

The Coming Glory - The Joyous Re-Creation

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[0 : 01] Would you bow your heads as we pray? Father, we thank you for your word and particularly for these two readings tonight. Lord, help us to soak it in by your spirit that we may live by it and live by the hope to which it speaks.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I just couldn't resist. This is all impromptu. But the first reading in Revelations, I think Martin had a sense of what the reading was.

Martin, would you mind standing up and just turning around so that people can see what's written on your T-shirt? Jesus, our dwelling place with God.

There you go. Thank you, Martin. I know you planned that really well. There was another illustration I wanted to bring into tonight's sermon. And both of you who travel down Burwood Highway will know that the new Kmart Coles has a health club called the Recreation Club.

And I was just thinking, how do I weave that into tonight's sermon? Because they obviously don't understand recreation. But I didn't succeed, so that was my attempt at it. Instead, you're going to have this introduction.

[1 : 15] Well, friends, I wonder whether you have had a chance to turn your mind to the year 2014. Of course, some of you are still trying to get over your roast turkey and Christmas pudding.

And still, some of you might have one or two New Year's party to get through before that. Others of you may have had a difficult 2013, and you can't wait for a fresh start.

You may have a few New Year's resolutions up your sleeves, which you hope to stick to, at least until the end of January. But whether big or small, I'm sure we all carry plans and hopes into the new year.

But have you considered what motivates these plans? What shapes our hopes for the new year? And what guides our choices? What is the thing that keeps us focused for next year?

Well, we've come to the last week in Isaiah, or our last week. And over the last month, we've seen how much of Isaiah, particularly the second part, is forward-looking.

[2 : 18] That is, it's hopeful, and it's fueled by a vision of things to come. And as we've seen, and as with Martin's t-shirt, all of it is fulfilled in Christ.

He's the servant. He's the light. The temple. So, Christ fulfilled all these at his first coming. But not fully, because when he comes again, then everything will be completely and finally fulfilled.

And so it is, we see with Isaiah 65. And we're going to look at verses 17 and 25 tonight. And what we see is two great hopes merging together. So, on the one hand, the hope of Jerusalem's restoration, which we looked at a bit last week.

And then, secondly, the hope of a new creation. But see how both of them are there in verses 17 and 18. 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.

[3 : 23] God's not creating two things here, but one. And we're meant to take it not literally, but figuratively. But the Jerusalem which people are coming to in Christ is also the new heavens and the new earth.

And the former things in verse 17 refers to all the pain and suffering and sadness of the old creation, which will be forgotten in the new Jerusalem or the new creation. In its place, there will be joy and delight.

God himself delights in the new creation, just as he did the first. And I think this joy is perfectly captured or beautifully captured by C.S. Lewis in his first book in the Chronicles of Narnia.

Those of you who know, that's the magician's nephew. And in it, Aslan, the lion who is the Jesus character in the book, he actually at the end sings Narnia into existence.

So instead of a fearsome roar, every time he opens his mouth, he sings, and living things in Narnia come into being. So trees start to sprout and grow as he sings, and animals and magical creatures come into existence out of thin air as he sings.

[4 : 35] There is a deep sense of joy as you read that book. And there's also a deep sense of joy here in Genesis, in Isaiah 65. Because three times the words joy and delight, or the equivalent, are used.

And actually in one of these, the second, the phrase is a command for us. It says, be glad and rejoice forever. That's a command for us. Rejoice forever because God is doing something amazing.

Rejoice because God himself rejoices. So friends, this is a command even for the tough times in our lives, when we don't feel like it, when being joyful isn't easy.

But God is calling Christians to have a long view of history. We are to rejoice in the Lord always because of where the world is headed, towards a new creation, towards a creation where the creator rejoices over it.

And it's not a superficial, happy-clappy kind of gladness. It doesn't try to make light of our problems or sweep them under the carpet. But when we begin to understand what God is doing, then a deep sense of joy will spring forth from within us.

[5 : 54] We begin to share God's own joy and delight. As he says in verse 19, I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. The sound of weeping and crying will be no more.

