

I Have Come Home at Last

Based on Isaiah 65:17-25 | Sermon 4 of 5: The Future Nature of Heaven

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." — Isaiah 65:17

SERMON SUMMARY

This sermon — the fourth in a five-part series on heaven — began by naming our real problem with heaven: not that it is unimaginable, but that it sounds uninteresting. The sermon opened with a childhood memory of a fourth-grade puppet show. All the friendly, collaborative plays were forgettable. The one dysfunctional, conflict-filled play — the one with danger and a rubber alligator thrown into the crowd — was the one every kindergartener drew afterward. Because every good story needs a good antagonist. It needs tension, challenge, and something to overcome.

Heaven, as we typically picture it, has none of that. Clouds and harps and eternal singing. No struggle, no challenge, no learning, no tension. No wonder we don't long for it. And if we can't live for what we don't long for, we need to recapture a genuinely biblical vision of what the new creation will actually be like.

The Text and the Question It Raises

Isaiah 65:17-25 is, according to one scholar, perhaps the loftiest Old Testament description of the future life of God's people. It arrives as a glorious pivot after chapters of impending judgment and terror — God saying, in essence, the past troubles will be forgotten, and I will create something entirely new.

But the text immediately raises a question every believer and every theologian wrestles with: how much continuity will there be between our present earth and the future heaven? And how much discontinuity? The sermon laid out both sides of this genuine tension in Scripture.

Isaiah 65:17-19 "Behold, 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. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people."

The Case for Discontinuity

Some scholars emphasize a radical break between what is and what will be. The Hebrew word for "create" in verse 17 is bara — the same word used in Genesis 1:1, meaning creation from nothing, ex nihilo. The text says the former things will not be remembered. Passages across both Testaments speak of the heavens vanishing like smoke, the earth wearing out like a garment, and everything being laid bare and destroyed by fire before the new creation appears.

Revelation 21:1 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

The Case for Continuity — and Why It Matters

Other scholars — and the sermon leaned this direction — argue that although a cataclysmic transformation is certain, the deeper reality is one of profound continuity. Several threads of evidence support this.

- The word bara does not always mean creation from nothing. In Isaiah itself, God says "I will create praise on the lips of the mourners" — creating beauty from ashes, something new from something that already exists.
- The Greek word for "new" used in the New Testament is kainos — meaning new in quality, not neos (new in time, something that simply wasn't there before). We became "new creations" in Christ; we didn't disappear and reappear. We were renewed.
- The "former things not remembered" refers specifically to the former troubles, not to all good things — the grief and curse, not the glory.
- Jesus in Matthew speaks of the "renewal of all things" (paligenesia). Acts 3 speaks of God's promise to "restore everything." Romans 8 describes creation groaning for liberation — not for destruction and replacement, but for freedom.

Romans 8:21 "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

As one Reformed scholar put it: "The present world will neither continue forever nor be destroyed and replaced by a totally new one. Instead, it will be cleansed of sin, recreated, reborn, renewed, made whole. The fire is not of destruction but of cleansing." Another said: "The world into which we shall enter at the return of Christ is not another world. It is this world — these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people — that will be the scene of redemption."

The Three Contours of the Future Heaven

With that framework in place, the sermon drew out three broad characteristics of what the new creation will actually be like — and none of them are boring.

1. Embodied Activity

Isaiah describes building houses, dwelling in them, planting vineyards, eating their fruit, and enjoying the works of their hands. This is not vague spiritual imagery. It is deliberate: these are the exact reversals of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy — where God had warned that disobedience would mean building houses and not living in them, planting vineyards and not enjoying their fruit. Heaven is the removal of that curse, down to the specific details.

More fundamentally: God's original intent was to place physical image-bearers in a physical creation and give them real work to do. Work was not the result of the fall — the frustration of work was. If God's design was embodied people in a rich material world with meaningful things to accomplish, why would the new creation be something less than that? It will be something immeasurably more.

The sermon offered a vivid image: what if a farmer who spent his lifetime working the rolling hills of northwest Iowa will do so again — in a renewed body, without decay or fatigue, across a renewed creation that includes not just earth but a universe? Olympus Mons on Mars is three times higher than Everest. Its base is larger than Nebraska. One mountain, one planet, in one solar system.

2. Life Abundant

Isaiah 65 promises that infants will not die after a few days, that the elderly will live out their years, and that the days of God's people will be like the days of a tree. Earlier in Isaiah we are told death itself will be swallowed up forever. This is not simply a promise of quantity — more years — but of quality. Every day will be a discovery of grace and joy and peace, free from the enemy who comes to steal and kill and destroy.

Isaiah 25:8 "He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces."

