

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Isaiah 65:17-25
Sermon Title: "A World to Look Forward to"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA
November 17, 2013

I don't know what it is like to run a marathon, but it must be pure joy to see the finish line after traveling 26.2 miles, having passed over every hill and made every turn, somehow getting through the leg cramps and overall exhaustion. I don't know what it is to be on the team that makes the winning touchdown, but it must be pure joy to have started on your own 5-yard line, and moving the ball 95 yards to the other end, and with no time on the clock punching the ball into the end zone and winning the game. I don't know what it was like living during the time of Isaiah, but it must have been pure joy, when God finally spoke to his people, finally told them that God is bringing in a new heaven and a new earth. God would finally rule over all without the threat of war or poverty or disease or sin.¹

"No more" is the word that should jump out at us. The thought is repeated in Isaiah 65. No more premature death, and no more wondering why we were

¹ Cf. Isaiah 65:17.

created. No more working for something and not getting a reward for it. No more weeping and carrying on – no more calling out to God and doubting that God will answer.

As we read through Isaiah – and as we read through any of the prophets – we get a sense that the people have gone through a lot. They are battle-worn and tired. They have endured every setback and failure – they have suffered many defeats and have had to go back to the drawing board time and time again to draw up new plans, which would also fall apart. Much of their failure seems to be of their own making. They ignored what God wanted them to do to keep them from defeat and suffering, and built idols from wood and stone, and thought those lifeless idols could save them from themselves. They chose to pursue their own pleasures, set up their own security, and elevate themselves over others, and they still suffered and became more miserable. They chose not to live as God created us to live, as selfless people interested in the good of the other person to the glory of God.

“No more,” God says. “All of this is finished in the world to come.” You who are battle-worn and tired will be restored. No more building up homes and vineyards, and then not being able to live in them or

work in them. Isaiah is talking about the threat of war and conquest.² There will be no worry of somebody coming in and taking over what we have worked so hard to build up, because in the world to come everybody will have their homes and families and the means to do work. Everybody will rejoice in what they have and not covet what somebody else has, for we will know that what we have is a blessing from God to do God's work in the world to come.

Isaiah is also talking about unfaithfulness, when he mentions homes and vineyards being overtaken by others.³ When the children of Israel completely turned away from God with their selfish living, God literally removed them from the land he gave them. They were parceled out to Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria, foreign countries with foreign gods, who didn't care what the children of Israel believed or felt. When God says no more building homes and having others taking over, the idea is there is no more unfaithfulness toward God. There is no reason to turn away from God to pursue other destructive lifestyles. There is no reason to trade God in for something worthless and pointless, because God will be our all in all. Again, everyone is happy with what God has given him or her: a home, a family, a place to serve, a place to worship, a life that

² John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*, cf. 688.

³ Motyer, *Isaiah*, cf. 451.

is dedicated solely to God.

No more young children living but a few days and old men and women not completing every year of their lives. The issue is death, which is what we all have to deal with. Sadly, everybody dies. Everything dies. Death cuts short the life of a child, who might have done great things for society. Death cuts short the life of someone who has been around for a long time, but who didn't live long enough to do more great things. God says no more to all of this. In the world to come everybody lives. They live as long as needed, beyond 100 years if necessary. They live to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

This part of Isaiah is a bit confusing, because Isaiah seems to suggest that in this world to come death will still be around. There may still be an end to things, which makes us wonder if there will be an end to this world to come. One thing is sure when all the prophets speak of the world to come: death will eventually not be welcome. It will be stopped by God's words, "No More," and all will enjoy God forever. Sin will be stopped, as well. Although people may live and live and live, they cannot live for themselves. They must live every day for God. Even the sinner who lives 100 years is accursed, removed from the glory of God,

because life is not a gift to keep to oneself, life is a gift to share. No more straying from God, no more thinking that something else is better. God is our all in all in the world to come.

No more weeping and no more crying, as verse 19 says. It almost sounds like we are repeating ourselves, as though weeping and crying are one and the same. However, one of my commentaries makes an interesting point. It says that “weeping is felt pain” while “crying is inflicted pain.”⁴ Weeping comes from feeling pain within us, that sort of pain that we suffer for no apparent reason. It’s just there, gnawing at us and causing us to panic and weep. It seems to follow us, no matter where we go, and we try to get rid of it. On the opposite end, crying is a reaction to pain inflicted on us. We stub a toe and we cry out. Somebody hurts our feelings or breaks a promise, and we react with a scream of pain. Whether we are being hurt by others or we feel a dread inside that will not go away, God say, “No more.” No more weeping and no more crying in the world to come. We will not feel any pain at all, because God will remove pain to fill us with something better. God will fill us with himself. That gnawing feeling will have no home and will disappear.

