

In The End . . .

Isaiah 65

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In the 80s, there was a TV series called the A-Team. The A-Team was made up of military misfits. Murdock, the leader of the team, would develop a plan to rescue someone who was in trouble, and then as the team implemented the plan, it would always go way off course. It looked like the mission would be a complete failure. However, in the end, somehow, they pulled off the rescue. Then Murdock would pull out his big ole Churchill cigar, light it up and say, *"I love it when a plan comes together."*

Sometimes when you read the Bible and you see the waywardness of God's people and the wickedness of people in the world, you might begin to believe God's rescue plan has gone way off course. We might begin to believe there is no way He is going to rescue sinners from their doom.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, God has been working His plan to save sinners. The wickedness of sinners has not thrown His plan off. He has accounted for every detail. He is not wondering how He will save His people.

God's plan from creation was *to have His people in His place under His rule*. Friends, we are created to be in relationship with God and to be in the place He has created for us and to live and flourish under His gracious governance of our lives. The plan is for *God to gather His people in His place under His rule*.

As we come to the end of Isaiah, he is given a vision of what will happen in the end. God gave Him a vision of the gathering of God's people in God's place under God's rule. Let's work through Isaiah 65 and get our minds around what God's going to do as He gathers His people.

I. God Gathers His people (vv. 1-16)

What we are going to see God doing in these sixteen verses is separating His people who trust in Jesus from those who do not. Jesus called this: *The separating the sheep from the goats or separating the wheat from the tares*. Verses 1-16 are scenes in Isaiah's vision that move back and forth between God saving and blessing His people and judging and punishing those who rebel against Him by refusing to humble themselves and trust His Son, Jesus.

First, in v. 1, we find God revealing Himself to the nations who did not seek Him, who did not know Him.

*I was sought by those who did not ask;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
I said, 'Here I am, here I am,'
to a nation that did not call on my name.*

Isaiah is telling us that God took the initiative to reveal Himself to those who were not His people (the Gentiles, that's us). He is saying that we were not seeking Him, but He revealed Himself to us so that He may save us. God literally says to us, *"Here I Am! I Am what you have been longing for in life."*

This is what happens when the gospel is preached to those who are not seeking Jesus today. Jesus reveals Himself to them through the preaching of His word and says, *"Here I am."* The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 10:17,

*So faith comes from hearing, and
hearing through the word of Christ.*

This verse is saying that when people hear us speak God's word to them, they do not simply hear our words; they hear Jesus call them to place their faith in Him. They may not have been seeking Him, but through

various circumstances and His word, He has made known to them that He was seeking them. When Jesus seeks you, that makes all the difference.

Verse 2 goes on to say that those who had been taught about God's word and had all the privileges of revelation were stubborn and rebellious. They would not submit to the Lord. The Apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 65:2 in regard to the Jews and wrote in Romans 10:21,

But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

Yet, not only did God spread out His hands, or we might say plead with His people to come to Him, Isaiah 65:2 says:

*I spread out my hands all day long
to a rebellious people
who walk in the path that is not good,
following their own thoughts.*

So, instead of following God's word, they decided to go their own way and embrace Canaanite paganism. Listen to God's indictment of His own people in vv. 3-7:

These people continually anger me to my face, sacrificing in gardens, burning incense on bricks, ⁴sitting among the graves, spending nights in secret places, eating the meat of pigs, and putting polluted broth in their bowls. ⁵They say, 'Keep to yourself, don't come near me, for I am too holy for you!' These practices are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long. ⁶Look, it is written in front of me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will repay them fully ⁷for your iniquities and the iniquities of your ancestors together," says the Lord. "Because they burned incense on the mountains and reproached me on the hills, I will reward them fully for their former deeds."

These verses describe what they were doing. These people were not simply rebellious; they were religiously rebellious. They had walked away from their relationship with God and embraced false religion. Often what happens when people walk away from God is embrace a false kind of spirituality. Most often, it is some kind of self-styled spirituality where they are the center of their own world. The sad news is that when rebellious people become religious, their hearts become incredibly hard toward Jesus.

God tells them in v. 7 that because they rejected Him and embraced paganism, they would receive what they wanted. Verse 7 reminds us that we can either humble ourselves before God and say, "Your will be done," or God will one day hand us over to our desires, and He will say to us, "Your will be done."

Then in vv. 8-10, the scene shifts again, and we see God gathering His people together. In this passage, we are reminded that not all of the Jews rejected God's salvation that was provided in Jesus. Listen to God's saving work among the Jews:

⁸ *The Lord says this:
"As the new wine is found in a bunch of grapes,
and one says, 'Don't destroy it,
for there's some good in it,'
so I will act because of my servants
and not destroy them all.
⁹ I will produce descendants from Jacob,
and heirs to my mountains from Judah;*

*my chosen ones will possess it,
and my servants will dwell there.
¹⁰ Sharon will be a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me.*

The imagery in v. 8 is a person harvesting grapes. He finds a few bad grapes in the bunch, but he knows that just because there are a few bad grapes does not mean the whole bunch is bad. Instead of throwing away all of the grapes, what you do is separate the good grapes from the bad grapes. Then the good ones can be made into new wine.

