

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
June 23, 2013

New Heavens and a New Earth

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

Key verse: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

Paul Tripp notes that the Bible compares the fleeting nature of our earthly lives to living in tents (see 2 Corinthians 5:1-4). Tripp adds:

“Most of us have no pilgrim experience, so perhaps the closest thing in our experience to the journey of a pilgrim is rustic camping. I am persuaded that the whole purpose of camping is to make a person long for home! On that first day in the woods, putting up the tent is exciting, but three days later your tent has unpleasant odors you can’t explain. You love the taste of food cooked over an open flame (that’s ash!), but three days later you are tired of foraging for wood and irritated by how fast it burns. You are excited at the prospect of catching your dinner from the stream running past your campsite, which is reported to be teeming with trout, but all you have snagged are the roots on the bottom.

“You’re now four days in and your back hurts, there seems to be no more felled wood to forage, and you’re tired of keeping the fire going anyway. You look into what was once an ice-and-food-filled cooler to see the family-sized steaks you have reserved floating gray and oozing in a pool of blood-stained water. Suddenly you begin to think fondly of home.... You stand there hoping that someone will break the silence and say, ‘Why don’t we go home?’ Your four days in the wilderness have accomplished their mission. They have prepared you to appreciate home!”

Tripp observes: “Our world isn’t a very good amusement park. No, it’s a broken place groaning for redemption. Here is meant to make us long for forever. Here is meant to prepare us for eternity” (from Tripp’s book, *Forever: Why You Can’t Live Without It*).

Isaiah 65:17-25 gives a prophetic view of the new heavens and new earth that are yet to come, after Jesus Christ returns. Revelation 21 is an instructive parallel passage:

Isaiah writes: “*For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind*” (v. 65:17). John

writes: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Isaiah writes: “*But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress*” (Isaiah 65:18-19). This part of Isaiah’s prophecy speaks of a restored Jerusalem as pointing ultimately toward the “New Jerusalem” described in Revelation 21:2-3.

There John writes: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”

In verse 20, Isaiah’s prophecy seems to compare the *longevity of human life* in the coming kingdom to that of Adam and his early descendants: “*No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.*”

Some see verse 20 and the following verses (vv. 21-24) as referring to a “millennial reign of Christ” on earth, in an intermediate period before sin and death have been fully destroyed. Other interpreters view these verses less literally but see in them, nonetheless, a figurative description of God’s coming kingdom—a kingdom in which safety, peace, and plenty will be available to all.

Isaiah 65:24 describes a time, in God’s coming kingdom, when nature itself will be made new: “*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.*”

This verse finds a close parallel in Romans 8:19-22: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom 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.”

Isaiah 65 gives a remarkable prophetic glimpse of the coming kingdom, the new heavens and new earth. In this passage, we are reminded of the *big story* that runs from Genesis through Revelation. That big story, God’s story,

tells us of God's original creation and then of that creation fallen and broken by sin. That big story tells of God's saving mission to earth in Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection conquered sin, death, and the grave. And that big story assures us that God's saving work in Christ will be completed, when Christ returns, in the new creation and in the inauguration of God's eternal kingdom. That's the big, big story of which—by God's grace—you and I are a part.

Thanks be to God!

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