

Are things going to get any better in this world

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Date: 17 July 2022

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[0 : 00] But let me begin by saying that I'm probably right in saying that no politician that's seeking your vote ever promises you a future that's worse than the present.

Is that right? Hence the ALP slogan for the election which I've stolen for the title of this series, A Better and Brighter Future. Except I've added the question mark at the end.

But it's true, isn't it? No politician or party can win if they promise a bleak and hopeless future. So in that sense, every party and everyone is progressive.

We all have a view of the future that's better than what it is now. The only difference is how much better or what it looks like or how to get there. And I think that's the same with life in general.

When you take a job, it's usually with a view to future prospects. To get promoted. To get better pay or better hours. Would you, for example, apply for a job with this description on the next stream?

[1 : 06] Interested in a job with long hours, outdated technology and being micromanaged? Maybe you think that's your job right now. Or when you go into a showroom to buy a car, it's always to upgrade, isn't it?

To a better model. Imagine trading up your latest Toyota Camry, which I've got on the next slide. Pretty good. With the original model. I know some of you are into vintage cars, but you know, even so.

So we're all wired, aren't we? To a better future. And we gravitate towards promises of that future. And especially during such a time as now, where there seems to be so many risks threatening that future.

And you might have shared some of it just now. So whether it's the global pandemic, which threatens our lives and health and lifestyle, being able to travel, big parties and things like that.

Or whether it's cost of living pressures or the interest rate going up and not being able to buy a house or pay the mortgage. Or globally, as we see international relationships deteriorating with Russia and Ukraine, China and Taiwan.

[2 : 20] And even within countries, civil unrest. All these things threaten, don't they? Our view of the future. And that's when sometimes we do hearken back to the good old days.

If some of you are old enough, you might remember the good old days when things used to be so much better. Of course, we tend to look back on those days with rose-colored glasses, don't we?

And forget that during those times, there were actually troubles as well. But I think what it shows is that we have a longing, don't we, for a peaceful and stress-free life. Where everyone just gets along.

Life is always happy. There's no lack or deprivation. But I think deep down as well, we tend to realize just how unrealistic that is.

That it's a pipe dream. Even though we realize that, somehow we still keep working towards it, don't we? Pretending that it's still something to strive for.

[3 : 20] And so we believe politicians who promise that we can get there. If only we would do this or that. We keep walking this treadmill.

Because, I don't know, what else can we do? Well, I'd like to, tonight, just consider what the Bible does have to say about all of this.

And those of us who are Christians, who believe the words of the Bible as God's revelation to us in the world, what does the Bible say? Now, the Bible does come in many genres.

So there's narrative and letters and apocalyptic literature. But in and through it all, as Christians, we believe that God is making promises of what he has planned for us in this world or for this world.

He's telling us what will come to pass. And amazingly, and if you are paying attention when we were reading the Old Testament tonight, which is part of Isaiah's prophecy, God was speaking through him as his messenger, God promises a picture of a perfect world, doesn't he?

[4 : 28] And so it seems our longings aren't a pipe dream, but planted by God as a seed in our lives, as a hope for this reality.

So let's hear again just what God has promised. And hopefully you've still got your Bibles opened to page 748. But if not, you can follow along on the screen as well.

So in verse 17 of Isaiah 65, God begins by saying this, See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

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 of crying will be heard in it no more. This perfect world is modeled around the city of Jerusalem. That's the place God has chosen to dwell with his people, Israel.

[5 : 31] It centers, therefore, around where God himself will be. And there, he says, All the bad memories of this present broken world will be forgotten.

No more tears. No more crying about what had gone before. And as we read on, we see what life will be like in this world. Never again, it says, will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days.

Or an old man who does not live out his years. The one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child. The one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. And so for those of you who are trying to aim for your hundredth birthday, well, you can have a kid's party when you turn a hundred.

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 work of their hands. They will not labor in vain. Nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune.

[6 : 36] For they will be a people blessed by the Lord. They and their descendants with them. Now, I don't know what picture comes to mind when you hear all this. But for me, it sort of feels like the Shire where the hobbits live.

And it's rather, you know, it's quite an interesting vision of a perfect world, isn't it? Because it's almost a bit like hankering after the good old days. What we consider to really be the good things in life actually turn out just to be the simple things in life.

The simple joys of life. You know, there's no promise here of faster internet speeds. Or modern conveniences. I'm sure that's all good. But deep down we realize, don't we, that, you know, those aren't the real important things in life, are they?

Instead, we want to be surrounded by people we love. Neighbors we can get along with. We want to watch our children grow up, or if we're not married, our nieces or nephews or godchildren.

We don't need a palatial mansion, you know, just a comfortable home to live in. Well-stocked pantry, of course. Warm, you know, the roof is not leaking.

[7 : 50] And also, you know, the picture there is of not being idle either, is it? So it's not a picture of sitting around and just partying and getting drunk all the time. No, the passage describes that we want to work and enjoy the fruit of our labor.

