

Isaiah and the gospel - the future

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 February 2019

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Long term, long term. This is really long term future. Let's pray that God will speak to us.! Lord, help us to have eyes to see things that are as yet unseen.

! Give us faith to walk by faith and not by sight. And please kindle within us and enlarge within us the hope that you have given us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray that you would bless your word to us in this. For Jesus' sake. Amen. I'll tell you about my cousin John.

Who lived in Stockton-on-Tees, which is near where Christopher's stamping ground. Where's Christopher? That's right, isn't it? Stockton-on-Tees Thirsk is where he lived. He wanted to be an accountant.

And it was a little bit of our sort of family story. What's cousin John doing? Oh, he's studying to be an accountant. And then next year, what's he doing this year? Oh, he's still studying to be an accountant.

[1:02] And I sort of dimly remember through my childhood what cousin John was doing was studying to be an accountant. And it took him years and years. He loved cricket, but he studied for his exams instead of playing cricket.

He read lots of books and wrote lots of notes. And he revised hard. And he could have been chilling. But he didn't. He was working.

And all the inconvenience and graft of that. He took lots of exams. And in the end, he did become an accountant. Why did he put himself through that arduous, those arduous years?

Because in this little matter of being an accountant, he could see that it was worth the hardship in the present for the sake of the future.

And that's a principle that works in lots of areas in just ordinary life. We do things. We go through things. We are prepared to undergo things because of the future.

[2:06] You could try to ask if there's a lady near you who has had a child, you could ask her whether. Anyway, let's not go into that. In many big things, it is the future.

It's what happens in the end that counts. It is the question, whatever is ahead, will it all be worth it in the end?

And what I want to say to you this morning is three things. Number one, that Christian faith is about the future. Number two, I'm going to say that Isaiah taught Christians about the future.

And then number three, we should learn about the future. So those are the three things we'll look at. So let me first of all make this statement that Christian faith is fundamentally about the future.

And when I say fundamentally, I don't mean that the future is the only thing. And I don't mean that the future is the only important thing.

[3:14] But I am saying that Christianity without the future is not Christianity. Christianity, Christian faith that is only to do with now is not real Christianity.

Christianity is to do with the future. And a Christian, self-designated, who has not set their hearts on the future, hasn't really learned what it is to be a Christian.

So Christianity is fundamentally about the future. And I'm going to give you some proof. Now, before I set off on this, let me just say you might be thinking that science doesn't go along with this.

You might be thinking, oh, he's going to be talking about a lot of stuff that's sort of mystical and so on. And what I'm going to say is that science, for all its usefulness and power, works within the

system.

It tells us what will happen if things go on as they have done. And it just predicts on that basis. That's all it can do. But the God who made everything is outside the system.

[4:27] He is not limited by what's always happened or how things usually happen. And he can intervene. He can bring things to a conclusion. He can change the parameters.

And he has the right to tell us about the future. And that's what the Bible is doing. So I've got some texts for us here. And you might like to look them up or you might like to just look at them on the screen because I put them there in full.

So Romans chapter 8, verse 23, says about Christian people, It says, We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all.

Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently. Let me just unpack that a little bit. He's saying, We, this is Christians, have something now.

[5:53] He says, We have the first fruits. And the something we have now is the work of the Spirit within us. The Spirit gives us eyes to see things that can't be seen without the Spirit.

The Spirit gives us desires for things that can't be desired without the Spirit. And the Spirit gives us a power within that is not there without the Spirit.

And such like things. We have the first fruits of the Spirit. But he says there is a future. And the future is the redemption of the body.

That's what it says just there. We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. The future is the resurrection. That our bodies will be like Jesus' body.

Glorious, human, new, fitted for the world to come. He says that is the future.

[6:57] The future is the resurrection of the body. And he says, In this hope we were saved. Do you get that? In this hope we were saved.

The word hope not meaning a vague aspiration. You know, I hope I might win the lottery. Which I'm not going to do because I haven't bought any tickets. It's not that sort of vague hope.

