

HOW YOU CAN PREPARE FOR YOUR GLORIOUS FUTURE (Isaiah 65:17-25)

His name was Charles. He graduated from OSU in 1904, but not the one in Stillwater. Back then that was Oklahoma A&M. No, Charles got his degree in Electrical Engineering from the OSU in Columbus, Ohio. Charles was an inventor. By the time of his death in 1958, he had 186 patents to his name. Your life is easier because of the things that Charles invented. Because of him, you don't have to crank your car in the morning to get the engine started. He invented the electric starter. And you can drive your car at night because Charles pioneered the electrical system in cars to provide a source of current for lighting.

It was Charles and a friend who founded the Dayton Engineering Laboratories Company. It is better known as Delco, and there is a pretty good chance that you have AC-Delco spark plugs in your car. If you own a GM, it is almost a certainty because GM bought Delco back in 1918.

Before Charles founded Delco he worked for the National Cash Register company, and he invented the first electrical cash register. He also invented a credit approval system that was the forerunner of today's credit cards.

He was the inventor of freon which has been used in air conditioning systems for decades although it was outlawed by the EPA in 2020. Charles found ways to harness solar power. He was a pioneer in the use of magnetism to create modern medical diagnostic machines such as the MRI.

Charles was his first name. His last name was Kettering. In 1945, Alfred Sloan, the chairman of General Motors donated \$4 million to create a cancer research institute in NYC. Charles Kettering, the vice president of GM oversaw the development of that research facility. Today, the Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan is one of the finest cancer care and cancer research facilities in the world.

I share those things about Charles Kettering to give weight to the following quote. Charles Kettering said: "My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there."

Brothers and sisters, I am afraid you and I give far, too little attention to the future. Some of us are held captive by the past. We constantly replay old hurts, former wounds that are still sources of pain. We are still bound by those terrible memories of things that once happened to us. Don't spend the rest of your life in the past.

Some of us have confined our thoughts upon the present. We are like the hamster on the spinning wheel. There is a whole lot of movement but not much progress. We are working, working, working to pay the bills and keep up and get by. We are shuffling the kids here and there, to and fro, and we are punching the clock, attending meetings, checking off our ever-growing to-do list. It is true that the present is the only time in which we can truly live, but the present must not be the only thing about which we think.

Don't be held captive by the past. Don't be confined to the present. Take a page out of the Charles Kettering playbook—be interested, so interested in the future. We are going to spend a whole lot of time there. If you are a believer in and a follower of Jesus, what

does your future hold? Have you thought about it? Have you researched it and meditated upon it? That is what I want us to do today.

We are going to conclude our quick journey through Isaiah. This is our 12th and final message from Isaiah. We have been looking at the gospel according to Isaiah. In the next to last chapter of his prophecy, Isaiah tells us the good news that God is going to create new heavens and a new earth. It will be a place prepared especially for God's family.

Our text is Isaiah 65:17-25. I have entitled this message, "How You Can Prepare for Your Future." As we examine our text, I am going to give you three things that we can do.

Look to See What God Has Announced—Expect

Two times in a span of two verses, Isaiah uses the same single word to tell us what we need to do. The word is variously translated.

- The KJV, the NASB, and the ESV all use the word *behold*.
- The NIV translates the word as *see*.
- The Voice Bible does something interesting. Verse 17 begins with the instruction, "Now look here!" while v. 18 tells us, "Look carefully!"
- Likewise, the Message paraphrase gives us in the first instance, "Pay close attention now," and in the second, "Look ahead with joy."
- The NLT calls upon us both times simply, "Look!"

I am afraid that we are so terribly distracted with our busy lifestyles and petty concerns that either we lack the interest in or the ability to pay attention to what God said should command our attention.

I believe that what Isaiah foretold in his prophecy is the same thing that John saw in a vision. In the next to last chapter of the Bible, John wrote: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Revelation 21:1). John wrote these words from the rocky Island of Patmos where he had been banished because of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. For John, the sea was a barrier that separated him from those he loved. In the new earth, all barriers have been removed. We will have perfect fellowship with one another and complete access to God.

In Revelation 21:2 John added, "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband."

John is closely following Isaiah's script 800 years later. He talks about God creating a new heaven, a new earth, and then he mentions the new Jerusalem. It is a city that God is preparing even now, and one day it will come to rest on the cleansed and recreated earth.

John describes it as a bride prepared for her husband on her wedding day. Think about that image. On her wedding day, a bride doesn't slip into a pair of jeans that have been lying on her bedroom floor for two days, quickly tie up her hair in a ponytail, throw on an old sweatshirt, and then shuffle down the aisle in a pair of house shoes.

No. Not at all. That picture I just painted doesn't match the experience of you ladies

who have been married, and it doesn't match the dreams of you who have pictured in your mind your own wedding one day.

