

*“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. (Isaiah 65:17-25)*

What Really Hurts?

What makes heaven attractive? You all want to go to heaven when you die, right? But why? Well, obviously, it’s way better than the alternative. Who wants to go to hell? Last week we talked about the fact that hell is eternal, unending pain and the horror of being locked out of God’s presence and his love forever. The Bible uses images of fire and darkness and weeping to describe it. Heaven has to be better than that. And it is. But none of us has ever been to hell. None of us ever will be there, God willing. And if the promise of eternal life were just about avoiding something that is really only theoretical for us, that promise would lose some of the great power that it has in our lives. But heaven and even more, the resurrection at the end of time, is also

about being delivered from this life, from everything that hurts here. When we rise from the dead, we will get a new and perfect world. That really is the point of our Old Testament lesson for today. The prophet Isaiah was trying to make the hope of eternal life real for his people, so he pointed to hurts and sorrows that were real and urgent for them and he described how all those things will be healed in the life to come. So part of understanding the promise of eternal life is understanding what God is going to solve. So what would that be, in your life? We don't live in the 8th century BC with Isaiah. We live today. Simply put, **what really hurts?**

God says, **“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”** When Jesus comes back, he is going to erase all sin and sorrow and pain and make the world so new that we won't even remember the way it used to be. I think he does mean that we won't see any traces of our old lives. You won't be to go visit the house where you grew up or redo the vacations you took with your kids. But the point here is deeper than that: all the things that sin did to us here, all the hurts and horrors, all the things we could never stop thinking about or weeping about – all that stuff will be gone for us. Apparently, we won't even think about it anymore. Isn't that the ultimate cure for hurt and sorrow? When you go through a personal tragedy – when you're grieving the loss of a loved one, when your career has been destroyed, when your house has burned to the ground – when you go through that kind of loss, your hearts hurts so badly that it's hard to imagine ever feeling right again. Certainly, you will never feel the same again. That kind of tragedy changes your life and you can't get back the things that you've lost. But even if you accept that you have to move on to a new normal, when your heart aches, it's really hard to believe that you're ever going to feel better. And you know what? On this side of heaven, you might not, at least not completely. There may always be a part of your heart that mourns for that person you lost, or that career that you worked so hard to establish or that home where you raised your kids.

But God's promise to Isaiah is that all that will change when we reach heaven. All that will be completely healed when Jesus returns. So Isaiah listed some of the hurts of his people and his time. How do they compare to our hurts and sorrows? Isaiah says, **“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.”** In Isaiah's day, child mortality was astronomical. Some scholars think that half of all children died before they grew up. Imagine half of your children or half of your brothers and sisters dying before they reached adulthood. Almost every family in Isaiah's day knew that pain. He goes on to say that after the resurrection, if you only reach a hundred, you'll be considered to have died young. Remember this is poetry. Isaiah is not saying we're going to have to die again after we rise. He's vividly painting a picture of eternal life. In the ancient world, fifty was old. So it would be like saying to you and me, if you only lived to be two hundred, you'd just be a kid. Eternal life makes a century or two seem like nothing.

Isaiah says, **“They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.”** That's what you would expect to have happen, right? But when God's people drifted away from him, he warned them that the opposite would happen. God would send an enemy who would conquer them and that enemy would live in the houses his people had built and eat the food they had grown. He talks about laboring in vain and children being born doomed to misfortune. Israel was at the center of the ancient world. It was trapped between superpowers and it was often a battlefield for them. So you could spend years building and farming and striving to provide for your family and then some army comes by and takes it all or destroys it all and all that effort was wasted. That kind of thing can't happen in the life to come. There are no enemies to invade, no wars to fight, no thieves to steal.

So how much of that is what really hurts in our lives? By the grace of God, we live in a world in which children dying is so rare that people actually say, “No parent should ever have to bury their child.” I'm glad it's that rare – I truly am. But you know that I'm not the only parent who's ever had to bury a child, not even in this congregation. Even if all your children and all your siblings are still alive, death takes people we love. Sickness and pain still torment us and the people we love. Count how many hospitals there are within ten miles of this church. Count how many funeral homes. How many of us have had our hearts ache because we had to visit one or the other?

