

# A Glimpse of Heaven

Isaiah 65:17-25

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One of the things that I think most of us have come to appreciate about the internet is the fact that there are reviews of most anything online. So if you are planning to make a purchase, you can read the reviews of others who have spent time with the product. If you're planning a trip, you can read reviews of others who have been there to get an idea of what's worth visiting and what's not. If you're planning to go out to eat or hire a contractor of some sort, often there are reviews of these things to help you get an idea of what to expect. The best reviews are specific; after reading them you feel like you have a pretty good understanding of what you can expect.

In a sense, I see our passage this morning as a bit like these online reviews. The Lord, speaking through Isaiah, gives us a glimpse of a place we've never been before and helps us to understand what it will be like. He uses vivid imagery to help us have some sense of the place before we ever go. In these verses, the Lord gives us a glimpse of heaven—and the picture we see ought to make us eager to go there.

## New Heavens and Earth

The first thing the Lord tells us is that He is going to remake our world.

<sup>17</sup> “Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. (Isaiah 65:17, NLT)

These words echo the words of John in Revelation when he said,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. (Revelation 21:1, NLT)

John was reporting what he saw in a vision given to him by the Lord. In Isaiah, we have the Lord himself speaking, telling us what He is going to do. Both passages tell us that God is going to remake our world.

Why would God remake the world? Because it has been tainted by sin. Every aspect of creation was affected when Adam and Eve sinned. Because sin has corrupted our world, it is unsuitable for an eternal home. So, God must restore, renew, and recreate our world sinless. And not only will the heavens and earth be remade, 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that the Lord will remake our bodies sinless and incorruptible as well.

These verses tell us that some things about Heaven will be very familiar because it will be on a restored earth. But it will also be vastly different, because all we have ever experienced is the earth after sin had entered the world.

In this opening verse the Lord gives us a sense of how much better the new earth will be—He says that no one will even think about the old earth anymore! I don't think He is saying our memories will be erased, but rather that we will be so consumed with the

wonder of this new creation that we won't even take time to think about the world we had previously inhabited. Things like cancer, war, terrorism, fighting—these things will be so foreign to us in Heaven that they will completely pass from our minds.

The closest analog that I can think of (recognizing that it pales in comparison) is when you take a good vacation. Even when we're on vacation far away, many of us still start wondering about how things are back at home, or at work, or we still worry about the challenges in our lives. But on the ideal vacation, you are so engaged in something you enjoy that you completely forget about your life back home. It just never even enters your mind. I believe the Lord is telling us that this is what heaven will be like—only we will never have to go back to the life we left. It will be our experience for all of eternity.

## **The Purpose of Heaven**

God also tells us what the point of all this will be,

<sup>18</sup> Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more. (Isaiah 65:18-19, NLT)

God's purpose in recreating the world and redeeming us is to bring joy. This new creation will bring joy to us, but also to the Lord. Much like a parent wants to give their children good things, the Lord desires to give us, His children, good things. He desires to give us things that He knows will bring us great joy. Maybe you have had a time when you've felt like you got someone the perfect gift. You watch with eager expectation as they open it. Why? Because you love them and want them to enjoy what you've gotten for them. You find joy in their joy. You do this to demonstrate your love for them. I think that's part of what God will do with the new creation. He finds joy in bringing us joy.

But God doesn't just find joy in seeing us enjoy His creation. He finds joy in His restored relationship with His people. Sin has created separation between us and God, but in Heaven, sin will be abolished, and we will be free to have the relationship God always intended for us to have with Him.

A big part of this restored relationship will center around us understanding just how much God loves us. As we realize how much better this new world is, we will understand just how much our sin messed things up. I think we will also understand how it is only by God's grace that we have been redeemed. And that will fuel our worship for Him. We will finally understand how much He loves us—and we will enjoy a relationship with God that is richer than we could imagine. And that brings joy to the Lord.

## **A Heavenly Preview**

The Lord then turns His attention to telling us how different the new earth will be from the earth we currently inhabit. There are lots of changes that will be a part of this new world.

<sup>20</sup> “No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young! <sup>21</sup> In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards. <sup>22</sup> Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses and confiscate their vineyards. For my people will live as long as trees, and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains. <sup>23</sup> They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune. For they are people blessed by the Lord, and their children, too, will be blessed. <sup>24</sup> I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers! <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. But the snakes will eat dust. In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain. I, the Lord, have spoken!” (Isaiah 65:20-25, NLT)

The Lord uses lots of images that help to show us just how thoroughly different Heaven will be from the life we have known so far. Let’s enumerate some of the differences God mentions.

