

Pastor Luke C. Werre

November 15, 2020

Sermon Text – Isaiah 65:17-25

Pentecost 24—Saints Triumphant

Welcome Home to Peace: Where You Have an Everlasting Family

A PREVIEW OF HOME IN HEAVEN

The family was planning a weeklong trip to Hawaii. Mom knew how to build the anticipation to keep family morale high during the dark, cold days of winter. She pinned the plane tickets prominently to the bulletin board in the kitchen. She bought herself and her daughter a new sun hat and hung them on the coat hooks in the entry. She lined up everyone's beach sandals on the floor by the front door. She put pictures of Hawaii from travel brochures on the refrigerator door. She put little notes that said, "Just three more weeks to Aloha!" in each of their lunches. One night for supper she made Hawaiian food. All these things kept family spirits high as they looked forward to that happy vacation.

In a similar way, to keep morale high in the household of Christianity while we suffer through the cold harsh realities living in an unbelieving world, where the unbelieving world always seems to gain the upper hand, God gives us a preview of our eternal home. In Isaiah chapter 65 God uses picture language almost like a postcard description of our eternal home as we trust in Jesus.

God says, *Watch this! I am about to create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered. They will not come to mind.* God says it this way so that we don't imagine heaven merely to be version 2.0 of this world's existence. We may correctly be filled with awe at the grandeur of a sunset, the delicacy of a wildflower, or the complexity of the human body. At the same time, consider how ruined this world is because of sin. Not only are people cruel to each other but even animals feed on each other! So the Bible says God is going to destroy this world with fire. He's going to recreate everything from scratch. It will have no sin so the very nature of things will be entirely different. This is the truth God is portraying with this picture: *The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and lions will eat straw like cattle.*

In the new world there'll be no trace of sin to mar our joy. God says in Isaiah 65: *Instead, rejoice and celebrate forever, because of what I am creating. Watch this! I am about to create Jerusalem to be a source of gladness, and her people a source of joy.*

Celebrate forever? This has to be sort of puzzling to us. Hasn't every one of us been haunted at some point with the question, "What if the joy wears off? What if I get bored in heaven? If it's sort of like a super long church service praising God, how long can we keep on doing that? Will there be other things to do?" But that only shows how paralyzed our minds are with sin, how totally incapacitated we are to have God be first in our hearts.

You see, if we will be without sin in heaven then we will be able to love God perfectly – as we were originally created to do. If we are able to love God perfectly nothing will fascinate us more and hold our attention longer than to see the Lamb on His throne. (We often comfort each other by saying, "You'll see your loved ones again." But that will not be a real joy. Our real joy will be to see Jesus.) Praising Him will be our favorite activity. We'll never tire of it.

By contrast to our unholy boredom with God, consider God's holy, tireless love for us. God doesn't begrudge us going to heaven. He is more eager for that day than we are. Eager enough that He was willing to condemn His own Son to death to make it happen. But there's the mystery. Why should He be so eager to have us? What's in it for Him? We certainly can't add anything to heaven that God needs. Even if we are praising Him – that really doesn't make His life better. But His delight in taking us to heaven is simply a fact of His amazing

grace –a love that defies explanation. God loves us because He chooses to love us. That’s a love that leaves us speechless with awe.

Let’s pause for a moment. Try to wrap your mind around that truth. There are people you are not thrilled to be around, aren’t there? People whose company you grow tired of, right? But God is non-stop excited and eager to take you to heaven. In spite of everything He knows about you, in spite of how tiresome your behavior is, in spite of all the people you may have turned off or pushed away in this life, God is nevertheless sincerely, genuinely happy and looking forward to bringing you to Himself and your eternal home in heaven. Just chew on that later today.

God’s joy in having us will be evident in the way He deals with us in heaven. He will no longer seem distant to us. He won’t be like a parent who leaves this kids playing in the living room while He’s busy in the kitchen. God will be right there among us as though He has nothing better to do than play Legos© with us on the living room floor. Maybe right now, because of the way your life is going it may seem hard to imagine God is taking delight in you. But in heaven that curtain will be removed and His pleasure toward you will be completely plain and clear. Listen to how God describes the whole scene - without sin, of course: *I, [God], also will be glad because of Jerusalem and I will rejoice over my people. The sound of weeping will not be heard in her again, nor will the sound of crying.*

A little child may begin crying in the night until Mom or Dad runs into the nursery, scoops them up and soothes them. In our heavenly home we won’t need to cry alone in the dark because it will be clear that God is right there with us all the time. So He promises, *Then, even before they call, I will answer. While they are still speaking, I will hear.* Do believe that this is already true here on earth. The only difference between now and then is what the apostle Paul describes: *Now we see but a poor reflection, but then we shall see face to face.*

If there is no sin in heaven, there will also be no death. He who is the Resurrection and the Life makes this promise: *There will never again be an infant there who lives for only a few days, or an elderly man who does not fill out his days, for one who dies at a hundred will be considered a young man, and one who fails to attain the age of one hundred will be regarded as cursed.* That is not to suggest people will die in heaven –this is only a picture after all. The point is that if you could measure time in heaven, 100 years would be nothing. Just a speck. After 100 years we’re barely getting started. It reminds us of that profound hymn verse: *When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun – we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun!*

We take photographs so as to hang on to memories. I’m sure if your family traveled to Hawaii this winter you’d take a lot of photos. But in heaven we won’t need to take photographs. That’s because heaven will be a moment that is never lost, because it stays. Time will not take anything away from us. God says, *Then they will build houses and live in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build a house and have another person live in it. They will not plant and have another person eat the crop, for the days of my people will be like the 4 days of a tree, and my chosen ones will enjoy all the work of their hands. They will not labor only to receive nothing, and they will not give birth to children doomed to disaster, for they will be offspring who are blessed by the Lord, and their descendants will be with them.*

Finally, in this portrait we see that our arch-enemy, the devil will be removed from our lives in heaven. Isaiah 65 says, *The serpent will eat dust as its food. They will not harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain, says the Lord.* Christ descended into hell to declare His victory over satan. When we say that in the Creed – he descended into hell – it wasn’t to suffer some more. He finished the job of suffering on the cross. His descent into hell was a victory march! Whether we realize it or not swarms of demons are pestering us every moment in a thousand different ways in this life. With that annoyance removed in heaven we will feel such relief that we won’t be able to decide whether to do our happy dance or sleep like a baby for the first thousand years.

Though Isaiah 65 only gives us a preview of heaven, know that the truths it conveys about heaven are reality. Know that this wonderful heaven is yours. It was opened to you when God put His name on you at your baptism. And like mom making a special meal to give her family a little pre-taste of Hawaii, your Savior has prepared a special meal, called the Lord's Supper, to give you a pre-taste of heaven.

Yes, now is the pre-taste, but then will be the full banquet. Now is the longing, but then will be the fulfillment. Now we only believe, but then we will see. Now we persevere, but then we will enjoy. Now we have only a portrait, but then we will live the experience.