It's a bit like when my wife, Elissa, brings in the produce from the veggie garden, you know, and she has the smile and the delight on her face, or the eggs from the chicken that we have in the coop.

Simple pleasures, isn't it, in life. And this is the picture that God promises, which is then topped off in verse 24 with what I think is the icing on the cake. And there God says, Before they call, I will answer.

While they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. And thus will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Now, don't get any fancy ideas here. I don't think God is describing himself as your heavenly butler at your back and call 24-7 while you stay at the Ritz-Carlton.

[9 : 01] Instead, this is a description, as I said before, of God being in relationship with his people. The promise to them has always been that when we call, he will hear.

He hears our prayers. And Israel had put that at risk themselves when they rebelled and followed other gods. And so God is promising a return to this original design.

And actually, if you read the whole passage, there are very strong reminders here of the Garden of Eden, where God dwelled with Adam and Eve, until they too rebelled, didn't they, and tried to live independently of God.

And I think the final piece of the picture here is verse 25, and that is peace. Peace to the extent that even in the animal kingdom, animals live in harmony with each other.

So the wolf and the lamb are feeding together, rather than the wolf feeding on the lamb. So I imagine illicit chickens and the neighborhood foxes will be playing together in our backyard.

[10 : 10] Imagine that. I mean, I had to pick up a few headless carcasses a few years ago. So, you know, big contrast. The serpent, no longer striking out at other animals, simply feeding on dust.

Now, you might think, that's not very appetizing. But, you know, you have to realize, the serpent probably has a very different culinary palette. So dust is probably okay for it. But everything is at peace, isn't it?

Because they will neither harm nor destroy on God's holy mountain. Now, obviously, if this perfect world existed, we would book our tickets and fly there straight away, wouldn't we?

And so we wonder, where might this place be? You know, I asked someone who had lived in Fiji before in the service this morning, and I asked, Fiji? She said, not always the case like that.

Hobbiton, maybe? But that's not a real place, is it? But if you look at the start of the passage, God promised that he will create such a place, isn't it?

[11 : 14] Which means we don't yet have it, do we? But it will come. And so the question becomes, when will this occur? Well, the Bible elsewhere tells us of things that must happen before we get there.

And it comes from the mouth of Jesus himself in our other reading in Matthew chapter 24. Now, if you want a spoiler alert, then the answer is, this perfect world only happens after Jesus returns a second time.

But Jesus says that other things must occur before then. And so I want to go back into that chapter of Matthew chapter 24 and tap into his words at verse 4, where he says, Watch out that no one deceives you.

For many will come in my name, claiming I am the Messiah, and will deceive many. You will hear wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

[12 : 21] Now, it doesn't take a lot of... You may not be familiar with the Bible or with what Jesus says, but it doesn't take much to look around the world to see that all Jesus is saying here rings true, doesn't it?

Nation rising up against nation, famines and earthquakes. Now, I'm sure there were wars and famine in Jesus' day as well, but Jesus was no politician, was he, promising a better future.

In fact, we didn't read this verse, but later on in verse 21, he says this, From then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equal again.

If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, that is God's chosen people, those days will be shortened. And so, Jesus is actually predicting things will get worse before it gets better.

This, he likens to birth pains. That is, the world is going into labor. What for? In order to bring forth a new heaven and a new earth.

[13 : 32] And Paul, the apostle Paul picks up on this same idea when he wrote to the Romans. And so, if you look at his letter in chapter 8 and verse 20, this is what he said, For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, that is God, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time. And so, whether it's natural disasters or the global pandemic or wars or human conflict, all the upheavals that we've been experiencing of late and in the past are God's way of turning our attention to the liberation to come.

It's meant to create hope of a better future. The better future that God has promised. And this future, Jesus says, only comes when he returns.

And so, we come back to Matthew chapter 24 and verse 10. He continues, At that time, many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

[15 : 06] And then, the end will come. So, the end will come upon Jesus' return. But in the meantime, Jesus says, don't believe the false messiahs.

Watch out that you're not deceived. Now, what does all this mean then as we look upon the world? Well, if you believe the Bible to be true, and I do, then here are some of the implications.

First, it means that there is really no final or perfect solution while we're still in this present world. It doesn't mean that as nations or individuals, we don't try and make things better, whether to care for the environment or to make peace among countries.

But we must be careful not to latch on to false hopes. People may not come and proclaim themselves as messiahs, but they often speak, don't they, as though they have this silver bullet that can solve all the world's problems.

Or claim that, no, if you don't do this, or we don't do this, do that as people and all that, and nations, that we'll be doomed. Well, that's not what the Bible says will happen.

[16 : 25] Instead, it promises that, yes, things will get difficult all the way until Jesus returns, but the world itself will still be preserved until that time.

We don't need to save the world. And we can't anyway, can we? No, God already has a plan that is guaranteed to succeed, and he's already at work to bring about this perfect world.

However, the only way for us to get into this perfect world is what Jesus explains in verses 13 and 14.

