

Good morning. I did not expect to be with you up here this morning, but I'm grateful to be. We are nearing the end of the semester. I don't know if you are feeling worn down or maybe you're excited for the summer just around the corner. I know for many of you this has been a challenging semester and a challenging season of your life.

Maybe you've been challenged in your classes. Good. You should be. Good classes push you. Maybe you've faced difficulties financially, you're wondering how you're going to make it to the end, you're wondering whether or not all this effort is worth it, is it really going to pay off.

For some of you, the challenges have been in regards to your relationships, relationships with a boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, relationships with your roommates, with your professors, maybe even relationships at home. Just because you are here does not mean that you don't feel the weight of what's happening there. Back there. When we consider the difficulties we encounter, we oftentimes find ourselves thinking, "This is not the way it is supposed to be. This is not the way I envisioned life." And you're right, theologically you are right.

This is not the way it is supposed to be. But I also want to add this: it's also not the way it will be one day. And that's what I want us to think about today. For the next 30 minutes, I want you to look beyond the immediate trials of life, whatever they might be for you, and we're going to set our minds on the world that is ahead of us. We're going to look to the future through the lens of Isaiah chapter 65.

If you have your Bibles, please turn there to Isaiah 65. This passage comes near the end of the book of Isaiah. Before we look at it, I want to set the scene. I thought it might be helpful just to briefly remind ourselves of things that we already know, but remind ourselves of things in the beginning. I want us to remember God's original intent for creation.

Back in Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible tells us God created the heavens and the earth. In 6 days, God spoke all that there is into existence. He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He separated the waters from the dry land. He commanded vegetation to sprout forth from the land.

He placed the stars and the planets and on the fifth day God began creating the animals. He created birds and great sea monsters and fish. On day six God created the living creatures of the land, all kinds of animals, including the most special creation of all, the one made in God's image, human beings. And on that sixth day God spoke to Adam and he said this, God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 2 tells us God had some additional instructions for Adam. "The Lord God took the man and he put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it." Notice that Adam was charged to work the garden and to keep the garden.

You could even translate that last phrase "guard." the garden. Even before the curse of sin and death entered the world, Adam was working. Work is a good thing. It's not part of the curse, though it has been cursed. We're going to keep that in mind.

Then God creates woman to be with the man, and they live in perfect harmony with creation, with each other, and with God. What we see very clearly is that before the fall there was perfect harmony, animals and humans living in perfect harmony together. Humans and humans living in perfect harmony, humans and God, perfect shalom, perfect peace with each other. No sin, no death. There was work to do, but it was a work that satisfied.

It was a work that produced great results every time. There was nothing in creation that was harming those perfect harmonies between all of creation. Nothing until the serpent came along and tempted Adam and Eve. Now you know this story. The devil in the form of a serpent convinced Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

The one thing God said don't do, they did. And because of this, sin and death and disharmony entered

into creation. After the fall, there was only disrupted relationships. At this point, the animals in the kingdom began to eat each other. At this point, Adam and Eve's relationship with each other changed.

Family relationships would never be the same after Genesis 3. And it's at this point that the relationship between God and man changed forever as well. God curses each of the major players in Genesis 3. He says to the serpent, "Because you've done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all the beasts of the field. On your belly you shall go, dust you shall eat all the days of your life." To the woman God says, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbirth.

You shall bring forth children in pain. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." So the woman will be fruitful and multiply, but only through pain. She'll have a fractured and a difficult relationship with her husband. And to the man God says, "Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. You shall eat the plants of the field." 'By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' Adam's task to work and to keep the garden will now become difficult. It will not produce the desired results. Work will be a challenge. So their world was one of perfect harmony, of perfect return for their labor, perfect peace, and now it's the world that you and I live in.

Pain in childbearing, fractured relationships, lack of satisfaction in our work, and difficult work at that. Every life and every corner of this universe has been impacted by the problem of sin and death, and that is the world in which we currently exist. And it's helpful to keep that in mind as we read the text that we're going to get to in Isaiah 65. Now we're jumping into chapter 65. We're, we're 64 chapters into the book plus a little bit, and then we're getting into this book.