It is a definite. This is what the plan is. This is what I'm counting on. This is where I'm going. In this hope we were saved.

And you see he's saying that there's something quite fundamental. When we became Christians, when we became Christians, that hope was immediately part of what it was to become a Christian. In this hope we were saved. And he says this is something we don't yet have. Hope that is seen is no hope at all.

[8:01] If it's something you've got in your hand, it's not something that you're looking forward to. But he says, Who hopes for what he already has? It's not like that.

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. And it's like to grasp that thought of waiting patiently. And I didn't do the full homework on this.

But it seems to me that what he's saying is, this is a hope that we hang on to patiently, meaning enduringly, meaning not giving up on it, not discarding it, not neglecting it.

We hang on to that hope with tenacity and patience and endurance. We hang on to this future hope through thick and thin.

That's what he's saying, isn't it? If we have this hope, we wait for it patiently. So let me ask you, if this hope is yours, whether you are walking by faith and that the Lord has put within you this hope, it's in everybody who's saved.

[9:14] And it is something that we need to hang on to patiently, through thick and thin. We need to do that, don't we, brothers and sisters?

We need to remind one another of this. We need to sing to one another of this, as we've been doing this morning. We need to quote this to one another. And we need to keep our focus on this.

We wait for it patiently. We hang on. We don't give up. We don't forget. Make sure we do. So there's the Apostle Paul saying that Christianity is fundamentally about the future.

The Apostle John says the same thing. This is what Christopher read to us in 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3, and I've got verse 2 here.

It's okay. It's okay. Yeah. Dear friends, this is 1 John chapter 3, verse 2. Dear friends, we are now, we are children of God.

[10:29] He says, that is what we are now. We are children of God. What a wonderful privilege. And he said this already. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.

That's an astounding privilege that we can say, our Father who is in heaven. Isn't it?

Astounding privilege that we should be called the children of God. How great the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God. That's what we are now.

But being a child of God sets something up for the future. What we will be has not yet been known. So just to echo C.S. Lewis' thought on this, you are sitting next to somebody who is either going to turn into the most appalling beast in hell, or you are sitting next to somebody who will shine like the stars in the sky with a sort of glory that would make you catch your breath.

That's who you are sitting next to. You are sitting next to one or the other. And because it's a Christian assembly it's most likely the second. What we have been, what we will be has not yet been made known.

[12:01] So you have to use your imagination because you can't see it. But we know that when he appears, when Jesus is revealed, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

So we will see the full glory of the risen Christ. Our current eyes are not capable of that.

They would burn up. We don't have the optical capacity to see him as he is. But when we are like him we will see him as he is.

And we shall be like him as it says. And this is the great hope set before us as John portrays it. And he says if you have this hope in you it has an effect.

So let me just run through that. We are something different now. We are children of God and our hope is the appearing of the risen glorified Jesus Christ. And when he appears we shall be like him.

[13:09] And this future hope motivates us to holiness. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure.

There is something about that vision of what we will be that makes sin repellent, inappropriate, incongruent and puts within the Christian the thought being pure as he is pure.

That's what I want to be. That's what the Apostle Paul says. And I say let us be motivated by that. Let's hang on to this hope and grasp as Peter puts it be holy for I am holy.

To put that onto our agenda to seek the beauty of holiness in our lives. And our beloved Saviour says Christianity is fundamentally about the future.

So let's look at a text in John's Gospel, John chapter 14. Let's take this text to oh dear what's just happened. That might be my maybe because my I should have done that.

[14:44] Sorry my computer's decided to go to sleep. It doesn't usually do this. Was there? Ah, you were right.

Yes, I thought it had 98% when I started. Oh, really? Gosh, thank you. You spotted what I hadn't spotted. Okay, we're going to John chapter 14 and we're going to look at the first three verses there, first four verses.

do not let your heart be troubled. John 14 verse 1. Let's get it up on the screen so everybody can see what we're doing. I'll read it.