3. Relational Wholeness

The first thing the fall ruptured was relationship: between Adam and Eve (naked and ashamed), between humanity and God (they hid), and between humanity and creation (now subject to death and fear). Heaven is the repair of every one of those ruptures. Isaiah 65 pictures one people from every tribe and nation gathered in diversity but deep unity, generations bound together across time. God says "I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people" — no longer angry or grieving, but rejoicing. Before they call, he will answer. And creation itself is made whole: the wolf and the lamb feed together, the lion eats straw like the ox.

Three Closing Truths

1. Joy will be the serious business of heaven. The only command in Isaiah 65's vision of the new creation is: "Be glad and rejoice forever." Joy is not incidental to heaven — it is its defining obedience. And it is mutual: God says he will rejoice over his people. Heaven throbs with the humor and wit and delight of a God who invented joy and enters into it with us forever.
2. The present earth echoes into eternity. Because there is continuity between creation and new creation, what we do now has bearing on what will be. Isaiah 60 pictures the kings of the nations bringing their cultural wealth into the new Jerusalem — the arts, the learning, the beautiful things made by human hands — renewed and purified. Our work done in Christ's name, our struggles against sin individual and institutional, our acts of faithful service have value not only for this world but for the world to come.
3. The present earth also echoes with eternity. This world is not simply what it appears to be. It is an anticipation — a foretaste, a shadow — of the real thing that is coming. Randy Alcorn: if you want to know what the new earth will be like, start by looking around. Visit a zoo. Watch the goldfinches. Look at the stars. Every burst of beauty in creation is a whisper of what is being prepared.

The sermon closed with C.S. Lewis's description of the new Narnia in *The Last Battle* — the characters realizing that the old world they loved was not the real thing, only a shadow of it, and that everything good and dear from the old world had been drawn through the door into the real one. The unicorn stamps his hoof and cries: "I have come home at last. This is my real country. I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now."

Key Takeaway

Heaven is not an escape from the physical world into some ethereal elsewhere. It is this world — redeemed, renewed, made whole. Embodied activity without frustration or decay. Life abundant without death or grief. Relationships fully restored between people, between us and God, and between humanity and creation. Joy as the very fabric of existence. The unicorn had it right: we have been looking for this country all our lives. We just didn't know it yet.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Take your time. Listen well to each other. There are no wrong answers — only honest ones.

1

The sermon named our real problem with heaven: not that it's unimaginable, but that it sounds uninteresting — no tension, no challenge, no story. Does that resonate with you? What has your picture of heaven actually looked like, and where did that picture come from?

2

The sermon presented both sides of the discontinuity/continuity debate honestly. On one side: a radical new creation from nothing. On the other: this world renewed, cleansed, and liberated — not replaced. Which reading feels more compelling to you, and why? What difference does it make?

3

The new creation in Isaiah 65 is described with very earthy images: houses, vineyards, wolves and lambs, people and their descendants. How does picturing heaven as a renewed, physical, active place change your relationship to it? Does it make you more interested? More skeptical?

4

The sermon said work was not the result of the fall — the frustration of work was. Heaven will have meaningful, fulfilling, unhindered work and activity. What work or activity in your current life do you love most? What would it look like to do that without decay, fatigue, or futility?

5

The only command in Isaiah's vision of the new creation is "be glad and rejoice forever." Obedience in heaven is joy. How does that sit with you? And what does it say about the nature of joy that God himself says "I will rejoice over my people"?

6

The sermon said the present earth echoes into eternity — that our work done in Christ's name has value not just for this world but for the world to come. How does that change the weight you give to ordinary daily faithfulness — your vocation, your creative work, your acts of service?

7

Randy Alcorn says if you want to know what heaven will be like, start by looking around — at creation, at beauty, at the things that take your breath away. What in creation has done that for you recently? What might it be a foretaste of?

LIVING IT OUT

We can't live for what we don't long for. And we can't long for what we can't imagine. This week's invitation is to begin imagining more truthfully.

In Your Inner Life

- Read Isaiah 65:17-25 and Romans 8:18-25 together this week. Let the two passages form a single vision: creation groaning for liberation, and the God who answers that groan with a new creation. Notice what moves you in each passage and bring it to prayer.
- Sit with the unicorn's cry from the sermon's closing: "I have come home at last. This is my real country. I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it." Have you felt echoes of that longing? When? What were you doing or seeing or experiencing when it surfaced?
- The sermon said joy will be the serious business of heaven — the only command in the new creation is to rejoice. Ask yourself honestly: is joy a serious business in your life now? What crowds it out? Bring that gap to God in prayer.

In Your Closest Relationships

- Heaven is pictured as a place of relational wholeness — people and their descendants gathered in unity across generations, with God rejoicing over his people. Is there a rupture in one of your close relationships that you have been tolerating rather than addressing? Let the vision of heaven — where all those ruptures are healed — motivate one step toward repair this week.
- The sermon mentioned sitting with someone whose body was wearing out, and reflecting on what it would mean for them to live in a world free of what the enemy brings. Is there someone in your life whose body or mind is wearing down? Visit them this week and let the hope of Isaiah 65 — no more infant deaths, no more grief, no more tears — be the comfort you bring.
- Share the "I have come home at last" passage from C.S. Lewis with someone close to you this week. Read it aloud together and ask: what does heaven feel like when you imagine it this way, compared to how you usually think of it?

