

The Fulfilment of All Promises **Isaiah 65: 17 – 25**

Our sermon text this morning will be Isaiah 65, verses 17 to 25. Before we have that reading, we will pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would indeed now bless your word to us. Please help us, Father, to receive your word for that which it truly is—the word of the living God. May our hearts be made meek and humble in your sight. Father, give us the gift of understanding that we may indeed take your scripture and understand what it says to us and apply it to our lives, and rejoice in your goodness to us that we may obey you, and that we may give you the glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 65, starting at verse 17: “¹⁷ ‘For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. ²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD.” Amen. And may God bless His word to us.

Isaiah, the book itself, our study of the book, is drawing rapidly towards the end, and I think today we're looking really at Isaiah's ultimate vision. This is the vision that he has longed for from the very beginning. This is his vision of man enjoying eternal life in the very presence of God.

Notice that Isaiah references both himself and other authors in Scripture. If you look at verse 25 of our passage, “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food,” well the wolf and the lamb shall graze together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox—that's a reference back to his own writings in Isaiah chapter 11, which is the prophecy of the coming of the root, or the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the branch from his roots that shall bear fruit, the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord shall rest. In other words, the very Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Notice also in verse 25, he speaks of dust being the serpent's food. This is a reference back into Genesis chapter 3, which we just read. And then he speaks also of the holy mountain of the

Lord. He refers back to his own prophecies in other parts of Scripture, in Isaiah chapter 2. He speaks of the mountain of the Lord that becomes the greatest of the mountains upon the earth, that fills the earth and it brings in the nations.

The Apostle John in the book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 21, makes direct citations of this passage of Scripture, directly linking his vision of the final destination of the people of God—the new heavens, the new earth, the new Jerusalem, on the mountain of the Lord—directly to the same vision that Isaiah saw in Isaiah chapter 65.

That makes this a passage of Scripture that, to preach from, you approach it with a little bit of fear, because you just have to ask yourself the question, How can I possibly do this justice? And the answer is, as a preacher, I'm not going to do this justice. The best thing that I can do is simply explain Scripture using Scripture, and let the Lord Himself be the one who impresses upon our hearts and upon our minds the greatness of His promises to His people.

All things seem to be channeling towards this very end. All the various streams and promises of Scripture seem to be running towards this ultimate end. Apparently, it used to be a saying that all roads lead to Rome. Well, I would suggest to you that in Scripture, all the roads lead to Jesus Himself. The fulfillment of all of these promises is to be found in none other than Christ alone, and through faith in Christ. All of these promises are there for His church to take hold of and to receive in the coming age.

It would appear to me that Isaiah, very much like the Apostle Peter, if you read Second Peter, has a vision of time that is basically three great ages, divided by two great judgments. There's the original creation, which comes to an end with the judgment of the Flood. And then there's the creation, or this present evil age that we now live in—as I said, the present evil age is what the Apostle Paul calls it, this “current evil age”—which comes to an end by the judgment of fire. And then there's the age of eternity, the age of the new creation, where God's people dwell in the very presence of God.

And Isaiah—like Peter, like Paul, like the Apostle John, specifically in the book of Revelation—has now got this vision of that coming new creation. And look at what it says: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.” It flows directly from verse 16, which we were looking at last week.

Just looking at verse 16, this is God's answers to Isaiah's prayer. Remember God told Isaiah, “What you are praying for will come, but it won't come in the way that you expect it.” Looking at verse 16, it reads: “So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.”

And last week we looked at how that leads us to think of the new covenant, and the promises to be found in Jeremiah chapter 31, specifically verse 34, where the promise of God is that He will

forgive their sins and He will remember their iniquities no more. That which is forgiven will not be brought to remembrance.

It's not that God forgets. His memory is perfect. Remember, His knowledge is perfect. God can't just turn Himself on or off. But when He says He will not remember it, He means He will bring it to account no more. He will not charge it against His people any more. It will be as though these things had been set aside.

Now Isaiah speaks, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth."—What we long for, the thing that we long for. All of us know that the way the world is that we live in, is not what the way the world was meant to be. All of us long for a time when we live in a world where there is no evil, no sin, to be found in us or in anyone else there—a world where nothing goes wrong.

Ancient theologians—or I'm thinking particularly actually of only one, St. Augustine—Augustine reasoned that evil is no real thing, that evil has no true existence in and of itself. How did he get to that conclusion? Well, he reasoned that there is good. There is good because God is good. And God has created things that are good, and God has spoken forth that which is good. And the only reason evil exists is because sin is in rebellion against good. So evil is not a thing that exists in and of itself. Evil is a thing that can only exist in the context of good. It's a parasite of that which good. When God created, He looked upon all of His creation and said, "It is good. It is good." Male and female was good; human sexuality as first created was good; the appetites that the man and the woman had in their original creation were good. These things were all good. Evil was the twisting and the perverting of that which is good.

And we long, don't we, we long to get into this creation, or into this place where evil is not present with us, and evil is not known by us, and evil is not part of our experience. And we all look upon ourselves, and we realize that within ourselves, within ourselves is the very seed of all the evil that we hate—within ourselves. That we are, of ourselves, as wicked as any other person on this earth, but we are saved by the grace of God, and are being transformed.