How do we summarize 64 chapters of a book like that? First half of Isaiah, mostly the prophet is preaching judgment. God's judgment is coming. It's coming upon the nations who don't know God. It's coming upon the Israelites who do know God and yet live in sin.

Judgment is coming. Second half of the book, Isaiah begins to preach hope and restoration. He preaches restoration from the coming judgment, from exile, but he even looks beyond that judgment of exile itself and foresees a greater restoration to come, a restoration of creation itself. And that's where we pick up the text in Isaiah 65, starting in the first half of verse 17. Isaiah writes, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth." Now let's just stop there and dwell on that statement for a moment.

What a statement it is. First of all, notice that word "behold." When you see the word "behold" in Scripture, it is inviting you to picture something in your mind's eye. Check this out. Imagine this. And Isaiah, he words this as God creating something new, a new heavens and a new earth, but the wording here is purposely reflecting backwards to the very opening verse of Scripture.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And all of those words that we see here are reflected in the words of Isaiah 65. Same object of creation, same verb create, except this time it is a new heavens and a new earth. And by using the same language, Isaiah is informing us that this activity of God is tantamount to a second creation event, just as significant as the first one. But this time it's going to be all new.

God, sometime in the future, will create a new heavens and a new earth. The Bible places this time after the return of Christ. Jesus will one day come back from heaven, and sometime after that, he will create a new heavens and a new earth. Now the first major implication of the text today is simply this: we are going to spend eternity on earth, not in heaven. Now this is a little weird to think about.

I don't know about you, but I always grew up in church thinking we're going to be in heaven for all of eternity, hanging out on clouds, playing a harp, a harp or something like that. But the Bible consistently tells us that we are going to spend our eternity on a recreated earth, physically. Now what is that going to be like? Well, this is where Isaiah starts to unpack it. He says, "The former things shall

not be remembered or come into mind." That's a beautiful statement there, but it's a little tricky.

I often get questions like this: Will we know our loved ones in heaven? Will we remember things from our past life? And at first glance, if all you had is this one line here, you would probably say no. But as we dig a little deeper, what we notice is that this verse begins with the word "for," which means it's connecting with something previous to it. If you jump one verse backwards into verse 16, you find out that God says, "The former troubles are forgotten and hidden from my eyes." And then he explains how that could be, because God is going to create a new heavens and a new earth.

The former troubles will not be remembered or come to mind. Now in the Bible when God talks about not remembering something, that's not just a mental intellectual thing he's saying. It means he is choosing not to bring up the past or act on it. Jeremiah 31, God says, "I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." That does not mean that God actually literally forgets our sin, like it's not there in his mind anymore. That wouldn't make sense.

God is omniscient, past, present, and future. He sees all at once. He cannot literally forget in that sense. But what Jeremiah means when he says God does not remember our sins is that God has chosen not to act on our sins, not to hold it against us. Tonight I'm taking my wife out on a hot date.

Imagine I go to the restaurant and the waitress comes over and accidentally spills coffee on my lap. Now if I'm a really forgiving person, I might say something like, "Ah, forget about it." Or I might say something like, "Don't worry, I've already forgotten about it." Well, not literally, right? I still have coffee burning my lap. There's a stain that's there that causes me to remember what just happened. But what I'm telling her by saying, "I've already forgotten about it," is I'm saying, "I'm not going to hold it against your tip."

Don't worry about it anymore." There's a book by Randy Alcorn called "Heaven," great book. I'd encourage you all to read it at some point in your life. He writes this, and I think this is very helpful in thinking about this statement. He says, "In eternity, past sins or sorrows won't preoccupy God or us. We'll be capable of choosing not to recall or dwell on anything that would diminish heaven's joy."

