

We’ve been seeing that Isaiah’s vision of the new creation includes where we are right now.

Isaiah speaks of the new heavens and the new earth

as a place where people are born – where people die (65:20).

John, in the book of Revelation, will make clear that in the final new creation

there is no death –

and Jesus affirms that there is no marriage in the final new creation!

But at the same time, Paul affirms that if anyone is in Christ,

he participates in a new creation.

The New Creation has begun in the ascension of Jesus to the Right Hand of the Father.

The New Creation has dawned in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

That’s the “already” of the new creation in Jesus.

The “not yet” is what is still to come –

and in between the already and the not yet,

we are building – we are enriching and improving – that new creation.

Isaiah 65-66 forms one great chiasm.

Isaiah 65:1 calls those who had not known or sought me.

Isaiah 65:2-7 speaks of God anger against those who sacrifice in gardens
and eat pig’s flesh (rejecting the true worship of God).

Isaiah 65:8-10 speaks of the remnant–

the servants who will dwell in the land–

the offspring that will flourish in the land.

Isaiah 65:11-12 speaks of those who forget God’s holy mountain,

turn to an idolatrous feast,

and delight in what was evil in my sight.

Isaiah 65:13-16 speaks of the contrast between the feast

of the servants and the starvation of the wicked,

juxtaposing the blessing of the servants and the

cursing of the wicked.

And at the very heart of the chiasm are verses 17-18,

the declaration of the coming of the new heavens and the new earth.

The creation of a New Jerusalem,

the city of the living God.

This is the heart of Isaiah’s message to Israel and Judah.

Isaiah 65:19-25 then returns to the blessedness

of those who live in the New Jerusalem

Isaiah 66:1-4 then reminds us that heaven is God’s throne,

and condemns those who have delighted in false worship.

Isaiah 66:5-14 explains the miracle children of Zion, the Lord's servants.
Isaiah 66:15-17 uses the exact same language, and speaks of their destruction.
Isaiah 66:18-21 concludes with those who have not heard my fame.

Tonight we are focusing on the second part of the chiasm.

The first part of the chiasm emphasized the fact that some of God's people
have turned against him, and refused to inherit the new creation.
"You" have forsaken the LORD and forgotten his holy mountain.
Therefore "you" shall be hungry, "you" shall wail for breaking of spirit,
while "they"—my servants—shall rejoice.
But in the second part of the chiasm, "you" are called to repentance.
The pronouns are reversed.
Now "you" are called to hear the word of the LORD,
while "they" are put to shame.

4') **The Destiny of Those Who Forget the Heavenly Throne—66:1-4**

Thus says the LORD:

*"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?"*

What's the right answer?

God says "I made all things—how can you build me a house?"

The question seems to demand a negative answer:

we cannot build God a house.

But that is not Isaiah's answer.

Remember Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:12-29.

"But will God really dwell on the earth?

The heaven of heavens cannot contain you.

How much less this temple I have built!"

But while Solomon recognizes that the temple cannot contain God,

yet he knows that God has promised to dwell there among his people.

Isaiah likewise declares that God will dwell with his people.

² *All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.*

*But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.*

It is probably clearer in Hebrew:

It's almost impossible to translate this literally, but the end of verse 1 says
"where is this house that you would build for me?
and where is this place of my rest?"

Then at the end of verse 2:

"but this is the one to whom I will look"

The irony is poignant.

Man builds huge, impressive temples for God.

And God asks, "where is it?"

You built something impressive for me?

I created the heavens and the earth,

how is this little dinky temple you've thrown together
supposed to impress me?

This temple is not impressive.

Now, the one who is humble and contrite in spirit,

the one who trembles at my word,

that is impressive!

This is the one who catches God's eye.

Do you want to impress God?

Then tremble at his word!

Do we *really believe* that God's word is able to change us?

Then you need to be reading it – soaking in it –

You need to be praying over it!

As if to demonstrate how futile are the endeavors of man to impress God,

Isaiah then compares even proper worship to idolatry:

(Read verse 3)

³ *"He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man;
he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck;
he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood;
he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol.
These have chosen their own ways,
and their soul delights in their abominations;*

You can build God a great, big temple,

and even follow all his liturgical commands,

and still be an abomination in his sight.

The contrasts are shocking:

slaughtering an ox was commanded by God –

but Isaiah says that for the one who is *not* humble and contrite,

it's no better than killing a man!

The grain offering is compared to offering pig's blood!

Going through the motions – when your heart is delighting in abominations –
will destroy yourself!

God says:

*⁴ I also will choose harsh treatment for them
and bring their fears upon them,*

Why?

