

Sermon Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

“See, 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; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one 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 work of their hands. ²³ They will not labor in vain, nor will they 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, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Sermon Theme: The Best Is Yet to Come

Growing up, one of my dad’s favorite lines was (and still is), “This too shall pass.” Get hurt playing and wrestling with the brothers, “This too shall pass.” Heart-broken because the Packers didn’t win like I wanted, “This too shall pass.” Frustrated because life was difficult and struggles kept coming, “This too shall pass.” Even when life was going well he was quick to remind my brothers and I: “This too shall pass,” so that we would stop and enjoy the moment.

There are some things that we try to hold onto and never want to let go. There are things that we can’t get rid of quickly enough. We sure hope, “This too shall pass,” when life is frustrating. We cling to that hope when everything seems to wear us down and we feel stuck. But other times life is great and we don’t want the moment to end. It’s hard to accept when we look at our relationships and loved ones that even this too shall pass. Whether you are struggling right now or life is going just fine, it can be hard to believe God’s promise that the best is yet to come.

Through Isaiah God gives us some insight into his plan for our future. We are told in other portions of the Bible that everything is coming to an end. Nothing lasts forever and everything has its end date. The same goes for all of creation. And God promises: he is going to make new. He says, **“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”** This new

creation comes with another promise: we won't remember all that came before this newer and better, those former things.

But do we really want him to?

You know it, you feel it, and you live it: this world is far from perfect. We are kidding ourselves if we think we can stop this world from deteriorating even more. We maybe can slow it down with different lifestyle choices, but it's not going to go back. We quickly point out that nothing lasts forever—same goes for this created world. We look in nature and we see the famines and earthquakes, the wars and disease. This world is progressively getting worse. You can't ignore it. Even with all the advancements in science and technology there is still a 100% mortality rate for human beings. With death we are forced to see and feel how things aren't right or how they are supposed to be. We see it especially with a miscarriage, babies dying a few days old, or the teenager dying in the accident. It's so wrong that children should suffer and their lives end. But then it also forces us to come to grips with our own mortality because we recognize this means my life will end too and can end at a blink of an eye.

But it's not just with the end of life that we see how much this life comes up short. You face it day after day. For all the blessings of home and family we've been talking about not everyone has a wonderful family life. Not all of us get along with our families. All too many wake up in the morning and can't wait to leave because home is not what they want, expect, or should be. Job security? Who has it? Constant fluctuation of prices and questions of the future plague our minds. What about peace? There's not a lot of peace of mind when family and home life isn't the best. You feel the missing peace when someone won't let go of that grudge. Remembering sins of your youth robs you of a peaceful night sleep. Conversations that are long-gone and thought to have passed come back to haunt us leaving you feeling disgusted and frustrated with yourself.

And, yet, despite all this, we try to hold on to this world. You want to make sure that you are living your life to the best of your ability because you recognize the time you have is precious and it runs out. The day-to-day life needs daily attention. But it can also lead us to lose focus on what's to come. The need to get to work and finish your to-do list keeps you from having your family devotion time. The sports practices and games pull you away from God's house and time in his Word. Your plans for this afternoon and later this week might be pulling at your mind right now. The experiences you want to have, vacations you want to go on with your family, time away for peace of mind can keep you from your experiences you share with the family of believers and the peace that God gives you with his Word. We want to grow in our relationships and do not want to upset anyone, but that sometimes means you ignore it when someone is being led away from God and his Word

It's important for us to remember that those things—the desire for good relationships, vacation, work, games, etc.—may not be wrong and against God's will by themselves. But whatever pulls away or keeps you from having God as the top priority in life (not just in word but also in action and living)—loving good things too much—becomes wrong and against God's desire for you and your life.

When we fail to see that the best is yet to come, we tend to glorify this world and what's in it. You hear it when someone passes away, especially at a young age. Someone will say: "They are going to miss out on being married, having kids, doing these things, having these experiences in life. It's too bad." Do we realize what we are saying? What is being implied is that what you have here on earth is better than the joys of heaven. But that's what happens when the life to come holds no certainty or hope. The only answer to death many are left with is this celebration of life and what we have here. Because, what else can you do? What else can you offer those left behind to take their focus off the pain and face the days to come?

That's what the devil wants you to do. He doesn't want you looking ahead to heaven; he wants your eyes down here. If this life is as good as it is going to get, the experiences and relationships we have today are the end-all and be-all. He works in tandem with this world to try and keep us tied to this world. He leads our skeptical minds to question whether or not God's promises. Is it going to be better? Is it actually worth it?

Your God does not give empty promises. This is his will and what he will do. So he gives you these promises so we can cope with the harsh realities of life. His promises comfort in the face of death and encourage during life's trials.

If there was not any hope, then this world and what have today would be the end. What a sad existence that would be. But that was never God's plan for his people. God created mankind to live. So when God's perfect creation was ruined by our rebellious parents Adam and Eve, God did not leave us in defeat. Already in the Garden of Eden he promises a victory—a Savior would come to crush the head of the devil. And when the time is just right, Jesus steps into time and history—child of Mary, Son of God, human flesh-and-blood—to be your brother. He carries the weight of your sin to the cross, suffers and dies in your place. With his perfect life and shedding of his blood Jesus sets you free so that sin does not follow you in your life today or in the grave. With his innocent death, Jesus crushes the devil destroying his work. Even when he dies and lies buried in the tomb, death would not hold Jesus. On Easter morning Jesus is raised to live. Death has been defeated! And through faith Jesus gives you his victory so that death is not the end, it's not a defeat for God's people.

Yes, the old order will pass away. This world will come to an end. The evil, the wicked, the sinful must be purged away. But, behold, God is creating a new heavens and new

earth. He tells you, “It’s a place where the sound of weeping and of crying will not be heard. Those things that cause those tears will no longer exist. I promise you, **‘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; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one 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 work of their hands.** ²³ **They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them”** (v.20-23).

God promises you a physical place to put your feet, a perfect home where you will live. The effects of sin, the weeping and crying, the missing and questioning will be “the former things” that we will not remember. No more meaningless work and labor done in vain. We will rejoice and be glad because that relationship that God started with you at your baptism will come to completion in the eternity with him. Never again will we be concerned about losing someone or someone leaving us. We won’t be hurt with family letting us down or the home life being a struggle. In heaven we will be joined with our perfect family: our brothers and sisters in Christ, God our Father, Jesus our brother, and God the Holy Spirit uniting us all together. There will be no questions about what the future will hold because we will be with the Lord forever.

And so we saints—that means holy ones washed clean of sin in baptism—fight on while we remain on this earth. Armed with the Word and Sacraments through which the Spirit works to keep us in the one true faith until life everlasting our battle continues against the devil and this sinful world. And while we fight, we rejoice and sing God’s praises thanking him for all those he has already brought out of this world—this veil of tears—to enjoy the joys of heaven with him. Yes, of course we miss them. But they aren’t missing out on anything. They are the saints—God’s holy ones whose sins have been washed away with the blood of Jesus so they are without sin. They are the saints triumphant. And those saints are asking Jesus, “How long?” They eagerly look forward to when they will return with Jesus to be reunited triumphantly with their glorious perfect physical bodies. Until that time of perfect peace and rest God assures you: the best is yet to come. Amen.