

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Last Sunday after Trinity, November 26, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 23, 236:4, 618, 613, 613:4.

Lessons: Isaiah 51:1-16, Revelation 21:1-7. Luke 12:35-46.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 65:17-19.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus:

What is it that we are looking forward to more than anything else? No doubt, if this question were asked of people of the world in general, there would be a variety of answers. But it is likely that all of their hopes for the future would be centered on something of this world, something of a material nature, something that money can buy. Since all these things are going to pass away, those who do not believe in Christ as their Savior really have no hope for the future. They can be described in Paul's words as *“without hope and without God in the world.”* Eph. 2:12

But how wonderful it is for us who are *“members of God's household,”* (Eph. 2:19) for we have Christ as our Savior by faith and we truly have something to look forward to in the future. Peter describes it: *“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you.”* I Pet. 1:3-4

Today, as this church year is ending, and we are reminded that this world is coming to an end, we want to rejoice in the fact that we as believers in Christ really have something wonderful to look forward to. Let us meditate on:

THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH.

- 1. God will create them, and the former heaven and earth will not be remembered; and,**
- 2. We will rejoice in them, and God in us, and all weeping and crying will end.**

The Lord speaks through Isaiah the prophet and says: *“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.”* These are the words of him who created all things in the universe in the beginning. In the vision that God gave to John, he saw the end of all things and the new creation of heaven and earth. He says: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”* Rev. 21:1 The destruction of the first creation will take place on the last day. Peter writes: *“The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”* II Pet. 3:10

Whether this destruction of the world will be accomplished by complete annihilation of this present world and then be replaced by a new creation, or if there will only be a change in the external appearance of the world after the destruction by fire, is something the Bible does not tell us. Therefore, we also do not need to know this, but can be satisfied with what the Lord does tell us. Jesus tells us: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”* Luke 21:33

The new heaven and earth that the Lord will create are truly something to look forward to, far more wonderful than we can imagine. This will be the dwelling place of all believers in Christ in eternity. In the Book of Revelation John tells how the glorified Church of believers is described: *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”* Rev. 21:2 The sum total of believers in Christ, members of the Holy Christian Church, are also called the “bride” of Christ. John was told by an angel in the vision: *“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the*

Lamb.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." Rev. 21:9-11

One thing that makes the dwelling place of believers in Christ in the new heaven and earth so wonderful is that there will be no hint or remembrance at all of what is was like on this sinful earth. Isaiah says in our text: **"The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."** We cannot forget these things now while we are still on earth. This present creation is full of troubles and problems, sickness and afflictions, crime and violence, immorality and disregard for what God tells us. Every day in this life we are reminded of these terrible things. We read about them, we hear about them, we see them with our eyes. That's why this earth is called a vale of tears. In heaven we won't remember one thing about anything on this earth. We won't remember how bad we felt many times, how troubled and perplexed we were by many problems, how guilty we felt because of our many sins. We won't remember any of these things because God's glory prepared for us in heaven will be so great. And we won't wish for anything we had here on earth, no matter how much we had or how wonderful it was thought to be.

Why, then, should we put so much emphasis on these material and earthly things? Why should we spend so much time and money on the things that are all going to be burned up, and that we won't even remember in heaven? Do we understand now why Paul gives this exhortation? **"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."** Col. 3:2-4

When the old earthly things are burned up, and God creates a new heaven and a new earth, then we will rejoice in them, and God will rejoice in us, and all weeping and crying will end.

2.

Our text tells us: **"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."** In the new creation where all believers in Christ will dwell, there will not be some joy, but only joy. Isaiah described the joy of the returned exiles from the Babylonian captivity in these words: **"The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."** Is. 51:11 Can you imagine how much more wonderful it will be in heaven! Paul exhorts believers here on this sinful earth: **"Be joyful always,"** (I Thess. 5:16) because of the joy we have in Christ's redeeming work. But think of how it will be when we really can be joyful always in absolute holiness and perfection in heaven!

This is the joy we will have in what Jesus calls **"my Father's house."** John 14:2 This is the paradise Jesus promised to the penitent criminal on the cross. He said: **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** Luke 23:43 The eternal God promises this joy and glory forever. He says: **"The new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me."** Is. 66:22

The glory of heaven is also this, that the Lord will rejoice in us. He says in our text: **"I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people."** Isaiah writes: **"As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."** Is. 62:5b The Lord will rejoice in his elect, those he chose from eternity by his grace in Christ. Those he redeemed and justified will be the object of his delight in heaven. Paul says of all of us who will be raised up on the last day to everlasting life: **"So we will be with the Lord forever."** I Thess. 4:17 Jesus promises in the Sermon on the Mount: **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."** Matt. 5:8 Jesus prayed in his high-priestly prayer: **"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."** John 17:24 Jesus promises the believers: **"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** John 14:3 John in the vision heard these words: **"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."** Rev. 21:3

Because God rejoices in his believers and delights in them, as our text says, **"the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more."** Because all sin and death will no longer be remembered, there will be no more tears and crying. Isaiah says: **"The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth."** Is. 25:8 In heaven, John writes, **"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."** Rev. 7:17 He also writes: **"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** Rev. 21:4

Thus there can be no doubt that the new creation of God is really something to look forward to! The only thing that remains for us to consider today as we are told of it is the question: How do we get there? It does no one any good to piously imagine that we all will finally get to heaven. The fact is that the great majority of people, because of their unbelief, will never experience the great joy of heaven our text describes. Therefore, this is not something to be careless about. We should not give only casual thought to this. John writes of Heaven: ***“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”*** Rev. 21:27

We must, therefore, know what the Bible says of our salvation, of having our names written in the book of life. It is alone in Christ Jesus our Savior that we have the hope of heaven. He is our only Redeemer. Paul says: ***“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*** Rom. 3:23-24 Jesus says: ***“No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”*** John 6:46-47 Let there be no mistake about this. John writes: ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”*** John 3:36 It is essential, then, that we hear the Word of God. Jesus says: ***“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*** John 5:24 Surely, then, we should hear the Word of God faithfully so that we can join the Church of Christ in heaven in praising Jesus our Savior, as the poet writes:

“Worthy the Lamb that died,” they cry,
“To be exalted thus.”
“Worthy the Lamb” our lips reply,
For He was slain for us. Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal 344, v. 2)

Reprinted from Ministry By Mail, November 26, 1989.