For he says, Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. But the one who stands firm, that's the only way, the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

And so it requires us to stand firm. And if you want to know what standing firm means, we find that in the next sentence. For Jesus says, And this gospel, this good news, this great news of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony or witness to all nations, and then the end will come.

[17 : 40] And this good news is that those who put their faith in Jesus will enter God's perfect world, his kingdom. You see, Jesus is the doorway from this broken world that we're in, into the new and perfect world, which is being promised.

Now you may wonder, you know, if God is so powerful, then why doesn't he just fix this broken world now? Or, why doesn't he let everyone into the new one?

And that's a good question, but the answer lies in the fact that the reason for this broken world is actually us. If you look around at, you know, everything that's wrong, in most cases, humans are the reason why, isn't it?

And even if they aren't the cause of it, so for example, some people might argue that the global pandemic, the coronavirus is not due to any human being, and you know, there are various views on that, don't want to get into the controversy of it.

But even then, even if we take that aside, we've since mucked things up, haven't we? In how we've treated each other. How we've not equally shared things around.

[18 : 58] We've made things worse, haven't we? So sure, God could make this world perfect in an instance, no problems. But that would require wiping all of us out, except for Jesus.

Because each and every one of us are in some way, whether big or small, part of the problem, aren't we? Now on the other hand, God could allow all of us into the new one.

But again, as we've seen with the coronavirus, you know, all it takes is patient zero, isn't it? Just one person. And before you know it, the whole world is infected by this virus, isn't it?

And that's the same way with sin, isn't it? We may go in there and it would be just one or two imperfect people. But before you know it, we will be back where we started in this new world, wouldn't we?

Full of sinful people mucking things up, causing the world to be broken again. And so the only way, therefore, for this to be solved is for God to send His Son, Jesus, who even though He lived among sinners entire life, did not sin and so could start and begin a human race, a new human race, untainted by sin.

[20 : 18] Because the price that He paid with His own life, He was able to use that to pass on that credit of righteousness to everyone who puts faith in Him.

so that as we walk through the doorway that is Jesus, we account righteous. He almost gives us a ticket as we go through as righteous, right? Not on account of our own character, but on account of His credit, His character.

And that's what we call substitution. We take on Jesus' righteousness and He takes on our sin and takes it to the cross for us so that we don't have to do it ourselves.

And so as we walk through, it's like we've got a whole total system reboot for you computer geeks. And all the virus and the bugs get reset. Or, you know, you've got your mobile phone, it's going back to factory settings, isn't it?

Now, all of what I've described in the Bible is in the Bible, but it will take me some time to actually show you the various bits and pieces, which we don't have time to do so tonight.

[21 : 24] So if you're interested to dig deeper to find out more, then what I want to invite you to is a course which Helen will also give more details later, which is the Christianity Explore course that we will start running in early August.

If that's you and you've come and you want to know whether the Bible and Jesus, what He says, is trustworthy, then that's the course I'd recommend for you to come along to. But if a better and brighter future is what you really long for, then please don't waste your time on false hopes, things that don't work.

Put your hope instead on something that will really come to pass. And if you're someone already here who believes in Jesus, then I hope and trust that today's talk will give you comfort in the times that we're in.

Because you know that what Jesus has promised will come to pass. Don't lose heart even if things do get worse before they get better.

Don't allow your heart, as Jesus says, to grow cold. Instead, be assured of this better and brighter future, not now, but in the future, because Jesus has already paid for it in full with His life.

[22 : 41] You know, I can't wait to see the wolf and the lamb feeding together. Perhaps to plant my own vineyard, make some wine, build my own house, you know, and not have somebody else live in it.

That's not, I mean, I haven't built my own house, but others can, you know, people I love can live in it too, of course, yes. But you know what I mean, get my house stolen from me. And there will come a time when, you know, I don't need to worry, do I, about growing old or whether I will fall sick and die.

I don't have to worry about the conflict in the world or people not getting along or me not getting along with other people. But best of all, there will come a time when I, when we, all of us, will be in God's presence, dwelling with Him.

And mind you, it's already true now, isn't it, that if we believe in Jesus, God already dwells with us by His Spirit. And so when we call, God already answers, right? He hears us before we even pray.

It's just that one day, though, what we now only know by faith, we will know in full by sight. And I can't wait for that day to come.

[24 : 02] Well, do come back next week because there's more to say on this topic as we consider what the future holds, not just for eternity, but also for this life.

So, in the meantime, though, I would like to pray and then we'll sing and I'm looking forward to hearing what Vincent has to share to us in reflection of what we've heard tonight.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that you promise us a better and brighter future, that we can inherit through faith in your Son, Jesus, this wonderful vision of eternity.

For those of us who are still considering whether this is true, please help them to investigate and come to a conviction that it is. For those of us who are already convinced, help our hearts not to grow cold, but for us to keep trusting in this reality, even when the future in this present world doesn't look bright or promising.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.