Weeks and months before you get married, you have to say "yes" to the dress, the right dress, the dress you can't imagine not walking down the aisle wearing, and you have to get the right venue. I can only hope that you spend as much time making sure you were going to marry the right man. I will skip over all the planning that went into ordering just the right wedding invitations and the guest list, making sure you had the right photographer, the right caterer for your reception, and all the decorating of the wedding chapel and the reception hall. On the day of the wedding, you had to have your hair done and your fingernails painted, and the makeup applied just so, and you put on the dress well before the ceremony starts. Everything is attended to before you walk down that aisle.

What is the point John is making? He is saying that God will prepare the City of Heaven with that same attention to detail. Nothing will be missed. Nothing will be overlooked. Everything will be just right and just as it was meant to be when the City of Heaven comes down to the new earth.

God, through the pen of the prophet Isaiah is saying, "Look! See! Watch! Pay attention! Don't miss it!" I believe God is whetting our appetite to see Him do a great work. God is building our expectation.

I came across a quotation from Daniel Boorstin. Boorstin grew up in Tulsa. His father wanted him to go to the University of Oklahoma and become a lawyer like himself. The younger Boorstin didn't do that. Instead, he earned a degree from Harvard, and another at Oxford, and yet another from Yale. He became a professor of American history at the University of Chicago, wrote many books on American history, and eventually became the librarian at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

Boorstin once wrote about the unrealistic expectations of most Americans. He wrote:

We expect anything and everything. We expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious; luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to be rich and charitable, powerful and merciful, active and reflective, kind and competitive . . . We expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly . . . Never have people been more the masters of their environment. Yet never has a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world could offer.

While I believe what Boorstin wrote concerning our expectations is true, I have found that within the church, our expectations of God are rather small and tame. We don't really expect God to do much when we gather to worship Him. Sadly, many pastors have very low expectations of what God will do.

The preaching professor Haddon Robinson addressed preachers about this very subject. He wrote:

When we lose the sense of holy expectation, our preaching gets downgraded to

a performance in which we are required to say something religious to pass the time between 11:25 and noon on Sunday morning. We make the calls, attend the meetings, conduct the funerals, officiate at weddings, but we don't expect God will show up. We pray for the sick, but we don't believe our prayers will make much difference. We counsel the bewildered, but we don't count much on the difference God can make.

Then one day, *surprise!* We discover God was at work beyond our most expansive expectations. We had underestimated the reach of God's Spirit.

The Holy Spirit doesn't check in at the church down the street and skip your congregation. He is present, not only someplace else but at your place. Count on him. Expect him. Live with holy expectations. You may be in for a great surprise.

Robinson's words hit the mark. Our God is at work. Pray and then watch to see what God does. Give, serve, share, proclaim the gospel and then expect God to act. God hasn't forgotten you. God hasn't forgotten His promises.

One way to prepare for your future is to expect God to incredible things.

Plan to Do What God Himself Does—Rejoice

God tells us to do something in v. 18, and in the next verse He promises to do that very thing. We should plan to rejoice because that is what God is going to do. God promises that He will create the new city to be a place of joy and that its residents will be a people of gladness; so, He calls upon us to rejoice. He promises in v. 19 that in our eternal home, the sounds of weeping and distress will no longer be heard.

That is not true of our earthly home. It is quite likely that many of you wept this past week. Many different things might have occasioned your tears—fear, grief, sadness, pain (either emotional or physical), loneliness, desperation, and confusion.

While it is possible to cry tears of joy, we usually express joy in other ways. We laugh. We smile. We shout. We clap our hands and raise our arms. Go to a basketball or football game. Watch the fans. Note what they do when their team is winning, when one of their players makes a great play. Their joy is not felt silently and privately. It becomes a community celebration. Fans will high five complete strangers.

The word *community* is made up of two words—*common* and *unity*. When a group of people are at a ball game and their team is winning, it doesn't matter how each person voted in the last election. It doesn't matter what each person's annual salary is. It doesn't matter the monetary value of their respective homes or what neighborhood in which they love. There is a common unity that brings them together—their team is winning.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, whenever you meet another follower of Jesus, you share numerous connections.

- You have the same Savior.
- You have the same Heavenly Father.
- You have the same Holy Spirit living within you.
- You have the same commission to make disciples.

- You have the same Enemy of your soul.
- You have the same destination—an eternal home that God is preparing.
- You have the same reason to rejoice.

Let me take you back more than 40 years ago. It was a sunny October afternoon in 1982. More than 60,000 University of Wisconsin fans were packed into Badger Stadium in Madison, Wisconsin to cheer for their football team as they took on the Michigan State Spartans. It didn't take long for the fans to realize their Badgers were no match for the Spartans.

Something odd, however, happened. Even though the score was lopsided in favor of the visiting team, there were bursts of applause and shots of joy coming from the Badger fans at odd moments in the game.