The Apostle Paul in the book of Galatians, and also in Second Corinthians, speaks of the new creation. In Second Corinthians chapter 5, he says that if anyone is in Christ—new creation. He is a new creation. And what we know from that is this: The new creation is in us. The new creation is in us. God has indeed started His invasion of this present evil age through us. The new creation is in us. But what we long for and what we do not yet have—the new creation might be in us, but we are not yet in the new creation.

We want to be where God rules and reigns, where people are what people should be. Isn't that the frustration and the sadness of this life? People are not what they should be. And everybody knows what people should be. People should be honest. People should not be violent. People should be trustworthy. People should be good. People should be generous. We know these things. We all know the way people should be. And we know that that's the way people are not. We know that's the way we are not, at least in and of ourselves. We're not what we should be.

We're not what we ought to be. And the promise of God is, Behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, or come into mind.

Reading on, verse 18: "But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. ¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress."

See the references there that John picked up in Revelation chapter 21—the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. And then John saw the new Jerusalem, Zion, descending from the clouds. And he saw that within Zion dwelt God and His people, and that in that place there would be no mourning, for God Himself would wipe every tear from their eyes.

Let's read on. Let's just look at verse 20: "No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed."

Now there are many who have a problem here. They read the passage, they see that it's referred to, or cited in Revelation chapter 21, and that Revelation chapter 21 speaks of eternal life in the presence of God. They see the citations, then they read Isaiah 65, verse 20, and they say that it doesn't seem to be speaking of the same thing. Why?

Well, there are infants being born, there are old men, there are young men dying, and there are sinners a hundred years old, and they say—Problem. Problem. How can this be? Revelation 21 is speaking of eternal life, the new creation, where everyone dwells in the presence of God. Isaiah 65 seems to be speaking of exactly the same thing, but then in verse 20, it doesn't seem to be speaking of exactly the same thing. Why does Isaiah speak of aging and death?

Well, I think he's still speaking of exactly the same thing. You come to a decision. Do you read this verse literally, in which case you've got to find a way to fit it in? Or do you read this verse in a figurative way, in which case it makes sense? If you want to read it literally, you're going to have trouble with it every time. If you want to take this literally, you're going to end up saying, "Oow, I just don't get it. It doesn't fit. It doesn't make sense."

What if what Isaiah is trying to communicate is the fact that the curse, because of sin, has been reversed? What if he's trying to communicate the fact that that which has happened because of sin in the world has been reversed?

Turn to Genesis chapter 6. We'll read from verse 1, just the first three verses: "¹When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.'"

Notice the judgment of God. Notice that in Genesis chapter 5, we're given a genealogy, and we're told that people were living incredibly long lives—Mahalalel, 840 years; Jared, 800 years; Enoch, 800 years. You know, Noah was 500 years old, and fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. But now, Genesis chapter 6, verse 3, God says because of sin, I am going to limit the lives of mankind. No longer shall they live these incredibly long lives. The limit of their days shall be 120 years. Because of sin, God constricted the lifespan of humanity.

But then, turn to Psalm 90. In verse 10, Moses says, “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?” By the time Moses is writing Psalm 90, he's saying God further constricted human lifespans. It's now typical for a man to reach seventy; if he's a strong man, he might reach eighty. Remember, Scripture tells us the wages of sin are death.

Now in the light of that, let's turn back to Isaiah 65, and look at verse 20. “No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.” What's he saying? If a man died at hundred years old, he'd still be considered a young man, and if a sinner lived to a hundred years old, he'd still be accursed.

In an age where long life was considered evidence of the blessing of God, Isaiah's saying, No. No, that's not necessarily so. The judgments of God are there, regardless of timespans, but in this new Jerusalem, life is completely different to the life that we know in our age.

There's an alternate reading to Isaiah chapter 65, verse 20, which can be found, for example, in the NASB, and I just want to read that. “No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed.” “Will be thought accursed.” Now if the NASB is correct in its reading, well then, it becomes even easier to understand. Basically what Isaiah is saying is, “Things have been changed. The wages of sin are death, the penalty of death has been lifted.” Remember, this is poetic language. It's being set out before us as poetry.

Your choice. If you want to take it literally, I don't know how to make it fit in with the Scripture. You have to do some things that don't make any sense, in terms of saying the start is concerning eternity, the center of the passage is concerning not eternity, and in the end of the passage, it's concerning eternity once again. I don't know how you get there. I'm just saying that and leaving it for you to think about and ponder. I'm saying the point of verse 20 is that the curse of death has been reversed. The curse of death as judgment for sin has been reversed.

Verses 21, 22, and 23 refer directly back into the book of Deuteronomy, and chapter 28, verses 15 to 68. A long reading, if you wanted to read Deuteronomy chapter 28, verses 15 to 68. It's basically the covenantal curses that fall upon the people of God for breaking the law of God, and it said that the houses they build won't be their own, but someone else shall have them. The

vineyards they plant won't be their own, someone else shall have them. The children they have won't be their own, they'll be taken off into captivity.