**First, there will no longer be death.** He says no longer will babies die at a few days old. Throughout most of history, infant mortality has been much higher than it is in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. The death of a child was a common experience to most people. He is not necessarily saying that there will be babies or that we will reproduce, only that this kind of experience will be gone. Similarly, He says adults won’t die before they have lived a full life. No longer will we have to mourn that someone “died too soon.” He says people won’t be considered old at 100—because everyone will live far longer than that.

The statement that “only the cursed will die that young” seems confusing. Will there be people who will die in Heaven? Will there be people in Heaven that God will curse? No, again, the Lord is just drawing a contrast with this life. In our life, a person who has lived to 100 has lived a full life—in Heaven, 100 years is nothing. The point of all these statements is that one of the greatest tragedies of this world is death—and it is a tragedy that touches every one of us. But death will be absent in Heaven. Neither death, nor disease, nor decay will be part of the new creation God promises.

**Second, there will not be injustice.** Much of the human experience deals with injustice. We often feel that our hard work doesn’t result in the payoff we expect. Sometimes it’s because we have too high of expectations, but other times it is because we are being treated unfairly. In truth, we often feel as though we’re robbed of what we feel we have earned—by our employers, by the government, by predatory business practices, and many others. Still other times, we are robbed of things we deserve due to circumstances outside our control. A natural disaster, illness, an untimely death.

There are lots of ways that we face a seemingly unjust world. But the Lord promises that in Heaven we will get to enjoy the things we have worked hard for. We will enjoy the fruits of our labor and the blessings of God. Injustice will be absent in Heaven.

**Third, we will enjoy redeemed work.** Many people are surprised when they learn that we will work in Heaven. Much of the time, we view work as a drudgery, an unfortunate part of the sinful world in which we live. We imagine that work is a “necessary evil.” But work is not evil—God created us to be productive. Adam and Eve were given jobs to do by the Lord prior to the fall. They took care of the Garden of Eden and the animals. It is only after sin entered the world that God said their work would be difficult, that became hard labor. Before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve simply found joy in the work they did, without the frustrations we often associate with work. I believe in Heaven we work like Adam and Eve did before the fall. Working gives us the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to the world and the people around us. In Heaven, we will get to be engaged in work that is meaningful, rather than frustrating.

**Fourth, peace will reign.** The Lord describes a kind of peace so pervasive that it even affects the animals. Predator and prey will lie down and play together without fear of being harmed. They will share meals, but not worry that one of them is on the menu. I believe this goes beyond animals. There will be no more violence in this world—only peace. Families will no longer break apart, there will not be tension between people, and the things that divide us in this life will give way to a unity we find only in Christ.

**Fifth, we will have a new closeness to God.** The Lord says that He will answer our prayers while we are still praying! I think part of this will be a result of our own redemption. Much of the time I think the Lord doesn’t answer us as we would like in this life because what we are asking for is not what is best. But I think once we are redeemed from sin, we will no longer will we desire things that aren’t good for us. We will ask the Lord for things that are good and right, and He will delight to give them to us! We will discover a new closeness with God that we have always longed to have, whether we realized we longed for it or not. We will find a satisfaction in Heaven that is greater than what we can even fathom—not because of the beauty of the world, but because of the fullness of our relationship with God. He is what we all truly long for, and in that time, we will finally be with Him.

## **How Can We Get There?**

If you’re like me, all of this sounds wonderful, and seems like a life that is worth looking forward to. But there are a couple big questions that this passage probably raises in your mind.

**First, how can we know this is true?** That is a fair question, because the skeptical side of us hears these things and thinks they sound too good to be true. Maybe you even find yourself saying (or have heard others say) the notion of Heaven is just an invention of religion to get people to obey and stay in line. People claim there’s no way to know that Heaven is real—that there is life beyond the grave. I beg to differ. I think there is ample evidence for us to believe that what God says is real.

First of all, we can be certain that these things will come true because it is God who is saying them. We’ve spent the last year looking at all the things God has promised in Isaiah, some of which were still hundreds of years in the future. Time and again we

have seen God's promises fulfilled just as He said they would be. He has consistently proven himself faithful, so we have no reason to doubt that He will also fulfill this promise.

