

The Second Arrival of the King who will bring us into the New Creation

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: 30 December 2018

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] I mean, please be seated and good morning to everyone. I hope you're really well. I hope you had a great Christmas. I think my voice is a bit croaky as well. I want to start with a question which is at the top of your handouts.

And please chat with the person next to you or the people around you. What city or place do you call home? What city or place do you call home?

Over to you for a few seconds. Let me break into your conversations there. A pretty good question that one. I wonder what place you said.

Is it the city you were born or grew up in? On Boxing Day, I drove my uncle to the airport. He was visiting India where he was born and grew up.

There's a big Indian festival happening across that country in January where Indians from all over the world are going back home to where they grew up to reconnect with family and friends.

[0 : 59] Is your home city the one where you spent most of your life? Perhaps it's another city of Australia like Sydney. If so, we will pray for you. I couldn't resist.

But I imagine for most people, Melbourne is your home. And that's a good choice, actually, because after all, Melbourne is the world's most liveable city, isn't it?

That's what... Well... Well, see, that's the award. There's a lot of groans at nine o'clock. That's the award given each year by the Economist Intelligence Unit, which is a British think tank.

Every year, they measure a city's livability based on criteria such as... I'll get this right. Stability, health care, culture, environment, education and infrastructure.

And according to that criteria, since 2010, Melbourne has been the world's most livable city, the place you should call home. That is until 2018, and we should all pack our bags and move to Vienna, which has the title.

[2 : 06] And I've been there, and I can't imagine why. Anyway. But if Isaiah was voting for the world's most livable city, he would have picked Zion, God's city.

Isaiah 65 is like inspecting a display home in God's city. Have you ever done that? Ever inspected a display home? Feels amazing, doesn't it? And far from being some sort of cloudy or ethereal nonsense, Zion is real.

It is relational. It is radically different. And it is eternal. And Isaiah's aim is to shift Israel's eyes from old Jerusalem to Zion.

Isaiah paints a picture of God's city that looks so radically different to Jerusalem in the Middle East that Israel will never again be confused about where their true home is.

And as they glimpse through the keyhole, Isaiah is trying to develop in them a sort of homesickness. You see, maybe you're a person who had a 2018, you would rather forget.

[3 : 24] And you want the Lord to take you away as soon as possible. Or maybe you're a person whose 2018 was full of the good things of life here and now. Whatever person you are, Isaiah wants us to recognize our true home as he presents it.

So we too would feel that deep ache of homesickness. Do you ever feel homesick? Maybe you're from another place.

Maybe this past Christmas you've been stuck here in Melbourne, away from your home. I lived in London for years and years. And at Christmas time I'd always get desperately homesick.

During the footy season, desperately homesick. But no more so than during summer times when Englishmen would take off their shirts and complain that 25 degrees was just too hot. I would get terribly homesick.

In Isaiah, in chapter 65, Isaiah shows us God's criteria for the world's most livable city. And at each point what we're going to do is compare Zion to Melbourne.

[4 : 31] Or the city you call home. So we can recognize where our true home is and feel that deep ache of homesickness. So let's do that. Please have a look at the handout.

It tells you where we're going. And please keep Isaiah 65 open. I'm going to read from the first verse, verse 17. See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered. And verse 17 is the key today. And in fact, you could say that verse 17 summarizes the whole book of Isaiah because it mimics the first verse of the whole Bible.

Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, which says, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But now Isaiah shifts Israel's focus.

See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things, that is, the things of Genesis, of this creation, will no longer be remembered.

[5 : 34] See, God's people Israel were trapped in an endless cycle of sin and judgment. And sin and judgment. Any blessings they experienced in 2018 would only last until 2019, when the nation was mired in sin, which happened very often.

In the early chapters of Isaiah, God says he's had enough of them. He wants to break up with them, as it were. And he warns Jerusalem that it will be invaded by Babylon, which happens, and that the people will be taken away from their homes as exiles.

But then right at the end of Isaiah, a change has happened, and he comes with something new.

Verse 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. It's a new city and a new people.

Verse 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. Joy and rejoicing is mentioned three times. And so that is the first criteria of the world's most livable city, joy.

[6 : 45] The city will be marked by a joy between its people and God. And so here is the compare and the contrast. How much joy did you experience in Melbourne in 2018?

So, babies born, family times. They're times of joy. We had a few of those in my family this year. But for our neighbours directly across the street from us, my wife and I would often hear at night time, often, the sounds of weeping and crying, until finally the police came at 1am to allow the wife and the little girl to escape.

I'm not sure how certain joy is for everyone in Melbourne. And that is just one street with two houses. I'm not sure how certain joy is for everyone.

But the joy Isaiah speaks about is a relational joy with the Lord. How much joy did Melbourne take in the Lord this year? In loving him, in loving his word.

How much did Melbourne celebrate the birth of its saviour this past Christmas? It's very easy to feel alone as Christians are here and now, outnumbered in this place.

[8 : 04] Joy. And so here is another criteria. The end to mortality. The end to mortality. Notice in verse 17, 18 and 19, the positives of those verses are enhanced by the negative of verse 20.

Never again. So in God's city, verse 20, Never again will there be an infant who lives but a few days. Or an old man who does not live out his years.

The one who dies at 100 will be thought a mere child. The one who fails to reach 100 will be considered accursed. Verse 20 mentions someone dying at 100, but it doesn't mean there'll be death in Zion.

It's just poetic language. It means that someone who dies at 100 will be considered well ahead of time, way before their years. A radically different to Melbourne.

Here, when you turn 100, you get a letter from the Queen. And I went online and had a look at what the letter says. This is something we can all look forward to. This is what Her Majesty says, I'm so pleased to know that you are celebrating your 100th birthday.