Again, by the grace of God, we live in a country that's pretty safe from enemy attacks. Most of us live in pretty safe neighborhoods. But terrorists still strike. Crime is still real. And even if someone doesn't come and take our stuff by force, every day, I get phone calls from people who tell me that they're calling from the credit department about my car or my benefits or my warranty (they don't say for what) or even that they're the

IRS or the Social Security Administration and do you know what they're trying to do? Get my social security number or access my bank accounts or record me saying words that they can rearrange into some kind of consent that will cost me money. They're trying to take the work of my hands and my wife's hands out of the bank. How different is that from building houses and having someone else live in them or planting fields and having someone else eat the fruit?

Life still hurts. You and I still suffer. And why? Because of sin. But God said through Isaiah, **"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."** A huge part of the book of Isaiah is God yelling at his people because he was so angry at them. Why was he angry? Because they turned their backs on him and worshipped false gods and then embraced all kinds of sin that God condemned. Then they pretended like they were still his people and went through the motions of worshipping. God told them to stop bringing him meaningless offerings. He told them that he was going to send them into exile as punishment. But the day would come when he would rejoice over his people. Why? Because Jesus would come and take all their sins away. All those who trust in Jesus are the new Jerusalem. God is building a new people right now and on Judgment Day he will assemble us before him into a perfect city and people. He will rejoice over that new Jerusalem. And no one will ever weep in it again.

What an incredible blessing! In the last three months, I've had maybe six or seven days when I didn't come to tears at least once during the day. But when Jesus returns, we will be healed and nothing will ever bring us to tears again. None of those hurts and sorrows that we have face will even be worth talking about. We will remember our hurts and sorrows no more. Instead, we will be the joy of our God and Lord. Why? Because Jesus has taken all our sin away, too. Sin is the source of all pain and death. You and I hurt and we die because we're sinners living in a broken world. Now, when I say that, I don't mean that every hurt we suffer is punishment for this or that sin. Even in Israel, many of the people who suffered when Jerusalem was burned to the ground and they were dragged away from their homes, were actually the people who were still faithful to the Lord. But they were sinners living in a broken world. All their hurt came from sin. They same is true for us. But when Jesus returns, there will be no sin. Not in our hearts. Not in the world around us. Not anywhere. Instead, there will joy and healing and fellowship for all eternity.

So God says, **"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."** Before we can even get our prayers out, God will answer them. How many times in your life have you had to wait for God's answer to your prayers? How many times have you had to wrestle with the answer God gave you? Sometimes, we pray and pray and as far as we can tell, God is saying "no" or at least "not yet." All we can do then is trust that God loves us, but we can't see it. That's what faith is – being sure of what we can't see. But when we get to heaven, when we live on the new earth, when sin is gone and death has died, God won't hide or delay his answers anymore. We will pray and our Father will act. We will always see his love clearly. No evil will ever get in the way again.

But there's more: **"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.** What is this a picture of? Peace. Wolves eat lambs. Lions eat oxen, not straw. But God pictures them living in peace together. More than just the end of war and violence and crime, God showed Isaiah a picture of true harmony and fellowship. We will all gather around the throne of the Lamb together. Sometimes, even in the church, there are people we have trouble loving. There are people that are hard for us to like or to get along with. Sometimes, even when we're trying to be good Christians, tempers flair and words are exchanged and friendships are damaged. Sad to say, even in our marriages, sometimes we can't help but fight. Sometimes we inflict the most hurt in our families. In this life, God calls us to repent and forgive and rebuild those relationships. But sometimes, the hurt is so intense that we can't fix it here. When we see Jesus, all believers will be one. All the hurt will be forgotten. All our conflicts will be over.

Even our conflicts with the world will be done – Isaiah says that dust will be the serpent's food. That's a reference to God cursing the devil in the Garden of Eden. True peace cannot come to this world while sin reigns. Sin has to be destroyed and the enemies of God have to pay the price. When the devil's kingdom falls, all of us who believed will live in perfect harmony with each other because we will live in perfect harmony with God for all eternity.

Today is Saints Triumphant. Today is all about winning. In Christ, we have already won. Our sin is forgiven. Our hearts are renewed. Our destiny is eternal life. But for now, that victory is hidden. It's hidden

behind dysfunctional families and broken relationships, even in church. It's hidden behind defeats and crushing losses in this life. It's hidden behind illness and grief and finally death itself. But something hidden is still real. A few weeks ago, I read a book about the California gold rush. For centuries, rich veins of gold lay hidden just below the surface of the ground in California. But it was always there, waiting. Jesus has already won our victory. He has it waiting for us in heaven. When we die, he will give it to us personally. And when Jesus returns, we will rise and he will give us the full measure of that victory. And we will rejoice in it forever. Amen.