-21 (NIV84)