

November 18, 2007
Saints Triumphant

"We Are Saints Triumphant"

ISAIAH 65:17-25

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. ²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

When we gather here for worship such as we are doing this morning we are celebrating the joy of being who we are in Christ our blessed Savior. We are saints triumphant washed clean by his blood and covered with his righteousness. We also celebrate the future joy of being together with the Lord with resurrected bodies in the place he has prepared for us.

In 2003 they did research on the happiest people in the world. What country came out on top? Not the USA but Nigeria. You already know that the key to happiness is not to be found a big television screen that impresses your friends, garages full of stuff, eating the best food, or shopping until you drop. The people in Nigeria, the most crowded country in Africa, say that happiness is found in their faith, and their families and the simpler things in life.

The level of joy on your joy meter goes up dramatically when you see yourself for who you are in Christ. You are a saint triumphant with big smile on your face because of the new heaven and new earth Jesus prepared for you. The joy on your joy meter also jumps up when you see all the places or zones or venues here in this life where the Lord is waiting to impress you with his love.

We triumph in our future glory

Listen to what the Lord says he has waiting for you. "Behold, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." When God created the original world he created it perfect and it says after each day of creation, "And God saw that it was good."

We like new things like the smell of fresh sheets that have been hanging on the line, or that new car smell, or the new computer that goes so much faster than the old machine that slogged along, or the new dress that brings compliments from people at work, or new a friend that comes into your life and brings you joy and happiness. In the place Jesus has prepared for us, everything will be new. The present troubled world will be destroyed.

Listen to these words from 2 Peter 3, "That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven, and new earth, the home of righteousness." We will have new bodies, without the aches and pains and imperfections of our present bodies. We will have new relationships as we enjoy the perfection we see in each other in what the Bible calls a home of righteousness.

In this new world the Lord has for us there will be no painful memories of the past. Some of our soldiers experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) They may have flashbacks to deaths of other soldiers, triggered by the smell, or sight or sound that suddenly brings up the past. All the pains and scars from life on this earth will not haunt you in the place Jesus has for you. Angry words that hurt you will be forgotten forever. That nasty surgery or the sorrow of losing someone you loved, these will all be forgotten. All these things you did wrong in your life that never seem to quite go away from your memory bank will all be forgotten. Even the horrible rejections you have seen to Jesus' love among family members and friends, they will also be forgotten and they will not haunt you when you are with Jesus.

In this new heaven and new earth, joy and happiness will go on forever. "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people, the sound of weeping and crying will be heard it in no more." Forever we will rejoice in what the Lord creates for us. He creates the heavenly Jerusalem to be delight and all the people there to be a joy. The Lord rejoices over the new world he makes. The people experience first hand the joy of their Lord as they see him face to face.

In the Revelation John writes about seeing this new Jerusalem. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband....They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." The people of Nigeria may hold claim to being some of the happiest people in the world, but their joy does not even come anywhere near the joy that will be ours in the place our Lord Jesus is so carefully preparing for us. As we sing in the spiritual song, "No more crying there, we are going to see the Lord."

Can you be sure that this very special place is yours and it is waiting there for you? If your hope is based on how well you have performed this past week, then you are in serious trouble, and so am I. Take an inventory of the best moments of your life. Take those shining moments that sparkle like the expensive diamond that sold for 16 million dollars recently. Take your best acts of kindness and your most glorious moments with the Lord. You will discover they still have a smell of sin attached to them, like smoke that lingers on

clothes and hair. It just doesn't go away. Listen to what Isaiah said in the previous chapter. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like wind our sins sweep us away." Even if you were to donate a thousand turkeys to the local food bank it could not compensate the Lord for one bad thought you had when you were a little child.

We need Jesus. We need his blood to wash us clean, and his righteousness to cover us. Then we can sing, "Bold shall I stand in that great day Who can a word against me say? Fully through you absolved I am From sin and fear, from guilt and shame." Fully absolved through Jesus, declared forgiven, declared righteous, sin removed as far as the east is from the west. Here is how you are described in the Revelation: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." There is so much to look forward to as we anticipate Jesus saying these words to us, "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

We triumph in our present glory

The past is forgiven. The future is guaranteed. The present is also exciting as you contemplate those special places the Lord has waiting for you because you are his saints washed by the blood of Jesus. He already has planned those moments, his shining moments, when he will overwhelm you with his love.

Isaiah pictures the joy we have in the Lord's love for us by describing a long and happy life for those who are in Christ as they live each day with his mercy that never fails. "Never again will there be an infant who lives but a few days, or and old man ho does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought to be a mere youth, he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. The ancient people equated long life on this earth as a blessing from God. The Lord uses this picture of long life to illustrate how special you are to him. It seems to me from my visits in the various nursing homes that the longer people live the more problems they have in their lives. What if every day of your life on this earth was lived with an abundance of God's love and mercy? Then every day would be special. I don't think we can ever exhaust the peace and joy that comes from knowing goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. Even the bad days become good days when that very special mercy, loyalty and love (Hebrew word chesed) of our God is new to us every morning.

Did you hear what happened to the former Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O Conner? Her husband, an Alzheimer's patient in Arizona has found a new girlfriend in the nursing home. She is happy for him because he has found someone to be close to him, when at times even the famous judge and her family are hardly known to him. The love and mercy and kindness and goodness and faithfulness of the Lord never changes, even if our minds become weak and feeble, even down to the last days of our lives on this earth.

This loyalty and faithfulness of our God is further described in joyful pictures of building houses and planting vineyards and eating fruit. I heard a woman, A Laotian refugee, describe how simple and beautiful their lives were in the homeland. People lived in simple homes built with their own hands, they interacted in the villages, they traveled on bicycles

and walked, they ate together as a family. When you hear someone speak this way you realize the value of living together and sharing love and closeness with each other in a family. You are God's family. You are saints triumphant. You have a fruitful life because you are attached as a branch to Jesus the vine, and his love for you never fails you. "Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We are a people blessed by the Lord, his descendants. We are his children. That means we can go to the Lord in prayer and he hears our prayers even before they are formed on our lips. "Before they call I will answer, while they are still speaking I will hear." We have direct access to the Father through Jesus who said, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you."

Then there is the peace we have in Jesus, a peace this world cannot give. "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord. Every day we glory in how the Lord helps us live our lives in peace and harmony with other people, loving them more than we love ourselves. We enjoy the fruit being produced in ourselves and in others, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Have you ever had tension in your family, in your marriage, with a brother or sister, with your parents? Because of who you are in Jesus, a saint triumphant, you are able to even triumph over your weakness and live at peace, the way a wolf and lamb are described as living together. Such is the power of the Lord to change our lives now in this life, and the best is yet to come. We are saints triumphant. We really are saints triumphant. Amen.