This is what this text is teaching us. God has revealed Himself, and there are many people who do not believe, but there are many people who believe. So, God carefully discriminates between them. He looks into the hearts of the people who believe, and He gathers them to Himself. The good grapes are the people who believe in Jesus Christ. Verse 9 tells us that these are the Jews who repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus.

Then after this scene, Isaiah shifts to another scene in vv. 11-12, but let's continue to think of the imagery of the grapes. This group is the bad grapes. They are about to literally become the grapes of wrath.

*They are about to be rejected and judged.
But you who abandon the Lord,
who forget my holy mountain,
who prepare a table for Fortune
and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny,
¹² I will destine you for the sword,
and all of you will kneel down to be slaughtered,
because I called and you did not answer,
I spoke and you did not hear;
you did what was evil in my sight
and chose what I did not delight in."*

Here we have God indicting those who have rejected His Christ. These are the ones in vv. 3-7. They are self-seeking, self-worshippers. They are pursuing the god Fortune and Destiny instead of Jesus.

Let's be clear here, the reason the group in vv. 1 & 8-10 were saved not because they were perfect and sinless but because they humbled themselves and cried out to Jesus to save them.

On the other hand, in vv. 11-12 these are the ones who refused to listen to the call of God. They knew they should trust in Christ, but instead, they did evil and rejected God's Messiah. They did what they wanted to do. They were like the man in William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus*:

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the stroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.¹*

This really is our problem, isn't it? At heart, we want to be the captains of our own souls, don't we? We don't want anyone telling us what we should do. We want to make our own way and do our own thing. Pastor Ray Ortlund, Jr. says,

¹ Ray Ortlund, Jr., *Preaching the Word Series: Isaiah*, 442.

It's why idols attract. What we choose and what we make, we can control. We'll climb any mountain except God's holy mountain, because it's hard for us to trust him and surrender to his will. We fear that if we yield to God, he'll ruin everything. But our mechanisms for control are disasters. Our holy mountains are hellish. We should know that by now.²

Brothers and sisters, v. 11 reminds those of us who believe to persevere. It says,
Those who abandon the Lord, who forget.

We must not forsake the Lord as we go through this life. There will be times when we will be tempted to go our own way. It is in those times we must humble ourselves and call out to the Lord Jesus for help. We must lean into the means of grace to help us stay the course. We must worship with God's people, ask our church family for help and prayer, and, most importantly we must spend time in God's word.

Next, in vv. 13-14, the scene changes again. This time the Lord connects our present reality to our eternal future. The word "*Therefore*" is the connecting word for the future reality of both groups. Listen to vv. 13-14:

Therefore, this is what the Lord God says:

*"Look! My servants will eat,
but you [these are the unbelievers] will be hungry.*

*Look! My servants will drink,
but you will be thirsty.*

*Look! My servants will rejoice,
but you will be put to shame.*

¹⁴*Look! My servants will shout for joy from a glad heart,
but you will cry out from an anguished heart,
and you will lament out of a broken spirit.*

This is a picture of a future reality and a future eternity. Everyone is standing at a fork in the road. There is only one of two ways to go. In these verses, we see a picture of two eternities. It should make us pause and take account of our lives.

We can choose Heaven or Hell. What will Heaven be like? It will be like a great banquet where the guests eat, drink, rejoice, and sing. In contrast, what will Hell be like? It will be a place of weeping, gnashing of teeth, hunger, thirst, shame, despair, and crying out in pain where everyone is wailing and despairing for all eternity.

Lastly, in vv. 15-16, we see that God's plan has come together. It was not an accident. He was not flying by the seat of His pants. These two verses may sound a little strange, but they really lay out the final outcome of the two groups.

The Lord tells us in vv. 15-16 that everyone who submits to Him by being in covenant with Him through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ are led to blessings for all eternity. They are given a new name, and all of their suffering, trials, troubles, and pain experienced in this life is forgotten. The Apostle John tells us in Revelation that those whom God saves are given a new name that only He knows and that Jesus will wipe away all the tears in our eyes as a Father would His child.

However, those who reject salvation in Jesus are cursed and experience eternal death in Hell, and as Revelation says, death in the Lake of Fire.

Friends, we must be careful not to be offended by the strong doctrine of Hell. It is certainly not a popular topic to preach about these days. Yet, Jesus talked about Hell more than anyone in the Bible. He did this to warn us not to be so foolish as to go there.

² Ibid.

Hell is part of what it means to understand the gospel. The gospel teaches us that on the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh, went through Hell for those who repent of their sin and trust in Him.

We also need to know that every sin will be punished. Every sinner will go to Hell. Sinners go to Hell in one of two ways. They will either go there personally or substitutionally. Sinners will go there and pay for their own sin, or because of their faith in Jesus Christ, His infinity sufferings will be counted for them. Jesus endured Hell on the cross for sinners. All you need to do is place your faith in Him, and His suffering and death become your suffering and death. The righteousness He earned becomes your righteousness.³

The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ have always been God's plan to gather His people to Himself. Jesus is not Plan B. He is Plan A, and He has always been working God's plan to perfection. You can trust Him.