⁴ J. Alec Motyer, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Isaiah*, 450.

Inside we will be at peace with God in the world to come. No more crying, because nothing may harm us. Nobody will wish to hurt us. We will all be at peace within – God residing within and making a home – and thus we will want to be at peace with everyone in this world to come.

A new earth and a new heaven are arriving, Isaiah says. Jesus speaks of the new world to come in the Gospels, and Revelation mentions a new heaven and earth toward the end of the book. “I create new heavens and a new earth,” God says in Isaiah 65, “and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.” When “the former things” is usually mentioned, we are talking about the old, sinful ways. In this present heaven and earth, death and selfishness and weeping and crying occupy our time. These are the old sinful things we have to deal with on a daily basis. We remember them full well, because they invade our lives each day. But in God’s new heavens and earth, the former things fade away. No more losing anything or anyone, no more sin, no more death. We do not remember those old, sinful things, because they will not exist. We will not speak of them, because we will have no memory of them. They won’t be around to bug us. It will be as though they never existed in the

first place.

Death and selfishness and weeping and crying will no longer occupy our time, and the former ways of viewing the world we live in will not be remembered any more, too. In our present heaven and earth, the planet is basically seen as something we can use for our own purposes. Our planet is like a big storehouse from which we can extract anything: coal, oil, natural gas, minerals, rocks, water, anything.

There was an oil company that put on a TV commercial years and years ago – it might have been sponsored by Exxon or Shell – but on the screen were displayed two identical Earths. Same land masses and same clouds formations. A voice says, “Wouldn’t it be great to have two Earths, so that we would have double the resources for all our needs?” No, we wouldn’t. We would have double the pollution, double the deforestation, double the abuse we already create on this planet. Both worlds would suffer doubly because of human negligence.

God says that new heavens and a new earth are arriving, but not for us to act like vacuum cleaners that sweep away everything the world to come has to offer. God says, “I create new heavens and a new earth.” These new heavens and earth are God’s alone, just as the current heavens and earth are supposed to

be God's alone. We are supposed to be God's own people, set apart from everything else, but sin came in and messed it up. Sin caused us to exploit the heavens and earth, viewing our world as a place to cut apart, divide up, and absorb it all for our corrupt purposes. "No more," God says.

The new heavens and earth will bring about the kind of place God intended for us before sin interrupted. In this world to come, God brings a new way of doing things. God brings a new perspective of how to work in the world and fashion it for God's holy purposes. There is no cutting up and dividing, but mending and building and bringing all things together. The world to come is nothing we exploit, but a place we enjoy.

One of the prominent English poets, Elizabeth Barrett Browning once said, "Earth is crammed with heaven and every bush aflame with God, but only those who see take off their shoes."⁵ In the world to come we will take off our shoes and honor God. We will all be face-to-face with God in all glory, in all peace, in all security. This world to come will be a place of healing, so much so that the wolf and lamb will feed together. The lamb won't be the food on the plate for the wolf, but both will enjoy food and

⁵ Philip Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places*, 26.

fellowship together. Even the lion and oxen will eat straw and think nothing of it. “There shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,” God says at the end of Isaiah 65.⁶ This world to come is not ours but is God’s and God’s alone. God creates it to share with us, and we dwell together in God’s holiness.

When life has been lived and we can finally rest from our labors, what awaits us at the end is a place more glorious than we may imagine, more perfect than we may ever dream. We have been through so much in life, some of it not too pleasant. We may have much more to endure in the near and distant future, and some of it might not be pleasant. But the world to come awaits us. God’s “No More” will resound all around us, and sin and death and weeping and crying will be gone.

In the meantime, as Paul told his assistant Titus, we say No to the ungodliness and worldly passions on this current world.⁷ We say No to the nagging feeling within to weep, and say No to the need to cry when things do not go our way. We say No and press on, living out all the day that God gives us. With sobriety, with righteousness, with godly living, we endure all this world may offer, because we know another world

⁶ Cf. Isaiah 65:25.

⁷ Cf. Titus 2:11-13.

is coming. Christ will appear to us, and glory will surround us, and we will know that we have made it. The finish line is here, and the greatest reward ever to be won is handed to us.