Because

*because when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke, they did not listen;
but they did what was evil in my eyes
and chose that in which I did not delight.”*

When we choose that which God hates,
we set ourselves down a path that always ends by bringing our own fears upon ourselves.
It's God's "poetic justice."
How often have we seen this?
How often have we done this?
God calls – and no one answers.
God speaks – no one listens.

This is the problem!

So:

3') God's Blessing upon the Son/Children of Zion–66:5-14

*⁵ Hear the word of the LORD,
you who tremble at his word:
“Your brothers who hate you
and cast you out for my name's sake
have said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified,
that we may see your joy’;
but it is they who shall be put to shame.*

And so hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word.

In verses 5-14 we hear Isaiah's final exposition
of the great deliverance that is coming.

God will put to shame the wicked,
but he will redeem his servants.

But notice that the wicked are “your brothers who hate you
and cast you out for my name's sake” (verse 5)

There are those who are “brothers” who hate you.

In our day these are the liberals—those who deny Christ
and persecute those who stand for righteousness.

⁶ *“The sound of an uproar from the city!
A sound from the temple!
The sound of the LORD,
rendering recompense to his enemies!*

Verse 6 then reads (literally)

A voice of uproar from the city.

A voice from the temple.

A voice of Yahweh rendering recompense to his enemies.

The triple staccato “a voice . . . , a voice . . . , a voice . . .”

emphasizes the suddenness and the thoroughness of God’s judgment.

It will come swiftly—and it will come from the temple!

It is no accident that Jesus spent his last week teaching in the temple.

It is no accident that Jesus cleansed the temple at the beginning of that week,
nor that he said, “destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days.”

He had to make it clear that he was the temple of the living God,
and that judgment would begin with him.

But in this context of the sound of an uproar from the city/temple,
we hear of this woman who gives birth before she is in labor!

⁷ *“Before she was in labor
she gave birth;
before her pain came upon her
she delivered a son.*

A painless childbirth is unheard of!

In Genesis 3:16 we hear that part of the curse is that women will have pain in childbirth.

But God promises that when he brings forth children for Zion,
it will be a painless birth.

Who has ever heard of such a thing?

Who has ever seen such things?

But no sooner does Zion bear a son,
then she brings forth a whole nation!

(Read verses 8-9)

⁸ *Who has heard such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Shall a land be born in one day?
Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?
For as soon as Zion was in labor
she brought forth her children.*

⁹ *Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?"*
says the LORD;
"shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?"
says your God.

This is what our God has done in Jesus Christ.
He is the son who was born before Zion was in labor.
And we are the nation born in a moment.
At the day of Pentecost God poured out the Holy Spirit upon 3,000 people.
In a single day a new nation was brought into being.

Remember Isaiah 26:18?
"We were with child, we writhed, we have as it were brought forth wind"
Zion spoke of her own failure to bring deliverance.
She had gone through the pains of childbirth,
only to pass gas!

What is the point?
Only God can save.
Zion cannot bring deliverance.
All of her agony is in vain.
But when the LORD acts, then a son will be born—
indeed, then a nation will be born—
because only God can save.
You are not saved by the church's action.
You are saved by what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Therefore,
¹⁰ *"Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,*
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her;

Here it is plain that *you* are the children of Zion.
You are the nation brought forth in a moment.
And you are called to
¹¹ *that you may nurse and be satisfied*
from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious abundance."^[a]

"Glorious abundance" is a euphemism.
English translators have been squeamish here!
Literally it reads, "drink deeply with delight from the nipple of her glory"

This is one of the most tender and powerful images of our relationship to the church.
She is our mother –
 who feeds and nourishes us with the pure milk of the word.

You are called to love the church of Jesus Christ.
You are to be like a nursing infant who delights and rejoices to be with his mother.
 You are called to nurse at her breasts–
 to suck upon the pure spiritual milk of the word and sacraments
 to drink deeply with delight from the nipple of her glory.
Yes, you must tremble at the Word of the LORD,
 but you must also delight in it,
 as a nursing infant delights in his mother’s milk.

(read)

¹² *For thus says the LORD:*

*“Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,
and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;*

In the new creation Zion becomes the center of all the earth.
 As the nations are converted by the word of the LORD,
 all of their glory—all of their wealth and splendor–
 is brought into the service of the church of Jesus Christ.
No longer are the sons of Zion passed out drunk in the streets,

Now,
*and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip,
and bounced upon her knees.*

But then comes a most striking change in pronouns.

¹³ *As one whom his mother comforts,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*

While Jerusalem is the instrument of God’s comfort,
 it is God who comforts.
He is the one who comforts us.

Zion’s mothering is not original to her.
 The church is a faithful and caring mother to us
 only because she comforts us with the comfort that is from God.
God is the source of “feminine” traits
 just as much as he is the source of “masculine” traits.
After all, we were created *male and female* in the image of God.
Therefore *all* human characteristics are rooted in God himself.