John 14 verse 1. Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.

this is Jesus speaking. In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

[15:58] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.

And he says, you know the way to the place I am going and they say, well, we actually don't. So have a look at that while my computer is just booting itself up again.

Thank you. this text is about Jesus' concern for his individual people.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. It's a concern for how the hearts of his people are. This is about what he has done for us.

he says, I am going to prepare a place for you. I've done something to prepare a place.

[17:18] So whether it's the going, that's to say his cross that is the preparation, or whether he goes via the cross and then does preparation

in heaven, I don't know quite how to think of that.

but he's gone to the trouble of preparing a place for his people. And what he says the future is, he says, I've gone to all this trouble, and I will, he says, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you may also be where I am.

There's something quite personal about that, isn't it? Jesus says, in a sense, I'm not going to be happy until I have finished this work, and the finishing of it is not just preparing a place, but making sure that you have been personally taken and brought to that place, because I want you to be there with me, I want you to be there, I want you to see my glory, says Jesus, that's what I want, and of course, if Jesus says that, it's not something that's going to fail, is it?

And he says, understand this, and then don't let your hearts be troubled. It's a powerful thing to say, isn't it?

There's so many things that could trouble our hearts, and we've referred to a number of them even in the past hour or so, but Jesus says, please get this big picture. What I did, I did to prepare a place for you, and whatever happens, I'm going to make sure you get there in person, I will undertake for this.

[19:13] I will take you to be with me so that you can be with me and see my glory. And he says, so please, don't let your hearts be troubled.

don't be living in an anxious panic. We don't know what the next day will bring, do we? But we know who holds the future.

He'll guide me with his hand, with God, things don't just happen, everything by him is planned. So as I face tomorrow with its problems, large and small, I'll trust the God of miracles, give to him my all.

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Now let's come secondly to Isaiah, as he teaches about the future. Just as a little sort of technicality, it's helpful to know that Isaiah works on three time scales.

Some of it at the time of writing, which was whatever it is, hundreds of years before the time of Christ. There's some of it in which he looks forward to the coming of Christ.

[20:14] A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel, that sort of thing. And there's things that go forward to the finality of what Christ comes to do.

There is the time of writing, the inauguration of Christ's first coming and the fulfillment of Christ's second coming, although I don't think the Bible ever calls it the second coming. The last day, the new heaven and the new earth with resurrected bodies like his.

Isaiah has that whole vision. 25, and let's just look at a couple of examples of it. So, Isaiah 25, verses 6 to 8.

Isaiah 25, verses 6 to 8. And you may or may not remember when we went through this, because we went through all of Isaiah, actually, didn't we, up to wherever we've got to, but we certainly did chapter 25.

I don't know whether you remember being surprised at this reading, but let me just read it to you again. Isaiah 25, 6 to 8. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines.

[21:42] on this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that covers all nations, sorry, that unfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.

He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. He will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.

the Lord has spoken. Let's just take that up. He talks about a feast and a banquet. We all know what a feast and a banquet is, don't we? You can imagine it, you know, McDonald's, go large.

A feast, a banquet, we get the idea, that's something you can say, yeah, I've got that. And then he says in this feast and banquet with all the luscious food, the aged wine, the best of meats, the finest of wines.

And then he says, on this mountain I will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people. And it's sort of a wrapping thing that stops you moving properly.

[23:01] And he says, I'll destroy this wrapping. And then he talks about a sheet that covers all nations. The idea is something like a mould. I don't know if you've ever been, had a plaster cast in hospital that's

sort of, I don't know, do they still do that, where you have a plaster cast on your arm or something, if you've broken your arm?

He says something like this over all the nations. And he says it just holds them and restrains them and stops them being what God intended people to be.

And he says, I'm going to take that away. I'm going to take away the sheet that covers all the nations. And what's he going to do? I'm going to swallow up death forever.

That's a brilliant prophecy, isn't it? And we thought that that was New Testament. But it's here. Isaiah saw it. Death is swallowed up in victory.