In Your Daily Life and Work

- The sermon said work was not the result of the fall — the frustration of work was. This week, in whatever work lies before you, try to distinguish between the work itself (which God gave and which will continue in the new creation) and the frustration (which the fall added and which will be removed). Honor the work even while holding the frustration lightly.
- Isaiah 60 pictures the cultural wealth of the nations — arts, learning, craftsmanship — being brought into the new Jerusalem, renewed and purified. Whatever skill, craft, or calling you exercise this week, do it with the awareness that work done faithfully in Christ's name echoes into eternity. Ask God to make your hands instruments of something that will last.
- Go outside this week and notice creation intentionally. Not in passing — deliberately. Randy Alcorn says the best way to imagine the new earth is to look at the present one. Find one thing in creation this week that takes your breath away and let it be a foretaste.

In Your Faith Community

- This is the fourth of five sermons in the series. The fifth will focus on the glory of heaven. As you prepare for next week, write down one thing from this sermon that has shifted your picture of heaven. Bring it to the final sermon with you.
- The sermon noted that our efforts to bring Christ's kingdom into fuller manifestation have eternal significance — not just for this world but for the world to come. Talk with one other person in your

church this week about what your shared vocation as a congregation might look like in light of that. What work are you doing together that might echo into eternity?

- If your congregation gathers for any corporate prayer or confession this week, pray specifically for the new creation — for the groaning of this world to be heard, for the liberation that is coming, and for eyes to see the present world as a foretaste of what God is making new.

A Word to Carry

Every time you catch your breath at a sunrise. Every burst of a fresh strawberry that reminds you of something good. Every effort done in the name of Christ that accomplishes some good. These are foretastes — glimpses of a world God will make new. You have been looking for this country all your life. You just haven't arrived yet.

SERVICE CHALLENGE

The new creation repairs every rupture the fall caused — between people, between us and God, between humanity and creation. This week, be part of that repair work in one concrete place.

This Week's Challenge: Do Something That Echoes Into Eternity

The new creation is not a replacement of this one. It is its redemption. Which means what we do here — faithfully, in Christ's name — has eternal weight. This week, do one thing with that weight in mind.

Step 1 — Choose Your Arena.

Look at the three ruptures the fall caused: between people, between humanity and God, and between humanity and creation. Which of these do you feel most called to address this week? A broken relationship? Someone who needs to hear about the God who will rejoice over his people? Care for the physical creation?

Step 2 — Name the Person or Place.

Get specific. A rupture with a particular person that needs repair. Someone who needs to encounter the God of Isaiah 65. A corner of creation that needs tending — a neighbor's need, a community project, an act of environmental stewardship. Write it down.

Step 3 — Do It as an Act of Kingdom Work.

Before you act, pause and frame it consciously: this is not just an act of neighborliness. This is a small foretaste of the repair God is making in the world. Do it with that awareness — not as performance, but as participation in what God is doing.

Step 4 — Offer to Pray.

If appropriate, close your act of service with prayer. Ask God to let this small act be a seed of the new creation — of the repair he is making in this person, this place, this relationship. Brief, honest, specific.

Step 5 — Come Back and Share.

If you're in a small group or Sunday school class, come ready to share what you did and what you noticed. We are practicing together what it looks like to live as citizens of a coming kingdom — doing work that echoes into eternity.

Optional Extended Challenge

- Read the final chapter of C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, or at least the section describing the new Narnia. Come to next week's final sermon with that image fresh in your mind. Let Lewis's imagination help you inhabit Isaiah's vision.
- Look up Isaiah 60:1-14 this week — the passage the sermon referenced about the kings bringing their cultural wealth into the new Jerusalem. Read it slowly. Ask: what does the work I do now look like as something being carried through those gates, renewed and purified?
- Find one place in your community where creation itself is suffering — an environmental need, a neglected space, something beautiful that has been damaged or abandoned. Do one small act of stewardship or restoration this week as an act of kingdom anticipation.

Closing Prayer Guide

Whether you're using this in a group or on your own, close by praying through these four things:

- Give thanks — for the vision of a new creation that is not an escape from the world but its redemption, where death is swallowed up, tears are wiped away, and joy is the fabric of existence.
- Confess honestly — the ways our picture of heaven has been too small, too dull, or too vague to actually move us, and the ways we have failed to live as people shaped by a vision of where this world is headed.
- Ask for longing — that God would give us genuine hunger for the new creation, not just theological assent to it. We cannot live for what we do not long for.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly — especially the line "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Let the vision of Isaiah 65 give that prayer new weight.

"I have come home at last. This is my real country. I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now."

— C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* | From This Week's Sermon