Second, we do have evidence of life beyond the grave. That evidence is Jesus. Jesus experienced death in this life, but then came back and promised that there was eternal life in Heaven. He promised that He was going to prepare a place for us to be with Him. There have been lots of religious figures throughout history, but Jesus is unique among them. All of them died...but Jesus is the only one who didn't stay dead. He demonstrated definitively that He has power over death. Other people can claim whatever they want, but Jesus has a credibility no one else has, because He has shown He has power over life and death. We can know this is true because God has given us plenty of evidence that we can take Him at His word.

**Second, how can we be sure we will experience Heaven?** This is probably the most important question we can ask. Sadly, most people seem to believe that all you need to do to go to Heaven is to die. We hear this sentiment at funerals all the time. Everyone seems to believe that their loved ones are "in a better place." I understand that—I want to believe that about my loved ones as well. But the Bible doesn't say that every person goes to Heaven when they die. Rather, the Bible seems to say Heaven is the exception rather than the rule.

Listen to what Jesus said about this,

"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. <sup>14</sup> But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (Matthew 7:13-14, NLT)

Jesus is clear that there are two potential destinations for us after our life on this earth. One is Heaven, but sadly, Jesus says the far more common destination is Hell. What determines our destination? Our destination is determined by who we follow. We face a choice—will we follow the Lord or will we follow something else? Our world tells us that we should do what we think is best, that we should live according to our own desires, and that because God is loving, He will overlook our rebellion and our refusal to recognize Him as the King He is. But Jesus says that if we follow the way of the world, that road leads to Hell. The only way for us to experience Heaven is to trust in what Jesus has done for us at the cross and to follow His direction for our lives. If we trust in and follow Jesus, we can have assurance that we will be with Jesus in Heaven when we die. We must each choose who we will follow. I think we should follow the One who has promised a place for us and proved His own power over death.

As we look at this passage about Heaven, we should take stock of our own lives and ask, which road am I on? Who am I following? I would encourage you not to take this question lightly. Honestly evaluate your heart and ask where you are placing your trust and your hope for eternity. If it is on anything other than what Jesus has done for you,

and if you are following something or someone other than Jesus, then you are on the wrong road. I implore you to change course before it's too late.

## Conclusion

This passage is one of the more uplifting ones we've seen in Isaiah. It is fun to imagine what our experience of Heaven will be like. As we look around at our fallen and broken world, it is encouraging to know that one day our world will be restored and delivered from sin. But God doesn't give us this information just so we can answer trivia questions—we are supposed to do something with it. I've got some applications.

**First, we should find new motivation to follow the Lord.** As we look at what God has promised, we see that He is faithful and that He loves us. God desires what is best for us. This means that what God tells us to do is best, even when we don't fully understand it—even when it seems to go against the conventional wisdom of our day. This passage reminds us that God delights in bringing joy to His people, so we should be emboldened in living for Him even as we await the day when all things will be restored. Living His way is the recipe for joy.

**Second, we should find hope.** The world we see around us is in shambles. It sure doesn't give us any signs that things are going to get better any time soon. But God promises a day when all things will be redeemed. We shouldn't let this world get us down too much because it is only temporary. That reality also gives us hope as we face death. Death is inevitable, it is part of the human experience. But this passage reminds us that we don't need to fear death if we are in Christ, because we know that what awaits us is far better than we've ever experienced.

**Third, we should make sure others get to experience the glory of Heaven too.** Most people in the world believe they will go to Heaven when they die, but the vast majority are actually on a different path. Some imagine they are going to Hell, but reason that it will be ok, because it will be a big party with all their friends. They are sorely mistaken. God has given us a glimpse of Heaven, and we ought to want everyone to experience what He has prepared for us. The most loving thing we can do is to make sure people understand the gospel message—that people know that through Christ they can be assured they'll be in Heaven when their life on this earth ends. We can't make people believe, but we can (and should) make sure they have everything they need to believe in the hopes that they too will spend eternity with us in Heaven.

I hope you are encouraged today as you see a glimpse of what awaits those who trust in Christ. I hope you see in these verses God's love for you, His desire to bring joy to your life, and that fact that He will rejoice at our restored relationship with Him. Our understanding of Heaven shouldn't make us apathetic about this life. On the contrary, knowing what awaits us should embolden us to live for the Lord because we trust in His plan, both for this life and the one to come.

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