It just happened that at the same time, 70 miles away in Milwaukee, the Brewers were beating the St. Louis Cardinals in game three of the 1982 World Series. This was long before smart phones, but many of the fans had brought portable radios. They were listening to the World Series while they were watching their football team.

It might be that life isn't turning out exactly as you hoped it would. Maybe you didn't get the dream job. Maybe that dream girl told you to take a hike. Maybe you are not having and enjoying the financial and vocational success you thought you would experience.

My advice to you is don't pay too much attention to the scoreboard of this temporal life. There is an eternal contest being waged between our God and the forces of evil. Those who are aligned with God are on the winning side. We have plenty of reason to rejoice.

Choose to Trust What God Has Promised—Believe

In vv. 20-25 we get some word pictures of what this new earth and heaven will be like. I must confess that this text is greatly debated. There is not universal agreement as to what is being discussed in this chapter. In fact, my view may differ from yours, and I'm okay with that. I hope you are, too. One reason there are so many different denominations and the Church of Jesus Christ is so fractured and fragmented is that we have not learned to live with contrary views of Scripture.

Of course, there are some basics upon which we should expect unanimous agreement. Let me name a few:

- The Bible is the inspired word of God.
- Jesus is the sinless Son of God.
- Jesus died on a cross to pay for sin.
- He arose again victorious over sin and the grave.
- All who repent of their sin and place their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior are given eternal life.

There may be some other basics on which we might expect unity, but then there are

many other beliefs about which we shouldn't demand conformity. You can still be my Christian brother or sister if your views of baptism are different from mine. I am not going to make your theological convictions about Communion or the Lord's Supper a test of fellowship.

One thing about which we surely should be gracious is people's view of end times, about what if anything must happen before Jesus returns and the order in which things will or won't happen.

There are earnest, studious, sincere believers who hold different views on these matters. So, we may not be in full agreement about our present passage, but as I say: "Hey, you believe what you wish to believe, and I will believe what Jesus believes." It's all good.

I do not believe that vv. 20-25 are addressing what some call the millennium. Some believe that before God creates a new heaven and a new earth that there will be 1000 years of peace on earth while Jesus is ruling here on earth. I don't see that. I can find nowhere in the gospels where Jesus says anything about ruling on the world for a 1000 years before eternity begins. Such a thing is not explicitly taught in the OT. Paul never addresses that. There is only one place in the NT where you might get that, which is the opening verses of Revelation 20. Revelation is what is known as apocalyptic literature. It makes great use of symbolic and figurative language. I do not think it is wise to build your theology on apocalyptic literature alone.

I believe that Isaiah 61:20-25 is a continuation of what began in v. 17 when God said He would create new heavens and a new earth. As far as I can tell, He doesn't change the subject to something that comes before. He keeps talking about this new earth. He is telling us what it will be like, but He is using language that would be understood by people who lived on the other side of Jesus and His resurrection. Isaiah is not teaching that in the eternal state that people will live a really, long time before they die. He is teaching:

- There will be no more sorrowful loss.
- There will be no more untimely death.
- You will enjoy the fruit of your labor.
- There will be no more unfair labor practices or work-related exploitation.
- You will enjoy complete security.
- The law of the jungle, kill or be killed, eat or be eaten will be rescinded and harmony will exist between animals, between man, and between animals and man.
- You will have a close fellowship with God.

On the new earth, death will be banished and the curse will be reversed. God will restore all things to the way they were meant to be.

The best-selling, horror author Stephen King was once asked in an interview, "Do you hope to go to heaven?" He answered, "I don't want to go to the heaven that I learned about when I was a kid. To me, it seems boring. The idea that you're going to lounge around on a cloud all day and listen to guys play harps? I don't want to listen to harps. I

want to listen to Jerry Lee Lewis!”

If that’s what heaven was all about, I wouldn’t want to go there either, but praise God, that is not the heaven the Bible presents.

Randy Alcorn is a preacher and author. In 2004 he published a book entitled simply, *Heaven*. In that book he wrote:

All our lives we’ve been dreaming of the New Earth. Whenever we see beauty in water, wind, flower, deer, man, woman, or child, we catch a glimpse of Heaven. Just like the Garden of Eden, the New Earth will be a place of sensory delight, breathtaking beauty, satisfying relationships, and personal joy.

That is the kind of heaven for which I am **expecting**. That is the kind of heaven in which I am **rejoicing**. It is the kind of heaven of which I am **believing**. I do so while knowing that God’s word says clearly, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” We find that verse in 1 Corinthians 2:9. Do you know where Paul got those words? He borrowed them from Isaiah 64:4.

Heaven is not a place you want to miss. Let me be clear how you get there. Jesus told us. Let’s close by looking at John 14:1-6. Jesus is the way to heaven. We get there by believing or trusting in Him.