He'll swallow up death forever. And he will wipe away all tears, tears. God's got a great big handkerchief for wiping away tears. He will wipe away all tears.

[24:10] And he will remove the disgrace of his people, verse 8. Disgrace is the shame where people say, you know, people make fun and go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

And there's a shame upon his people because people, Satan can say, yeah, yeah, you get ill. you sin.

You're mortal. And God says, yeah, I'm going to remove that disgrace. And what is mortal will be swallowed up by immortality.

And what is weak will be swallowed up by glory. And what is sinful will be swallowed up by holiness. and God will remove that disgrace from his people.

And it tells us, the Lord has spoken. It's not a guess. It's not something that various preachers can disagree on because there are different interpretations.

[25:14] It's categorical. The Lord has spoken. I will do that. this is where Paul got it from.

This is where John got it from. This is the future hope. And he said, I will. You could think about the I wills of God, or the definites of it.

On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food. On this mountain, he will destroy the sheet that covers all nations.

The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears from all faces. He will remove the disgrace of his people. The Lord has spoken.

Isaiah teaches about the future. Let's look at Isaiah 64, verse 4. Isaiah 64, verse 4.

[26:25] The chapter begins, Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down. And in verse 4, it says, Since ancient times, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God beside you who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

There's something about waiting for God to do something. There's a different translation, this is the authorised version, which I've got up on the screen, I just copied it from my computer and it's got the word numbers in there.

For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.

Old English. Do you know who quotes that? It's the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 and he says, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

No eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, nor has the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed it to us by his spirit.

[27:55] He says, we're not in the dark, well, we don't have it yet, but it has been revealed, and it's been revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the glories that are coming, but in the sense I've already said, we haven't got it yet, we still have to use our imaginations.

Christians. But that quote comes from Isaiah, and it's, as Paul says it in Corinthians, he says, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

That's the bit that hasn't entered into the heart of man. He says, just get this, that God has planned something brilliant for us.

He planned it before time began, and that's what the gospel is about. It's not obvious to unconverted people because their eyes can't see, their ears can't hear, and their minds can't

conceive it, and it wasn't fully revealed in the Old Testament, but the gospel of Jesus Christ brings us to light immortality.

The gospel of Jesus Christ shows us the unbelievable good things. I put unbelievable in quotes because people say unbelievable meaning brilliant, and this is brilliant, but the whole point of it is we believe it.

[29:30] If you like, it's unbelievably good, but it's true. Christianity is fundamentally about the future.

It's at the heart of what it is to be a Christian. The apostles teach us about the future. Jesus teaches about the future. The Old Testament has taught about the future.

That's where it all comes from, and it's revealed for us fully in the gospel. So we should learn about the future. We should take to heart what the Bible says about the future, so that we won't be overly troubled or anxious.

Remember what Jesus said, don't let your hearts be troubled. He's got it under control. For each of us, he's got a plan.

He's definitely going to, he's prepared a place for us, and sooner or later, he will come and take us to be with him because that's what he wants it to be. We should learn about the future so that we will live lives of holiness and heaven even before we get there.

[30:42] The Puritans had a good handle on this. Do you remember Richard Baxter? I showed you Richard Baxter from Bridge North. He wrote a book called *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, and it was about heaven.

I have to say, I don't think I've actually ever read it. He's famous for writing it, and it was said of him, heaven was in Baxter before Baxter was in heaven. Heaven was in Baxter before Baxter was in heaven.

What a thing to aspire to. We're so busy thinking about this world, aren't we? Let's give heaven a chance, that heaven might be in us before we're in heaven.

We should learn about the future so that we have something really brilliant to look forward to, which makes everything else worthwhile, and which puts into perspective the other calls on our hearts.

We look forward to a feast. We look forward to a wedding. We look forward to a new body like his, and we look forward to the welcome to the welcome of Jesus Christ himself.

[32:16] Let's sing. Thank you.