So you see, even though it may not look like it at times, history is not headed towards a horrible end. Instead, it's headed towards a delightful climax, one in which our creator rejoices over.

And we too can share in that joy as God's people, whatever our circumstances now. And we're going to look a bit more into that as we look at the next few verses.

And so as we turn to verses 20 to 23, we see what God delights in. What is it that gives him such delight? God rejoices because the fall is being reversed in the new creation.

All that threatens us now will be removed. And so in your outlines, I name those three reversals. So in verse 20, the curse of death is reversed.

[7 : 02] In verses 21 and 22, it's the curse of toil or work gone wrong. And in verse 23, it's the labor of childbirth being negated.

Now, most people would think that Nelson Mandela had led a full life. So at 95, that's pretty good, isn't it? But if you read these verses, that is not so in the new creation because verse 20 says that Mandela's life would have been considered accursed because it didn't reach 100 years.

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. The one who dies at 100 will be thought a mere child. The one who fails to reach 100 will be considered accursed.

Now, there's two ways of reading this. It could mean that there's still death in the new creation, but everyone only dies after they reach 100 or more. No one dies young.

Or you could read it poetically, which is what I think is right, to mean that death will be no more. If you remember when Jesus was asked by someone how many times he should forgive, what was his answer?

[8 : 18] Seven times seven. Now, did he literally mean that on the 50th occasion you can start not forgiving? No, I don't think that's what he meant. Seven times seven is a poetic way of saying forgive for as many times as it takes.

So similarly here, I think what he's saying is that everyone lives till they are old. But if 100 is the age of a mere child, then being old in the new creation is an age which is many times then.

So long, that is as though it's the same as not dying. Anyway, whatever you think, what matters is that the threats to life are now gone.

And if you think about it for a moment, I think a lot of our time is actually taken up avoiding death. So just think about the sorts of things you get to day to day and the type of energy we expend.

So we go around eating this or that pill, watching our diet and exercising so that we wouldn't die young from cancer or heart attack. We lock our homes at night to keep ourselves safe and our families safe from danger.

[9 : 26] We study and work so that we can earn a living because we need food and shelter in order to survive. And you can think of a lot more other examples about how you take precautions in life.

But in the new creation, we don't need to worry about any of these things anymore. Yes, we will still need to work, but not because we need to survive, but because we're created for it.

Which brings us to the second reversal. Ask most people what they hate about work, and they'll say, office politics. That and the sort of never-ending demands of your boss.

We hate it when others take credit for our work, when our bosses don't recognize the value, our value, the dog-eat-dog nature of the workplace. We hate that. And we hate bosses who use us for their own ends and undermine each other and colleagues undermining us.

In other words, we hate other people's egos and insecurities. Now, of course, the fact that it bugs us says something about our own insecurities and our own hang-ups, too.

[10 : 38] But work is frustrating because of the fall. And even if you had the perfect boss, we'll still fall short every time of the goals that we set out to achieve.

But here in Isaiah 65, people will build houses and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. In other words, they will enjoy the fruit of their labor.

And just so we get it, it's repeated again in the negative in verse 23. It says, No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat.

In fact, this is a direct allusion or quotation from the curse that is in Deuteronomy 28 and 30, which I've got up there. It says, and this is spoken by God to Israel, You will build a house, but you will not live in it.

You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit. There, God was warning Israel that if they disobeyed, he would cut them off from the land, and they would not enjoy the fruit of their labor.

[11 : 42] And of course, that's exactly what happened, because they did disobey, and much of Isaiah is filled with this, so much so that by chapter 1 in Isaiah, Israel is described as a booth in a vineyard, or a shelter in a cucumber field.

That's not meant to be a good thing. That's a bad thing. If it was written by an Australian, it might be a reference to a lean-to, you know, with its door flapping in the wind, hanging off just one hinge.

You get the picture? That's what Israel became or was like. And further, in chapter 6, we find that God's judgment relents only when Israel is reduced to a burnt stump, a burnt stump in a parched land.

