

Sermon for Saints Triumphant Sunday (Series C)
Text: Isaiah 65:17-25 Preached on 11-18-2007

Introduction:

Is it just me, or has our world endured more than it's share of natural disasters lately. I can remember the heat wave in France, Spain, and Italy that claimed the lives of over 50,000 people in 2003. I remember the tsunami that suddenly claimed the lives of over 216,000 people in Asia in 2004. I remember how hurricane Katrina caused immense flooding and more than 800 deaths in New Orleans in 2005. I remember the mining disaster in West Virginia that trapped 13 miners in 2006. Most recently, there were the firestorms that burned 375,000 acres of Southern California coastline last month. It seems like there's one natural disaster after another.

Closer to home, maybe there's some disaster going on in your life right now. Or maybe there's some tragedy happening to someone you know and love. All the hardships in our world and lives can cause us to wonder if there is anything good to look forward to. Well, there is! Our text for this Saints Triumphant Sunday has the power to make every one of us anticipate the best possible outcome. That is why...

Theme: We Are Looking Forward to a New Home!

Part I: To be enjoyed then (vv. 17-19)

Part II: To be enjoyed now (vv. 20-25)

Part I: To be enjoyed then (vv. 17-19)

The LORD says, "**Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth**" (v. 17). These words sound familiar. They remind me of the Bible's opening verse: "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**" (Genesis 1:1). At Creation the LORD spoke and things sprouted into existence: Oceans, mountains, sun, moon, stars, fish, birds, reptiles, mammals, and, of course, human beings. Creation was, by God's own assessment, "**Very good**" (Genesis 1:31). But when Adam and Eve decided to defy the one limitation God had placed on them, they and all Creation experienced some rather dire consequences. Sin, sorrow, fear, trouble, and natural disasters all pushed their way through the door Adam and Eve had opened. The Bible says that when God saw what had become of His once perfect creatures, He became, "**Grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain**" (Genesis 6:6).

God experienced that same grief and pain as He looked at the people of Judah in Isaiah's day. The LORD said, **"All day long I have held out My hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations – a people who continually provoke Me to My very face"** (Isaiah 65:2-3). Because of Israel's stubborn resistance, their nation was in the middle of a very difficult period. Things were going from bad to worse. The nation's capital was about to be overrun by enemy forces; the nation's citizens were soon to be hauled off as prisoners of war. Day after day, month after month, the Children of Israel were confronted with what can only be characterized as one disaster after another. And yet, against the backdrop of all those horrible events, Isaiah still had a message of hope for them. With the temple burned and their former home destroyed, they had *A New Home to Look Forward To!*

Application:

As we look at our lives, we realize that by our sinful behavior, we've earned far more curses from God than blessings. Because you and I are guilty of breaking the same commandments that Israel broke, we are worthy of the same punishments that God brought against His Old Testament people, namely, sorrow and disaster in this life and eternal condemnation in the next. That's the bad news. BUT fortunately, God's message does not stop there. Against the backdrop of that bad news, God steps forward and offers some truly Good News. News that promises us a *New Home!*

The LORD describes our *New Home* in terms of what won't be there. He says, **"The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind"** (v. 17). In Heaven we're all going to experience a divinely-induced amnesia about all the disasters that occur in our present world and lives. We won't remember any of them. The things that cause us misery and heartache in this world will not exist in our *New Home*. That means it will be a place of pure, unadulterated, never-ending joy! That is why the LORD says, **"Be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy"** (v. 18). This Good News message of a future home in never-ending joy gives us something to look forward to, even as we continue to experience all the natural consequences of sin in our world and lives today?

Transition:

So far Isaiah has described how *We Are Looking Forward to a New*

Home sometime in the future. In addition to enjoying that *New Home* then, it is also...

Part II: To be enjoyed now (vv. 20-25)

Looking into the future, the LORD gives us one foretaste of Heaven after another. Each one gives us great joy now! First, the LORD tells us that, **“We will no longer build houses and others live in them, or plant vineyards and others eat their fruit” (vv. 21-22)**. That hadn't always been the case in Israel. Though the Children of Israel inherited a land with ready-built houses and vineyards already planted, they lost those things when the Babylonians came in and conquered their land. Their planted crops were harvested by their enemies. How frustrating! BUT here and now God is permitting us to thoroughly enjoy our homes and gardens. In just a few days, in fact, we will be offering thanks to God for the splendid array of blessings He's given us. We will be enjoying His gifts of food, relaxation, and entertainment with our family and friends. So even though we live in a fallen world that experiences one disaster after another, there are many things that God still uses to bring us enjoyment now.

As you are gathered around the table this Thanksgiving, remember the following promise. The LORD says, **“Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (v. 24)**. On account of our sin and rebellion, we deserve to have our food and homes taken away from us this Thanksgiving. BUT God promises not to do that. He promises, instead, to be entirely in tune with our needs and wants. For Jesus' sake, He is like all the people in our lives who have an uncanny knowledge of us. A spouse, for example, knows when you are hurting. A parent knows what gift will bring a smile to your face this Christmas. That's how well God knows us. He knows our hurts and what will bring a smile to our face. He knows these things because He is attentive to our prayers. Before a prayer ever crosses our lips, God is already answering it. He does so to bring us enjoyment now.

Application:

It is important for us to know that these words are not describing some kind of earthly (or millennial) enjoyment that God will establish for the physical nation of Israel someday. No, the nation of Israel broke that Old Covenant when they failed to live up to their end of the bargain and sinned against the LORD. What Isaiah is describing here is the life that you and I now enjoy as Christians. A life which does not mean peace between nations, an end to world catastrophes, or perfect happiness in

our lives! Rather, Isaiah is describing an eternal peace and happiness in an all-together *New Home*.

This peace and happiness was first announced to the world by the angels when they sang, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests” (Luke 2:14)**. My friends, we don’t have to wait for Jesus’ to come again to enjoy our *New Home*. We can enjoy it right now. Because we are living under the New Covenant, we are at peace with God! That makes us happy now! So no matter how bad things get in the world; no matter how big a disaster hits your life, you can always count on God’s Grace. It’s found right here, in His Holy Word. It’s given freely right there, at the Lord’s Table. Through these Means (of Grace), *We Are Looking Forward to a New Home!* But it’s a home we can enjoy now.

Conclusion:

One of the greatest natural disasters of all time occurred on August 24 of 79 A.D. That was the day when the area around Mount Vesuvius shook with a huge earthquake. The mountain's top split open and a monstrous cloud raced upward. The inhabitants of Pompeii were showered with ash, stones, and pumice. Excavators found that much of what Pompeii looked like in 79 A.D. had been preserved by the ash that had fallen. Victims were immortalized when their decomposed bodies left cavities in the hardened ash. The cavities were filled with plaster to recreate victims much as they looked at the time of their death. Many are seen running away from the impending doom.

Do you realize it’s going to be much the same way on the Last Day? Most people will be living out their lives, completely oblivious to God’s building anger over their sin and unbelief. Then He will blow: Suddenly and unexpectedly! The trumpets will sound and the skies will light up! When that happens, many will try to run and hide from the impending doom. But just like the residents of Pompeii, no one will be able to escape God’s just wrath. No one except believers that is! The LORD will have a *New Home* waiting for His people on that Day. It is something that we will enjoy then. But it is also something that we can enjoy now. Either way, *We Are Looking Forward to a New Home!* Amen!