

New Heavens and a New Earth – Isaiah 65:17-25

Introduction – The Lord declares a redemptive work of His Messiah so immense, so sweeping, so unstoppable – and so tangible in the life of the world. Our world. And while its consummation will only be realized when He comes again, it was finished in principle and began when Jesus rose from the dead 2000 years ago. In that sense, Isaiah declares, you are living in that world now.

The New in the New Creation – The new heavens and earth are so wonderful in their redemption everything associated with the old world will be forgotten (v17, also Jer 3:16). God commands Israel to rejoice *then* for what He was going to do in the *future* for the very nature of Jerusalem will be gladness and the nature of her people will be joy (v18). God Himself will rejoice over what He will have redeemed with such measure that no weeping will be heard (v19). There will be the “shalom” of long life (v20), productivity and prosperity (v21), and the enjoyment of the labor of one’s hands (v22). This age will see children’s children following in the unbounded blessings of God and no longer under the curse (v23). There will be unhindered access to communication and fellowship with God for everyone in the covenant (v24), and the most “natural enemies” will no longer be a threat at all (v25).

Too Good to be True (in the Here and Now) – The language of promise and joy and blessing are so full in this passage that we tend to think this must be speaking of life in eternity after the end of the world. In Rev 21:1 John sees the “*new heavens and the new earth*” and in 2 Pet 3:13 Peter tells persecuted Christians that we “*according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*” But this passage (and therefore these passages) cannot be speaking about time after the end of the age in which we live. For in this passage there is still death, people building, working and having children. Again and again, Isaiah has used this kind of language to describe what would happen when the Messiah came and established His new order as everlasting King (2:1-4, 11:6-9, 25:6, 26:15, 35:1-10, 60:10-22, etc.). Isaiah is not changing the subject or his central message: a great judgment was coming, but that judgment would bring forth a glorious, cosmos-shaking change: the salvation of the world (John 3:14-17).

But It is Here and Now – This is the language of the Word of God. Time and again we have seen such language of the victory of Christ in the prophecies of Isaiah; time and again we see the writers of the New Testament declaring that victory coming forth in their generation with the destruction of the elemental things, the old covenant order, and the bringing forth of the new covenant and creation. When we gather on the Lord’s Day, we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22-23). We have been “*born from above*” (John 3:3) and we are now citizens of the Heavenly City (Eph 2:19, Phil 3:20) even while we live as ambassadors and pilgrims on this earth. If you are in Christ Jesus then you are a new creation and all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17).

“But We See Jesus...” – It is a common temptation to believe that this is all hyperbole, because we do not yet see all things put in subjection to this victory of Christ. This same admonition is for us too: “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone...*” (Heb 2:9). It is so important to remember that the recipients of that letter had not and were not seeing Jesus at that time – with their eyes. We all “see” Jesus when the gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and received by faith (1 Cor 2:2-5). Those who are His hear His voice in the preaching of the Great Shepherd (John 10:27-28).

Crazy Optimism – What if, with eyes of faith, with eyes that “see” Jesus, we actually believed that Isaiah was speaking about life in our day, in the days of this New Creation? Look again at the description of blessings we would be praying for, believing on, cultivating, anticipating, and initiating. Reimagine Christ in this service of worship (v19). Contemplate the new mercies of God every day in a life full of His blessings upon the labors of your hands (vv20-22). Stand on the promises of God for your children and children’s children (and with this congregation for all of our children – v23). Apply the promises of a listening God to your Psalm-singing and to your prayers, and to fruitful Bible Study as you seek His Word for you (v24). Work for the end of all ungodly enmity, hatred, and malice, knowing that you are cutting with the grain of what God is bringing forth (v25).

It is certainly true that righteousness does not dwell in the earth in an absolute sense; nor will this world ever be absolutely righteous, until the final enemy is defeated at the Second Coming of Christ. The war between Christ and Satan for dominion over the earth is not over yet. We all experience this battle in a myriad of ways in our own lives, day to day. But we are not fighting a battle we will lose. In fact, we are fighting a battle where nothing we do in the Lord will go to waste. When Paul wrote his great chapter on the resurrection (1 Cor 15), he didn’t tell us to celebrate only what will happen then. He ends by saying, “so know this – none of your labor for the kingdom is in vain” (15:58). “*When the final resurrection occurs, as the centerpiece of God’s new creation, we will discover that everything done in the present world in the power of Jesus’s own resurrection will be celebrated and included, appropriately transformed*” – N.T. Wright.

It almost seems as if it takes some kind of supernatural faith to actually believe all of this. And of course, it does. Jesus is Lord. Do you believe as the great hymn says, “*He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found?*”