Again, a very vivid picture of what Israel was reduced to. But here we see the reversal in verse 23. God's people are like a tree, fully grown, tall, perhaps a thousand years old, like one of those cedars or cypresses.

And not only will they live long, they will live to see the fruit of their hands. My chosen ones will long enjoy, it says, the work of their hands.

[13 : 00] Now, the word long enjoy here means enjoy to the full. Enjoy it such that you use it up. No one will be able to take it off them, and neither will they die before they've finished enjoying it.

Now, who are these chosen ones? Well, we read in the rest of Isaiah 65 who they are. You'll find that they're also called the servants of the Lord.

It's there in verse 15, if you look just a few verses back. The you in those verses are those who forsake the Lord, in verse 11 onwards, and they are contrasted with God's servant.

So perhaps if I could read from verse 13 onwards. Therefore, this is what the sovereign Lord says. My servants, or the chosen ones, will eat, but you will go hungry. My servants will drink, but you will go thirsty.

My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out with anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit. You will leave your name for my chosen ones to use in their curses.

[14 : 04] The sovereign Lord will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name. So only the servants of the Lord will enjoy this new creation. They are the chosen ones.

They are the one God calls my people. Now, of course, when you hear the words servants of the Lord, it should remind you as well of Jesus himself, because he was the servant of the Lord, and he was the one whom God chose.

All of God's people will be his chosen servants, which means in the new creation, we will be doing his work. We'll be serving him. That's what it's meant to mean in those verses.

As for the third reversal, which we're going to look at now, it speaks to the curse of childbearing. Now, if you read verse 23, the labor in the first phrase, they will not labor in vain, is actually a reference not to childbirth, childbirth, but back to the previous point, just labor in general.

But the second phrase, where it says, they will bear, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune, is when the specific labor of bearing children is spoken of.

[15 : 20] Now, the verses don't actually promise that childbirth is no longer painful. And it is sort of slightly intriguing to think that children will still be born in the new creation.

Again, we don't know the real answers to all that. But what matters is to realize that God's blessing is now no longer limited to us as individuals. But when God blesses us, it flows to successive generation.

And so, even if you thought childbirth is still painful, it will be worth it. Now, this view of blessing is captured in popular culture, isn't it? When we look at some of the happily ever after scenes in movies.

So, in Notting Hill, it's a pregnant Julia Roberts lying on the lap of Hugh Grant. It's meant to be an idyllic picture of happy after. In The Lord of the Rings, it's Samwise Gamgee and his family in the shower.

And then, even in Harry Potter, if you remember, it's Harry with Ginny and his family. Blessings connote flowing on to the next generation.

[16 : 34] And if you ask any grandparent, rich or poor, what is their greatest blessing in life, they're likely to say it's their grandchildren. And even if they don't tell you so, the dead giveaway is the number of photos they have on the mantelpiece.

And guess which great-grandma has this on her mantelpiece? The thing, though, is that this is not a picture of life often, is it?

Often, tragedy comes to our children and our grandchildren or they go the wrong way, bringing much pain to us. And sometimes, we even wish that we could take their place rather than watch them go through it.

But again, this is not going to be the case in the new creation. In verse 33, God says, for they, that is the children, will be a people blessed by the Lord. And not just them, but they and their descendants with them.

And again, there are echoes of God's promises here that refer back to Deuteronomy and to Abraham. So if you remember the Ten Commandments in the second one, which says not to worship idols, it then says, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[18 : 03] Well, in the new creation, the fall will be reversed, and that's why the sound of weeping and crying will be no more. And that is what we get to look forward to. Now, my final point in verses 24 to 25 is that we come to this final aspect of new creation, which it speaks of there, and that is that relationships will be restored in the new creation.

That is, the root cause of the fall, which is humans' broken relationship with God, will be restored. So God not only restores creation, the material will, but he comes to relate with it as well.

God is not a distant hands-off God, like the watchmaker setting the watch and then leaving it, but he creates the world in order to relate with it.

He's intimate and hands-on. And that's what we find, the third aspect, in these verses. We see that all parts of creation will be in harmony because it's in intimate harmony with God.