Verses 21, 22, and 23 speak of the complete reversal of all of the curses of God. In the place of cursing, there is blessing. Note that in the book of Isaiah, this concept of children does not necessarily refer to children by biological begetting. The children that Isaiah speaks of are the children who come by faith, and become believers in God. "Here am I and the children that God has given me," says Isaiah earlier in his prophecy. And in the book of Hebrews, that "Here I am and the children God has given me," is spoken of as having been spoken by Jesus Himself, and it's spoken by Jesus Himself of the people whom He has saved—not literal children. "For they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them."

So Isaiah's picture here is that all of the curses that have fallen upon all of humanity have been reversed. All of the blessings now, all of the blessings of God's promises, are falling upon the people who have faith in God through His sent-forth Savior, through the servant, through the Messiah, through the son of David, through the one born of the Virgin.

Looking now at verses 24 and 25: "24 'Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,' says the LORD." As I've said, it refers us back to Isaiah chapter 11, and to Genesis chapter 3.

One of the ways we need to always understand these promises is the "now" and the "not yet." What we have now and what is not yet. What we have now is, these promises are ours. If those who were here and can remember all the way back to Isaiah chapter 11, when we were looking at that chapter, I then tried to speak of the fact that in the church, in the kingdom of God, people who would not be one with one another *become* one with one another through the work of Christ, and through the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

If you want to take it, once again—you know, there's a difference between trying to interpret this literally and trying to understand it in another way. If you want to take it literally, and you're looking for a world where wolves and lambs are kind of domestic pets, and you can keep a lion on your farm—well, I mean it would be an interesting world to live in.

But I think what Isaiah is saying is that evil will be gone from the world, that people will be living as one, and will be living at peace, one with another. The reference back to dust being the serpent's food is Isaiah telling us, "You see, here's the solution to all problems." He's saying, "Go back to Genesis chapter 3.

You know, it's interesting. The book of Isaiah starts off, if we were to turn back into Isaiah chapter 1, at verses 10 to 14, Isaiah speaks of the people of God and of their false religion being rejected. God says He hates their gatherings. He hates their assemblies. He does not accept their worship.

And then in Isaiah chapter 2, Isaiah has this vision of the mountain of the Lord, which draws people from all the nations, and from the mountain of the Lord goes forth the law and the word of God. Then in Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah is given his vision of YAHWEH, high and lifted up, and there he learns that the problem is sin. Looking at Isaiah chapter 6:

“¹In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’ ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”

What’s the problem? The problem’s not with YAHWEH. The problem’s with Isaiah. “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Isaiah sees what the problem is. The problem is that mankind in his sin cannot enter into the presence of God. He sees that mankind in his sin is suffering exactly the same problem Adam and Eve suffered after they brought sin into the world. Remember, they were banished from the Garden. They were banished from the presence of God. God pronounced judgment on the serpent and upon themselves, and in that judgment, there was promise: “The seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent.” But they themselves were told that they will die. “From the ground you were made, to the ground you will return.” And they were told that the serpent’s food would be dust.

This was the judgment of God. This is the problem of all humanity. And Isaiah sees that the solution is the work of the servant. It’s the work of the one who comes from the root of the stump of Jesse, the branch of the root that shall bear fruits, the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests.

“‘The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD.” This is a vision of better than good times, this is a vision of ultimate great times—perfection. Perfection—all dwelling as one in the presence of the Lamb.

And dust being the serpent’s food. Well, he’s basically excluded. He is not a part of this world which is being made. This creation of the new heavens and the new earth will have no place for the serpent. He will not dwell there. He will not cause his trouble there. He will not bring sin into this place. “‘They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD.”

I say again—we can look at this and try and make all these things be literal. We can imagine a new heavens and a new earth, and we can imagine the new city descending from the clouds, and we can imagine a mountain that fills the whole earth. Or, we can see what it is that Isaiah’s trying to say. In the end, all of us are to be gathered into the presence of God. In the end, the

problem of evil will have been ultimately and totally dealt with. In the end, we will dwell in the presence of God, rejoicing forever.

Verse 18: “Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.” Be glad and rejoice forever. Praise God! Praise God for this new creation that is promised to us. Praise God for the good things that are before us!

My friends, we long for these things. These things are to be found, or at least a taste of these things is to be found today in the church. The new creation is here, where God’s people are. Those who are God’s people, as I’ve already said, the new creation dwells within them. But the new creation is not yet with us. It’s in us; we’re not in it.

The promises of God are great and glorious. Isaiah has had more revealed to him than I think he ever knew or understood. False religion has been rejected. The mountain of the Lord is the place where the people of God gather. It’s a glorious vision, my friends. The day is coming. We’ll close now.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your promise of the future. We thank you, Father, for the good things that you reveal to us in Scripture. We pray, Father, that you would build us up and strengthen us in faith, that we would hold to you in faithfulness and in obedience. We pray, Father, that we would see the day where we ourselves are in that new creation. And we pray that we would rejoice in the fact that you have placed your new creation in us. All of these things we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.