Heaven cleanses our slate of sin and error, but it doesn't erase our memory of it. If we forgot we were desperate sinners, how could we appreciate the depth and the meaning of Christ's redemptive work?" for us. He goes on to say, heaven's happiness won't be dependent on our ignorance of what happened on earth. Rather, it will be enhanced by our informed appreciation of God's glorious grace and justice as we grasp what really happened here.

So what does this mean? Will I remember my loved ones? Yes, I think you will. Moses and Elijah keep their names and even keep their identities when they show up on the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus himself even kept his scars.

Well, what does that mean? Does that mean I'm stuck with my name for all of eternity? Like if your name is like, I don't know, Gary or something like that, I mean, are you stuck with that forever?

I don't know. Revelation 2 talks about believers getting a new name. Maybe we won't be stuck with something awful like Brian or something along those lines. Praise the Lord if that's the case. Now how these details are going to all shake out, I'm not quite sure, but verse 18 starts to get to it.

Look at these two verses. God says, "But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create. For behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of the afflicted." of distress.

Now I love the flow of these verses. You might have noticed here that 3 times each God uses the same root words, glad and joy, or gladness and rejoicing. 3 times he uses it, and the flow is very logical. God first commands his people to be glad and to rejoice. Then he says, I have created you for that very purpose.

The only way that we fulfill God's desire for us to be glad and to rejoice in our lives is for God to create us to do that. And once the Lord does that, the third set of words in verse 19, God says, "I rejoice in Jerusalem and I'm glad in my people." So first God commands his people to be glad and rejoice. Then God has to intervene to help us to be glad and rejoice. And then, and only then, will God himself rejoice in his own work and in his own people. Isn't that awesome?

In this way, God himself gets the glory for God getting the glory. When we worship God in our joy and our gladness, we can only do so through the marvelous work of God, which brings him even greater joy and gladness. Think about that last line. He says, "There will be no more weeping, no more crying, no more distress." Do you remember the last time you cried? I've never cried, but I don't know about you, this is obviously the bad kind of crying, crying over death, crying over a doctor's diagnosis, crying over your grade in your Bible class, crying over a breakup.

These are not happy tears. These are tears that come from the deepest grief and darkest sin. And the Bible says we will not have those kind of tears anymore in eternity.

We will have no reason to bad cry. You can walk the streets of Jerusalem all day and all night and not hear a single sound of weeping. It's almost impossible for us to imagine that we will because we don't know what that's like. Isaiah goes on in verse 20 and he says, "No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old man who does not fill out his days; for the young man shall die 100 years old, and the sinner 100 years old shall be accursed." Now how can there be people who die and are accursed in eternity future? Remember the context here is the new heavens and the new earth.

I think the best way to understand this verse is to see it as a metaphorical statement that indicates that everyone in eternity future will live a long and prosperous life. To say in a different way, death will not reign any longer. Now this is poetry, and I think it's best to not press it too literally, but rather this is an affirmation that the way things were in Eden, That's the way things will be in eternal future. The curse brought death. Jesus will one day reverse that and bring life.

To say it in a different way, eternity is Edenic. It's like Eden. No more death, long lives, a perfect existence. People who are 100 years old, we might as well consider them babies. That statement in Isaiah reverses the curse.

The curse brought death. This speaks of life through Christ. In fact, another element of the curse is reversed in the next two verses, 21 and 22. It says, "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat.

For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands." Doesn't that sound great? In the eternal state, the work of our hands will be always fruitful. Never will we work on a project and not see its rewards. You know the feeling of working hard on a paper and not getting something that you think you deserve. You know the feeling of studying for hours and hours and not getting that A on your final exam.

You know the feeling of working hard and feeling like at the end of the day, "What in the world did I just accomplish?" Life can be frustrating like that. But not so in our eternal futures. I've read a lot of commentaries on Isaiah. In what is undoubtedly the best one of them all, one that rises above the rest, the author translates this verse like this. He's a humble guy too.

He says this: "The efforts of my chosen one's hands will be satisfyingly exhausted." Satisfyingly exhausted. In other words, every day will be like a day of hard work that feels fully rewarding.