In verse 24, it speaks about the intimacy between God and his chosen ones, while in verse 25, this is expanded to all creation. It sort of says that if traditional predators can sleep and lie with their prey, then by extension, all creation is in harmony with each other, including between humans and the environment.

[19 : 28] But the relationship that undergirds all this is the one that God has with humans. One of my biggest challenges as a Christian is prayer.

I know that God hears my prayers, but when I pray, I still have to believe that he does because I don't get any audible answers from him. And when I pray, sometimes I have to wait for an answer and sometimes for a long while.

But here is the promise of verse 24. Before they call, I, God, will answer. While they are still speaking, I will hear. God is eager to relate with us.

He can't wait to hear from us and to speak with us. And again, here there's a contrast with the earlier verses. In verse 12, those who forsake the Lord, there God accuses them of this.

I will destine you for the sword and all of you will fall in the slaughter. For I called, but you did not answer. I spoke, but you did not listen. Can you hear the contrast here?

[20 : 36] How different God is to us. And to be honest, that's sometimes how we are, aren't we? God calls, but we don't answer. We don't listen and obey and we choose to please him even though we know what he wants of us.

And yet, in return, we expect God to listen when we cry out, when we want our problems solved, here and now, even when sometimes the problem was our doing in the first place.

But the thing is that that's exactly how God does respond. Paul says in Romans chapter 5 and verse 6, while we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That is, God heard us even before we called to him. He acted for us even before we knew who he was.

And that is why the new creation is joined with the new Jerusalem because there's no new creation until Christ died at the cross, at the epicenter of the new Jerusalem.

[21 : 43] We're only servants of the Lord because Jesus, the servant of the Lord, died for us just as God commanded him. He died for the ungodly. And there's even a reference there in verse 25, see that reference to the serpent, thus will be the serpent's food.

It's a reference back to Genesis 3, to the serpent's curse, to his role in bringing sin into the world. Now that is the one aspect of the curse in Genesis 3 that's not going to be reversed for sin is finally put in its rightful place in the new creation because an offspring of Eve, namely Jesus, crushes the serpent's head and deals with sin on the cross.

And that's why at the very end nothing will harm or destroy on God's holy mountain because sin itself has been destroyed. Sin, which is the thing behind every wrong and harm, has been dealt with so that nothing else will be harmed or destroyed.

Well, friends, this is the grand picture of the new creation and we who are God's people will be part of that. You can be part of that if you put your trust in Jesus. But I think it's important for us not to think that all of this is only about the future.

Yes, the fullness of this will happen when Jesus comes again, but the new creation is also about now because the new creation is already here. Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and 17, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.

[23 : 18] that is, for them, the new creation has come. If you are in Christ, then you are already part of the new creation. We already have the promises of Isaiah 65 in seed form, not a mature tree, perhaps, but in seed form, and it will blossom fully when Jesus comes again.

So, we can practice and live today what will be ours fully one day. so we don't need to, for example, make choices out of fear of death because the curse of death does not apply to us.

If we, and we may, and we will, die physically, even though that happens, we will have a life beyond that, eternal life. When we serve God, we can be confident of enjoying the work of our hands.

Sure, the will may not give us credit for it, but God does, and God will, and he will reward his servant. And so, we can bring that hope and that view into our jobs today.

We can have an attitude to our work and our workplace that reflects that hope. And, we should care for one another. We should love each other because the people here in our church are the same ones that will share in that new creation.

[24 : 35] For example, we should persevere in training our children and the young, not just our own, but even those in Sunday school and youth group because we believe that they are a people blessed by the Lord.

And finally, we should pray and never give up because God has promised to hear us while we are still speaking. This is the great hope of a new creation that should shape our lives today and transform how we face our day-to-day challenges.

our present suffering may be temporary, will be temporary, but our coming glory is permanent. Our pain may be for a moment, but our joy and delight will be forever.

And so, I pray as we approach this new year that God will help us to serve him in the coming year, that we will hold firm to the hope which we have in Christ, and that even as we do, we will pray, come, Lord Jesus, come in glory.

And all the people of God say together, Amen.