

“Forget what lies behind...rejoice and be glad”

**Isaiah 65:17-25** <sup>17</sup> For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;<sup>1</sup> for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD -- and their descendants as well. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent -- its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

**1 Corinthians 15:19-26** <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.<sup>1</sup> <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup> for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end,<sup>1</sup> when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

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“If I were to contemporize Isaiah, it might sound something like this. “Behold! I am creating new heavens and a new earth. This futile world won’t be remembered anymore or even come to mind. This futile world where people weep and grieve and cry out in distress! No more will infants die in childbirth or be aborted or die of SIDS or fall into pools and drown in those few seconds when no one is looking. No more will people die short of full lives because of AIDS, cancer, drunk drivers, bird flu, or heart attacks. In my new heavens and new earth people will live long lives like trees do, full and meaningful lives.”

“No longer will you build homes and the banks foreclose on them because you lost your job because the stockholders weren’t making enough money because people aren’t buying the frivolous stuff you made that they once thought they needed. Now they need something more useless because everybody else has one and you just aren’t trained to make it. But, it wouldn’t matter if you were because your union has priced the cost of your sweat and blood out of the market and the stockholders have told the board to go manufacture in China where labour is cheap because it is slave labour.

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“Behold! In my new heavens and new earth that I am creating you will build your own home and you will live in it. You’ll plant your fields and vineyards and eat and drink the harvest. There won’t be anymore foreign governments subsidizing their farmers in violation of treaties and pricing you out of the market. There won’t be anymore corporate farming outfits and developers circling your land like wolves and lions ready to buy you out because the government thinks you’re a threat to the environment and yet they shell out money at outrageous interest rates to foreign farmers who scorch the earth to get a pitiful piece of land that’s good for only one season. In my new heavens and new earth you won’t have to mortgage your house to buy a tractor. You will be able to enjoy working your land and people who produce food will be called blessed and even their children will be blessed. No longer will your work be in vain.

“Behold! I am creating new heavens and a new earth. Forget the old things! Rejoice and be glad! I am making my home among you and you, my people, make me glad. I am with you. I am rejoicing with you. I am sharing in your gladness. Before you begin to cry out I answer you. Before you even begin to speak, I hear you. *I am with you.* In my new heavens and new earth no one will hurt another. Indeed, never will anyone destroy another for their own gain. Those days are passing, forget them. Don’t let them come to mind.”

Well, if Isaiah were speaking to us today, that is what I believe he would say. Am I simply being idealistic to think, to believe, to know that at this very moment God is creating new heavens and a new earth where Isaiah’s vain ‘imagination’ are becoming reality. Why do I think this? Why do I believe this? How do I know this? Because God raised Jesus the Christ from the dead. I know this because I know that God is with us, that he rejoices over us, that he is glad with us. He has blessed us with his Holy Spirit abiding in and among us. He truly answers us before we can call out and hears us before we can begin to speak. Since God is with us, what else can we conclude than that God is creating new heavens and a new earth before our very eyes that we might behold it and it began when God raised Jesus from the dead.

You see, in the early church, Jesus’ resurrection meant something. It meant that the end times which the prophets had foretold were beginning. These days we don’t quite see where Jesus’ resurrection really matters. This has become so evident that certain Christian denominations today say that Jesus wasn’t really the creating and life-giving Word of God become human flesh to bear our sin and death unto death so that sin and death will cease to be in his resurrection. They say we’ve progressed beyond all that naïve believing; just feel spiritual and love – that’s all that matters. Paul would say to these Christian denominations today, “You are indeed the most pitiable of all people there ever were.” I shouldn’t point the finger at others. If you were to survey Presbyterian congregations this morning, you would find that Resurrection is little more than an analogy for why there are butterflies and cocoons. You will hear that God’s bodily raising Jesus from the dead is simply proof that we will go to heaven as disembodied souls when we die.

I challenge you to read the Bible and prove to me that the content of the Christian Gospel is that we will go to heaven and live forever as disembodied

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souls because we made the decision to believe in Jesus. It can't be done without pulling a verse from here and from there and putting them together in some strange formula that says believe this and you will go to heaven. The Biblical content of the Gospel when you take it from Genesis the Book of Revelation is built indisputably upon what God says through Isaiah. “Behold, I am creating a new heaven and a new earth.” If we want to call that place we go to after death heaven, then we have to know that what we call heaven is a new earth and moreover we're getting our bodies back. Heaven is new creation which means new heavens and new earth. In this new earth there will finally be peace, justice, equity, and physical wholeness. That's what salvation is when you read the Bible from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. What makes salvation a reality is the presence of God with his people. New heavens and a new earth, resurrection, peace, justice, equity, physical wholeness and God's presence fully with us that is what we are headed for and this fact calls us to forget the former things and rejoice and be glad for we live in the new.

You see, in the early church Jesus' resurrection meant that the days of God creating new heavens and a new earth had begun and would continue to germinate until Christ, the first fruit from among the dead, returns and the new heavens and the new earth blossom forth like flowers in the desert (Is. 35). Isaiah speaks about a New Jerusalem and a new people of God and God being in their midst. That day has come to pass! We are in the midst of it. God has created a New Jerusalem. It's the Church universal of which we are a part. We are his people and he is in our midst. The New Creation has begun and we are living testimony to it until Jesus returns and brings it in its entirety. As the living testimony to New Creation we the people of God are called to live in the present the way we shall be in that day. This is not idealism. You see, if God is with us then certainly he has enabled us and not only us as a congregation but the Christian faith as a whole, God has enabled us to be a community of people who love so deeply that there is peace, justice, equity and physical wholeness now and not just in the future.

We, the church, are to be a human community where the people who produce food, both at home and abroad, are given a fair chance and are appreciated for being the blessing that they are. We could do this if we Christians would quit buying things we don't need and rather set the example when it comes to sustainable lifestyles. We need to be those who live healthily and not to excess. We need to use our clout in numbers to press for research and development in the areas of curing disease rather than letting the pharmaceutical companies get away with profiting from treating the symptoms of disease. We are the ones who are to be working to see to it that people have adequate housing and it would help if we ourselves stopped buying such elaborate housing for ourselves. We are to be human community where human rights are not violated and lives are not destroyed in order to protect a particular lifestyle. We have to hold our governments accountable to do the same.

You see, God raised Jesus from the dead and we, his church, are living proof of it. And since God raised Jesus from the dead the new heavens and new earth have begun to come into existence. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new

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creation as Paul says. Go forth and live as those who have been raised from the dead. The same Spirit that lives in Jesus lives in us and enables us to be the living testimony to the way things will be in the New Creation. We cannot solve the world's problem, but we really are able to be the evidence that God's got better plans for his creation. Therefore, let us premise our lives on the way things will be rather than just being like everybody else and thinking we're blessed because we live in comfort. Amen.