

Saints Triumphant Sunday

November 13, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God and Savior, you have set the final day and hour when we shall be delivered from this world of sin and death. Keep us ever watchful for the coming of your Son that we may sit with him and all your holy ones at the marriage feast in heaven; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. Alleluia! (Revelation 7:15)

Sermon Text: Isaiah 65:17-18

"Giant asteroid—2016! Just end it already!" Maybe that election bumper-sticker best sums up the mood of millions of Americans. The past 16 months were packed full of debates about foreign policy and trade agreements. Steady streams of campaign ads played over every radio and TV set and Facebook stream. People learned everything there is to know about how e-mails become classified and what kind of words are said behind closed doors. It did not take long for people wanting the election to end.

And it did. Last Tuesday. Ballots were cast. Votes were counted. A winner declared. But it didn't end, did it? Helicopters now hover over riots. People chant in the street and (again) on your Facebook stream. Media outlets

Isaiah 65:17-18

- 17 "Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
- 18 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.
- 19 I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.
- 20 "Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
he who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere youth;
he who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed.
- 21 They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- 22 No longer will they build houses and others
live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the works of their hands.
- 23 They will not toil in vain
or bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,
they and their descendants with them.
- 24 Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
- 25 The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
but dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.

are trying to unlock the future as they play out the “worst case” scenarios— or at the very least, what you can expect to happen over the next four years. Do you wish the giant asteroid won?

I mean, it gets tiring, doesn't it? In fact, over these past few days, I'm sure you now know what “voter fatigue” feels like, how it happens, and how it's cured. And regardless of who you voted for, or what you thought of the election, or how you feel about the aftermath, perhaps the burning question now is: “What will the future be like?” Wouldn't it be great to know?

Well, you get that opportunity this morning. Over the past twenty years (or in our case, over the past 65 chapters) Isaiah has filled the airwaves with gloomy pictures of future terror and chaos and destruction and desolation and captivity. He is not laying out his vision on foreign policy. He is not preaching to random people or some distant foreign nation; he is speaking directly to Judah.

Yes, the very same Judah to which God promised: *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his* ([Genesis 49:10](#)). The same Judah that is home to the capital city, Jerusalem— where King David once reigned— and, remember, David was “*a man after God's own heart!*” ([Acts 13:22](#)) This is the very same Judah holding Solomon's astounding temple of glistening stone and gold— and not just a temple, but worship practices commanded by the living God. God's fingerprints are all over this nation.

He is their God— and the people, well, they glance around at how other nations behave. When Isaiah speaks, Judah is eating meat [pork] God expressly commands them not to eat. The people carved wooden statues to worship and bowed down in prayer to a fertility goddess, Ishtar, Queen of Heaven ([Isaiah 65:3](#); [Jeremiah 7:18](#)). National leaders ignore the needs of the poor, refuse to help the widows and orphans— and even go so far as to suppress the pure preaching of God's Word. To say the very least, God had held absolutely nothing back from these people— and Judah held everything back from God.

So, it leaves God seething: *I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me* ([65:12](#)).

Isaiah reveals exactly what's going to happen in the future: Judah will lose everything! No more temple. No more government. No more army. No more city pride. No more worship services. No more priests. No more house and cattle and family. Everything will utterly destroyed.

Leaves you with happy feelings, doesn't it? Maybe recently you've been wondering how much longer your life will remain the same. You know, I couldn't help but shake my head as I watched the election come to a close. I mean, you saw people acting as if the world was roaring to an end. Masses race through streets, chanting for someone to lead them. The tone of the media left you wondering if someone just died. You still watch people trying to map out the future in order to see what it holds. All these people are

searching for certainty; they search for something to tell them everything will be alright. But they just cannot find it.

You probably did not riot this week, but maybe your heart yells at God because it feels he is a poor Leader. When you prayed for health for the umpteenth time, maybe for a second, you wondered and acted as though God was dead. As you roll out your financial blueprints, you might feel that everything depends on you to meet your financial needs—and that God has no bearing on your plans.

The devil uses every trouble and challenge as an opportunity to wrap his arm around our shoulder and say: “See! God doesn’t care about you!” How easily we can listen to the father of lies!

You know, Judah did everything possible to show just how little they cared about God. The most astounding thing in our reading is that God did everything possible to show just how much he cares.