We have glimpses of this today. You also know what it's like to, what it's like to put in a really hard work of— into your paper and getting that A, being satisfied with what you've done. You know what it's like to study for hours and knocking that final out of the park. You know what it's like to come home from a hard day of work and thinking, "I worked really hard today on something that was valuable,"

and going to bed resting in that satisfying exhaustion. Everything you do in eternal future will have that feeling.

Nothing you do will ever feel partial or unearned or incomplete or unsatisfying. Now this might rub against some of your thoughts about heaven. We think of heaven as a place sometimes where, quite frankly, there's not a whole lot going on. We're standing around, we're singing a lot, we're praising the Lord, but we're not doing anything. When I was a kid, I thought an eternal church service does not sound like fun to me.

But remember, eternity is Edenic. And in Eden, before the curse, Adam was told to work the ground to guard the garden. He had satisfying, good, wholesome work to do, work that had a profitable return always. That's what our future will look like. Doesn't that sound good to you?

If it doesn't sound good to you, it's because we have no real idea of what this is going to be like. We only catch glimpses of it here. We only get a taste of what it means for the ground to return the fruit of our labor. But in eternity, we will be satisfyingly exhausted every single day.

And it gets even better than that, because verse 23, goes on to say this: "They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them." This is another poetic way of saying the curse will be reversed. What was Eve's curse? Pain in childbearing. But now no labor will ever be in vain. No child will ever be born only to die young or to live a troubled life.

Now, does this mean we're going to have babies in eternal future? I don't know. But what I do know is that this is a direct flip of what you see in Genesis 3. And I think that's the point. Never again in eternal future will we ever experience the same kind of pain that we go through right here and right now.

But here's perhaps the best part in verse 24. God says, "Before they call, I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear." This is written with some emphasis. "Before they call, I myself will answer," God says. God will have such an intimate personal relationship with each one of us that before you ever even have to ask, he will have the answer ready for you.

We'll be speaking and he will truly hear us without a doubt. Have you ever talked to somebody and you are sure that even though you are talking to them face to face, they're not listening to a word you're saying? That will never happen with God. He will be with his people. You could hear the covenantal overtones in this.

He will listen. He will answer even before we ask. This is describing uninterrupted personal relationship with the Lord. Remember Adam and Eve in the garden? After they sinned, God walking in the garden, he's calling to them and they're hiding.

Well, even here before we call, God answers. It's a reversal of that curse. Never again will you be praying and feeling like God's not listening. God will always be listening. When we have a question, God answers it.

Before we ask. And then we come to the final verse of this passage, a beautiful one indeed. It says, "The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord." This is another poetic way of saying the curse will be reversed. Now if you were studying the book of Isaiah, You might have noticed that this sounds a whole lot like another passage in Isaiah.

Back in Isaiah chapter 11, that chapter had very similar terms that it used to talk about what was coming. Isaiah 11 is focused on the coming Davidic Messiah, Jesus. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will usher in a time of peace and righteousness. He will bring harmony to creation.

He will reverse the curse. And now what Isaiah 65 does is it picks up on those thoughts and expands on them. Notice how in each of the phrases of Isaiah 65:25, each of those phrases are reused from

chapter 11 except for one. The only phrase he actually adds here is he says, "And dust shall be the serpent's food." Now Isaiah 11 did talk about snakes. It talked about little kids hanging out with snakes.

But he used different words for snakes in Isaiah 11. Isaiah 65:25 uses a third word for snake, and it's the same word that's used in Genesis 3 for the serpent. Isaiah purposefully reuses the same word for Satan in Genesis 3 to draw our attention on the reversal of the curse and on a curse that lingers. Remember back in Genesis 3:14, one of the reasons I read all those verses at the beginning, what did God say to the serpent? He said, "Because you've done this, cursed are you above all livestock, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life." And now Isaiah reflects back on that and he looks ahead to eternal future and he says, "Snakes will eat dust." for all of eternity.

