

**Saints Triumphant
November 13, 2016**

“Hope for the Future and the Present”

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 you read the Old Testament prophet Isaiah you have mixed feelings and emotions. There is sadness when you hear the Lord condemn the idolatry and rebellion of his people. You realize with sadness this same idolatry and rebellion is found today in people we know and love. Earlier in this chapter the Lord says, “All day I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.”

There is also great joy that comes with reading Isaiah as you see the Lord reaching out to his people to bring them back to himself. In chapter 1 the Lord says: “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool.”

On this Saints Triumphant Sunday, what joy we find in the words we just read where the Lord promises to create for us a new heaven and new earth. Not only is there hope for the future in a new heaven and new earth, but there is hope for the present as the Lord pictures a very rich and abundant life for us right now in the blessings we have in Jesus our Savior. As saints triumphant, let’s take a closer look at these comforting words from Isaiah as we hear more about the hope that we have in the future and the hope that we have in present.

Hope for the future

What hope we have in the future! The Lord says, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” Let’s not just brush over this word “Behold.” The Lord wants to stop everything we are doing

and just look up at what he is preparing for us in the future.

"I create new heavens and a new earth." God created the world in which we live by the power of his Word. He looked at his creation and saw that it was good, that it was perfect. Someday our God will destroy this present world in which we live and create a new heavens and new earth. This new world will be perfect. It will be designed by our God to provide us with the greatest joy and happiness. Jesus tells us in John 14 that he is going to prepare a place for us. If he prepares a place for us you know that it will be good, far better than anything you could possibly design for yourself.

Every year HGTV (Home and Garden TV) offers a dream home that they remodel and then offer to the lucky winner. Last year 137 million people sent in their names for this dream home in Merritt Island, Florida. Only one person won. Only one was lucky. Our Lord God offers us a dream home in heaven that is far better and it cost us nothing. It comes to us through Jesus suffering and death on the cross for our sin and his resurrection from the dead. It is carefully designed by Jesus. He has planned only the best for us. It has no federal income taxes, no state taxes and no property taxes.

In the new heavens and a new earth, none of the problems of this past and present life will be remembered. "The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." Some of our war veterans carry with them painful memories of things they have seen in the past that suddenly emerge to haunt them and trouble them. In the new heavens and new earth there will be no flashbacks to the painful sins of our past life, no flashbacks to the times someone deeply hurt you, no flashbacks to pain and suffering in your body. "The former things will be remembered no more, nor will they come to mind."

The new heavens and new earth will be a place where we continually rejoice in what God has created especially for us. "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." Remember how carefully you planned out the surprise birthday party for someone you love dearly. Our God is a God of surprises. We see how he can surprise us with beauty in nature such as a sunset or waterfall or beautiful flower or the birth of a child. 1 Corinthians 2 says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." How often the Lord has surprised you in this life by his goodness and mercy that are new to you every morning. You have an eternity to enjoy the special delights the Lord has planned for you and you never growing tired of them. "When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise then when we first begun."

There will be no tears and no crying in the new heavens and new earth. "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." In heaven there will be no tears of sorrow, perhaps tears of joy but no tears of sorrow. We have heard the sound of weeping and crying. You have cried when you lost someone you have loved dearly. I know of a woman who lost her husband suddenly to a heart attack. He was only 56 years old and about to retire from a very successful year. For one year she hardly shed a tear. Everyone said how brave she was. But then at the first anniversary of her husband's death the fountains opened up and she could not stop crying.

In the Revelation John writes about this new heaven and new earth. "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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." As we sing, "No more crying there, we are going to see the Lord." That's our hope for the future guaranteed for us by Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and by his resurrection from the dead and his promise to prepare a place for us.

But our hope is not just for the future. We have this hope for this present life. Often the Old Testament prophets seem to blend together the glory we have now and the glory we have in the future. So it is with these words of Isaiah. Think of a large mansion filled with people. Some are on the inside of the mansion and some are still in the courtyard. Some are with the Lord in the church triumphant and some are in the church militant. We are still in the courtyard, but it is not a place without hope.

The hope we have now

The present life has its shares of sorrow and suffering, but also there is great hope and glory because our God is with us. "Never again will there be in it and 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 to be a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed." At the time of Isaiah, living a long life was considered to be a great blessing. When you have Jesus as your Shepherd and you are one of his sheep under his care, then every day of life on this earth is an opportunity to be taken into the green pastures and the quiet cool waters of his love for you. Every day is an opportunity to celebrate the reality that goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life. In John 10 Jesus says, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full."

This full rich life that we have now in Jesus is described as living in houses and planting vineyards and enjoying the work of our hands. "They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 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." So often people have labored at building and planting only to have the fruit of their labors taken away from them. In the kingdom of God that is here and now, in the land of the Shepherd, everything we do in Christ is successful and done to his glory and to the glory of his kingdom. "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

This rich full life is a very real hope for the present that includes having direct access to our God in prayer. "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." The Lord knows your thoughts even before you put them into prayers. He already plans out how he will answer them and give you what is best for you. Living in the courtyard of the mansion is tough. There is work that needs to be done. But there are no dropped calls with the Lord. Sometimes people try to call my cell phone while I am in my office. The connections are poor here in Orcutt. The calls have been dropped. Not so with your prayers to the Lord. Even before you call he says, "I will answer."

This rich full life in Jesus is so full of hope because it offers a peace that this world cannot give. This peace is pictured to us in a most vivid way. "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw with the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord." There is a place where people have a peace this world cannot give. Jesus said, "My peace I leave with you and my peace I give you." When he rose from the dead he said to his disciples "Peace be to you" and then he showed them the nail marks in his hands. This peace we have in Jesus enables us to go to war against sin in our lives and go to war against sin that might keep us from loving other people and hurting them. We love the peace we have in Jesus and the peace we have with one another as members of his body the Church.

How can I ever be a saint triumphant with a sure hope for the future and a sure hope for the present? It does not depend on who I am. Another week of life here on this earth has once again shown how often we fall short of God's glory and perfection. We could never be saints of God by what we do. But then we look at Jesus and realize that he has come to make us saints not by what we do but by what he has done for us. How true are the words of the hymn we sang earlier in our worship. "Blessed are the saints of God; They are washed by Christ's own blood. They are ransomed from the grave; Life eternal they shall have. With them numbered may we be Here and in eternity." Amen.