II. God Gathers His people in His place (vv. 17-23)

In vv. 17-25, the scene changes again, and we are given a glimpse of the New Heavens and the New Earth. God has been leading His people and all creation to this point since we sinned and were removed from the Garden of Eden. It is not by accident, nor is it a coincidence that we eventually arrive back where it all started.

Verse 17 opens up with Genesis 1 kind of language. God is creating a New Heavens and a New Earth.

*“For I will create new heavens and a new earth;
the past events will not be remembered or come to mind.
¹⁸ Then be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I will create Jerusalem to be a joy
and its people to be a delight.*

So, how did we get here? The Father did not abandon His original creation. He refused to abandon His creation. But in order to remake His original creation, He sacrificed His own Son in order to save it and remake it. We trashed His original creation with our sin, but God redeems and recreates His original work, except this time, there will be no sin, no brokenness, no cancer, no genetic disorders, no mental illness, no terrorism, no politics, no bad news, no more wars, no more strife, no more arguments, no more hurt feelings, no sadness and no death because the old things like this that are caused by sin will have passed away. Everything will be made new.⁴

As a matter of fact, just a few seconds into the new creation, you may turn to someone and say, “Cancer? Terrorism? War? Pain? — what are those things? I can't seem to remember them, and I am sure glad of it.”⁵ Let's go further in and further up!”⁶

Friends, do you ever wonder what the new heavens and new earth will be like? Isaiah 65:19-23 gives us some inkling of it. The language in this text is prophetic, earthly language striving to help us grasp heavenly realities.

I remember, as a kid thinking heaven will be boring because it sounds like one very long church service. There is no doubt that worship of Jesus will be part of what we do in the new creation, but it will not be all we do.

Citizens of the new creation will build, plant, and eat just as human beings did in God's original design. In Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed God's good creation, and likewise, we will, too, only there will be no sin. Work will be fun and rewarding. Have you ever gotten to the end of a work project only to find it full of flaws, limited in what it does, and then in a few years, it is obsolete? Perhaps you worked on a project only to have it break down as soon as it started. This will not be the experience in heaven. Frustration will be gone.

³ Tim Keller, *Leadership Journal: Preaching Hell in a Tolerant Age: Brimstone for the Broadminded*, Fall 1997, www.christianitytoday.com.

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, 89.

⁵ Adapted from Ray Ortlund, Jr., 444.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle*.

Friends, life will be filled with joy and happiness. There will be safety and contentment in our relationships. There will be unending fellowship with God, and that will make our hearts overflowing with amazing love and peace. It will be the life we have always longed for but has always just seemed out of reach. In God's new creation, the abundant life we have longed for will be given to us in unending measure. It simply will be an unending, eternal paradise.

If you have ever longed for a place to call home where, when you get there, you don't have to wonder or worry about fitting in with everyone. It will be a home without anxiety. You won't have to wonder if you are loved and accepted because you will know that you are finally home. You will be safe in the arms of King Jesus. He and everyone there will love you for simply being you.

C. S. Lewis is one of the best writers on the subject of heaven and what life will be like in the new heavens and new earth. Yet, like everyone, he struggled in this life as he traveled to his heavenly home. He wrote:

I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not see till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to the other country and to help others to do the same.

Friends, this is what the church helps us do. Life in a local church is continually reminding one another to fix our eyes on Jesus, who has gone home to prepare a place for us. He will come to welcome us to our heavenly home one day, or we will pass from this life to the next and meet Him there as He welcomes us home.

Friends, we need three homes in this life. We need a home where we can go to after a hard day at work and close the door. We need a home in heaven, and we need a church home. These last two homes are built by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life and then died on the cross and rose from the dead to establish His church. Every local church should function as a taste of our home in heaven. They are not perfect, but they help us as we travel to our perfect heavenly home.

The way we enter our church home and our heavenly home is the same. We enter through the Door of Jesus. We must turn from our sins and unbelief and trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Have you trusted Jesus? Do you have a church home and a home in heaven? I would love to speak with you if you are not sure.

III. God Gathers His people in His place under His rule (vv. 24-25)

Finally, we come to the end of Isaiah 65. Verses 24-25 tell us what it will be like to live under God's rule. The Bible tells us that we call God because He first called us. We love Him because He first loved us.

Verse 24 is consistent with the grace of God, who is seeking us before we ever consider seeking Him. Then we begin a life of living under God's rule. We flourish under His grace and mercy. There will only be one rule in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Look in v. 18:

Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.

Then v. 25 tells us that the culture of the new creation will be peace. The imagery of apex predators living in peace alongside helpless animals means there will be peace beyond measure. God's peace will fill every corner of His new creation.

Finally, the serpent that brought the curse will be crushed. Sin will have no power in God's new creation. The curse will be swallowed up in life and blessing.

Conclusion: In the end, this is the life we have always longed to live. May the Lord God be gracious and grant us this life soon.