He uses Isaiah to point past the years of Judah’s captivity and to the days they would rebuild homes and replant vineyards. Although they would lose everything, they would receive their land back.

It doesn’t stop there. Isaiah looks even further past the rebuild. He highlights the silhouette of a man and a woman traveling to a little town in Judah called: “Bethlehem.” His eyes sparkle as he watches this man and woman camp out overnight in a cattle barn. Even though Isaiah lives 700 years before the Savior, he wistfully smiles as he sees those little fingers reach up from a manger.

This little baby is sent by God for specific purpose: He comes to restore peace in a broken world. Remember, your Jesus lives in your world. He sees terror in the eyes of the oppressed. He senses fear as people bend under the weight of the Roman Empire. He weeps with others as they stand around the graves of their loved ones. He knows the uncertainty life can bring. He knows how fearful your future can look. You can almost hear him gasp: “Your future is secure.”

Then, on the cross, he spells those words out with his life: “Your future is secure.” Jesus’ future life is cut short on the cross. This is what your sins, my sins, deserve. To be cut off from the face of God forever. Yet, the perfect life of Jesus covers over every sin. The perfect life of Jesus satisfies God’s anger. The perfect life of Jesus makes God at peace with you. This peace is like **[W]olf and the lamb feed[ing] together, and the lion eat[ing] straw like the ox[...]** Prey and predator will live in peace. God and humanity live in peace now.

This is not one of those well-wishes. It is not a hopeful feeling. This is truth. When you wonder what your future will bring, God makes it explicitly clear: **“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”**

God lifts your eyes past this life and into the next. Is that not what you see in Easter’s empty tomb? You don’t see a hole carved into a rock or some cave. You see a doorway— a

door that cannot lock you up death forever. Rather, the grave is nothing more than passing through life on earth to life in heaven.

He does not leave you guessing what you can expect. Heaven is perfect! No tears, no mourning! No sadness! These things do not exist! The funny thing is, the only way we can describe what heaven will be like is by saying what it is not. It just goes to show how weighed down our life can be. Yet, it goes to show just how much God cares for you, that he would remove every affliction. The thought of death or cancer or anger or fear will not even be a thought. In heaven, things will not be like they are on earth; troubles **will not even come to mind!**

Rejoice and Be Glad! Notice, God is not suggesting that you **Be Glad And Rejoice**; he commands you. These imperatives are his assurance. He tells you: “You shall have eternal life in heaven. This is my promise.” You have a never-ending reason to **BE GLAD AND REJOICE!**

Yes, that’s right. You have a never-ending reason to **BE GLAD AND REJOICE**— even right now. Because of Jesus, you are declared to be a saint. I am not talking about the Catholic church definition of a saint— where you have to be (1) a good person who (2) performs two miracles after death and (3) who becomes someone we pray to. I am using “saint” as Scripture uses it: “a holy person” ([Romans 1:7](#); [1 Corinthians 1:2](#)). You are holy, not because you worked hard to do it, but because God sent his one and only Son to clothe you with his holiness.

For just a moment, take away the billions and billions of people living in your world. Take away all the people living in your house so that you are the only person remaining on earth. Imagine you standing in front of God, person to person. God’s not only the Judge who enforces the law, but also the one who creates the law. Yet, you experience no fear, no threat that he will cut your life short on earth. Jesus endured the anger, fire, wrath in your place— instead of you, instead of me. Because of this you are holy, a saint. God’s patient forgiveness remains with you for over one hundred years.

As a saint who is “holy” in the sight of God, it means you can approach God. In fact, God makes his pledge: **Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.** Martin Luther once called prayer “like the most pleasing aroma one cannot smell enough.” God wants to hear you. He tells you to pray. He cannot hear you enough. Even though you are one out of billions of people, even though God manages large issues, your concerns are his most important concern. **BE GLAD AND REJOICE!**

The next four years hold a future we do not see clearly. I’m not sure how much longer people will chant for leadership or how much longer they will act as though in a state of mourning. What I do know is that regardless of what the next four years hold, my heart finds peace in God.

He kept his promise to send a Savior. And Jesus died and he rose again. One day he will return to create new heavens and a new earth— just as he promised. He cares that much about your future. There is no question about it. **BE GLAD AND REJOICE!**