Now, does that mean that snakes are going to slither around eating dirt forever? Probably not. This is probably another poetic way of saying everything will be restored. Every curse will be reversed except for one: the curse upon the devil. He doesn't get redemption.

He doesn't get restored. But everything else in creation does. In fact, the entire animal kingdom, you can see, gets restored. Eternity is Edenic. In the Garden of Eden, animals all got along, every one of them, with each other, with humans.

That's clearly not the way it works now, is it? I don't know how much you know about wild animals, but these are not normally creatures that hang out together. Wolves don't normally dwell with lambs. Perfect harmony between wolf and lamb, between leopard and goat, does not happen today. My family and I on occasion have gone to that water park, the Great Wolf Lodge.

It's that big giant hotel with an indoor park with slides and all that, and it's got, of course, a wolf theme. And they're not angry wolves; they're cute wolves. Each kid that comes in gets these cute little wolf headbands, and there's cute little wolf songs that are sung. There used to be this animatronic show they would do And they would sing this song. First time I went, I was struck by it.

It went like this. I'm not going to sing it for you, but I'll just repeat some of it. The song goes like this: There's nothing to be scared of here. Trust in Mother Nature.

And I remember walking in thinking, how stupid is that? What are you teaching my children? Right? Trust in Mother Nature. Have you ever been to Mother Nature?

Like, have you been outside? Do you know what wolves do? To kids? Have you watched anything on National Geographic ever? There is no harmony between the animal kingdom and humans today, and yet somehow there will be a restored and renewed harmony for all of creation in the future.

Now, is this only literal? Are we talking that there will literally be restored harmony? I think yes, because eternity is Edenic. But even beyond that, we're looking at the idea here that everything that is disrupted today will be in harmony one day. People will get along.

Nations will get along. Israel will enjoy harmony with Palestine. Republicans and Democrats will see eye to eye on all issues. Gryffindor and Slytherin will dwell in the same house. Calvinists and Arminians will talk about the Bible without arguing.

Marvel and DC will write comics together. People who like cats and Christians will get along finally. I mean, that's what we're seeing here. No church splits, no broken marriages, no war, no disease, no death, absolute eternal peace and harmony forever.

This is what we get to look forward to. The Messiah's reign is characterized by perfect harmony. Doesn't that sound great? Doesn't that want to make you just look beyond the stuff of our lives and anticipate and long for that day to come? This should leave us with a burning fire in our souls, a longing for this ultimate relationship, a yearning for this restored world.

Every time you struggle with relationships here, every time you suffer a hardship, every time you mourn a loss, every time a fractured relationship keeps you up at night, every time your body aches, every time your work goes unrewarded, you can look forward even more to the day when these trials will be no more. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not even worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Creation itself eagerly longs for the day that Isaiah is talking about here. Our hearts burn for this day of total and final healing and salvation and restoration.

In fact, if you go to some of the very last words of Scripture, some of the last chapters of Scripture, you will see John reflecting on these things in the book of Revelation. Let me just read this to close out our thoughts this afternoon. John says this in Revelation 21: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." 'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' Can you hear Isaiah in those statements? 'And he who is seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" Do your hearts burn for this day to come?

Life is not perfect now. It is full of heartache and sin and misery and death.

But if we allow those imperfections to stir us up and grow our longing for that perfect world to come, I think our perspectives will be in the right place. Come, Lord Jesus. I hope you eagerly anticipate that day. Let me pray for you.

Come, Lord Jesus, indeed. We pray, Lord, that we will live this day with eager anticipation for that time, that world to come. I pray, Lord, as we go through the sufferings of this world, that they would only stir up our hearts even more towards you, that we would eagerly long for the day of Christ's return, that we would live our lives not just for this world here, but for what is coming. And Lord, we thank you for the promise that we have in Scripture in Isaiah 65, that you will reverse that curse and bring restoration to this broken world. May it happen soon.

In Jesus' name, amen.