Verse 14 then concludes this section by returning back to where we started in verses 5-6.

(Read v14)

*¹⁴ You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;
your bones shall flourish like the grass;
and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants,
and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.*

God will finally accomplish the judgment he has promised –
and that is where we turn in verses 15-17.

2') God's Judgment against the Wicked–66:15-17

*¹⁵ “For behold, the LORD will come in fire,
and his chariots like the whirlwind,
to render his anger in fury,
and his rebuke with flames of fire.*

*¹⁶ For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,
and by his sword, with all flesh;
and those slain by the LORD shall be many.*

*¹⁷ “Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst,
eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the
LORD.*

“For behold”–ki hiney–“Yahweh will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind”
The fire of the LORD will be poured out upon the earth,
and all the wicked–here identified as they were in 65:2-7
as those who sanctify themselves in the gardens and eat pig's flesh–
will come to an end together, declares the LORD.

The compromisers and apostates among God's professing people will be destroyed.
God had told Israel not to sacrifice except at the place of his choosing,
and he had forbidden them to eat pork or mice.
But they have rejected the word of the LORD.
What kind of wisdom do they have?
Purely a wisdom of men.

Dear congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ–
you who have inherited the blessings promised by Isaiah–
hear the Word of the LORD!
Tremble at the Word of the LORD!
Delight in the Word of the LORD!

If you reject this Word,
then you will wander in the way that leads to death.

1') God's Gathering of the Nations–66:18-21

¹⁸ “For I know^[b] their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming^[c] to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, ¹⁹ and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. ²¹ And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

But Isaiah finally returns to the beginning of his chiasm.

And the One who knows all thoughts and hearts has declared that the time is coming,
and in Jesus it has come!

when he will gather all nations and tongues,
and they shall come and shall see my glory.

God promises that he will set a sign among them.

What is that sign?

Isaiah did not know—he does not say—

but we now see that the sign is nothing other than the sign of the cross—
the sign of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jerusalem would become the center of the pilgrimage of the nations.

In the new creation all nations would come to the city of God and worship.

All the exiled people of God will be restored to the holy city,
and even the Gentiles will come.

A new priesthood is envisioned (v 21)—in which Aaronic birth is no longer necessary.

Conclusion: The Worship of the Eschatological Sabbath (66:22-24)

And God promises that this new creation is permanent.

(Read v22)

²² “For as the new heavens and the new earth
that I make
shall remain before me, says the LORD,
so shall your offspring and your name remain.

The heavenly Zion will never fail.

The gates of hell will never prevail.

Your offspring and your name will remain as long as the new heavens and the new earth.

Whose offspring?

Whose name?

Jesus’ name – and Jesus’ offspring –

“behold, I and the children God has given me.”

God has promised to Jesus that his name and his offspring will endure forever!

And even better:

(Read v23)

²³ *From new moon to new moon,
and from Sabbath to Sabbath,
all flesh shall come to worship before me,
declares the LORD.*

Here we see again that the new creation and the new Jerusalem are one and the same.

The new heavens and the new earth are the one place—the city of the living God—
where all flesh will gather to worship the living God.

The “your offspring” of v22 is here revealed to be “all flesh.”

Isaiah 66 has brought us back to Isaiah 56.

(Read 56:1-8)

The Sabbath theme there was joined with the inclusion of the Gentiles.

The foreigner who kept Sabbath and held to God’s covenant would be included
together with faithful Israel.

Now at the end of chapter 66, the book of the Anointed Conqueror is brought to a close
with the promise from new moon to new moon,
and from Sabbath to Sabbath (from month to month and from week to week)
all flesh shall come to worship before me.

God is going to redeem humanity.

Sometimes we speak of God condemning man,
and saving the elect out of the mass of dying humanity.

But more properly we should speak of God saving man,
and condemning the rebels who refuse to worship the Lord.

(Verse 24)

²⁴ *“And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me.
For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to
all flesh.”*

They do not look the destruction of the wicked in order to gloat—

nor do they come for pity’s sake—

rather they come to behold the wrath of God
against those who refuse to believe in Jesus.

Isaiah leaves us here.

This final chapter, after all, is a call to faithfulness in the light of the new creation.

But the light of the new creation reveals both glory and wrath—

both the glorious beauty of Zion and the hideous corruption of sin.

You need to hear both the call to drink with delight from Zion’s glorious abundance,
and the warning revealed in the destiny of those who rebel against God’s word.

As we live in the middle of the already and the not yet of the new creation,
we need to remember the horrible fate
that awaits the one who refuses the call of Christ.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts
as in the day of the rebellion in the wilderness.

If you hear his voice, repent – and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!