[9 : 13] I send my congratulations and best wishes to you on such a special occasion. I think she's a legend, just for the record. But in Jerusalem and in Melbourne, 100 is a great long life.

You get a letter from the Queen. How fantastic. But in God's city, you will be considered, or you'll be thought, a mere child is the language. Because in God's city, there is an end to mortality.

No death. No weeping. No crying. Everything created totally new. And only joyful.

What city do you call home? The second criteria of the world's most livable city are there in verse 21 and 22.

I'm going to read from verse 21. They will build houses and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Now I asked the biggest wine buff I know, I said, how long does it take to plant a vineyard and enjoy their grapes?

[10:21] And he said, it could take anywhere from six to ten years. And so to plant a vineyard is a major investment. To build your own home, as Isaiah says, a major investment.

You have to have permanence and security to spend that sort of cash. Well, here is a picture of God's city where there are no movers, no mortgages, no calls from the bank manager, no worries about market values or interest rates.

And again, the positive of verse 21 is enhanced by the negative of verse 22. Verse 22, no longer will they build houses and others live in them or plant and others eat.

My sister, she built a new home in Wonturner and she got the keys just on the 23rd, just before Christmas. And the builders were two years late in building because squatters had moved into the old house and it took the builders two years to get the squatters out.

Now, for me, the idea of squatters sounds outrageous. But to an Israelite, these words mean much, much more. You see, these words speak of invasion and ruin, of poverty and forced migration.

[11:38] You see, worse than a hippie squatter were the Babylonian armies waiting to invade and destroy Jerusalem and exile the people away so they could take over their farms and eat all their produce.

Catastrophic stuff. But in God's city, verse 22, no longer. No longer will they build houses and Babylonians live in them or plant and invaders eat.

And the reason, verse 22, be. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people.

Yesterday, my family and my extended family, we drove through the Dandenongs.

Have you ever done that? Drive through the Dandenongs? It's fantastic. And we drove through Alinda and Calista and places like that. And there are all these massive gum trees. And they must be decades and decades, maybe even centuries old.

And all the gum trees stand completely straight. They're not like the ones in the suburb which are all bent. And you look through the Dandenongs and it's like a forest of old people or ancient people standing up.

[12:48] I meant ancient, not senior citizens. Sorry. But that's what these trees, these gum trees look like. It's magnificent. Please have a look. God says, my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

Why? For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people. No invasions. No exile. You can build and live. You can sow and reap.

You can invest and profit. You can plan for a long, long future in Zion. But down here in Melbourne, we always say, God willing, don't we?

I'll see you next year. God willing. I'll see you later. God willing. We'll pay off the house soon. God willing. My business will go well. God willing.

In this city, not even a Christian can make huge claims about their 2019. Your job, your relationships, your health, your lives, your home, its value, God willing.

[13:53] We have to say that. But in our true home, the person who trusts in Jesus can make plans one, ten, one hundred, one thousand years in advance.

Can you imagine investing money today or buying a house in Doncaster today and having a right concern about using it in a thousand years' time?

Can you imagine investing money being concerned about the value of it in three thousand and nineteen? my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

No longer handing over your houses and your businesses to your children only for them to go off and marry a total idiot. No longer any redundancy.

It's funny because it's true. No longer any redundancy. No longer having to see the boss. You know when you go to see the boss and you walk in and they say have a seat and please close the door behind you?

[14:55] You think oh, what's coming now? No longer. No longer worried about interest rates or property values or university results or jobs. No longer in God's city.

No longer any funerals or hospitals. Imagine that. No longer that sick feeling of what tomorrow will bring. These are the regular experiences of life here and now but no longer in God's city. Are you homesick yet? And our final set of criteria are the supernatural blessings and peace of verse 23 to 25.

I'll read from verse 23. They will not labor in vain nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune for they will be a people blessed by the Lord they and their descendants with them.

These verses speak of curses and futility and of blessings. See, even in Australia, even in Australia, some places are doomed to misfortune.

[16:02] Would you pack up and move your family to a country town with huge unemployment where droughts and floods were common or to a suburb where the drugs and the crime have gripped the young people where opportunity and education were pretty low.

This is the cursed feeling of verse 23. But in God's city, no such curses, no such futility for or because they will be a people blessed by the Lord.

They and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer. While they're still speaking, I will hear. I've noticed that a lot of my prayers, maybe this is true for you, this is not finger pointing, but just for me, maybe you agree.

A lot of my prayers aren't for eternal or character godliness things. They are for, they're just a long list of things and stuff that I need. And it's not necessarily because I'm selfish or materialistic per se. It's just that there's so much wrong with life here and now. I can, I'll never run out of things to pray for, the stuff of this world. How much more livable is God's city?

[17:23] Verse 24 says that we won't even be able to get our prayers out. Before they call, I will answer. While they're still speaking, I will hear. It's a radically new or better relationship.

Have a look at the imagery of peace in verse 25. This is imagery of peace. The wolf and the lamb will feed together. Yeah, but only one of them is going to go to sleep that night.

I've watched enough of David Attenborough to know that in nature or naturally, wolves and lambs don't eat together just like the lion and the oxen.

It's the old creation of Adam versus the new creation of Christ where there is an unnatural or supernatural peace.

Wolves and lambs, lion and oxen together. It is an otherworldly peace. Music to the ears of people constantly in the grip of war such as the Israelites or people like us constantly in the grip of conflict between one another.

[18:35] They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain says the Lord. Do you long for a home like that? And as we move to apply this passage, Isaiah has been trying to develop that deep ache of homesickness and I think Isaiah has two people in mind.

So person number one hates or feels discontent with life in Melbourne. Totally discontent here. Either they want to go home with Jesus or they want to go home to another city.

And I just want to caution that because I don't think that loving God's city is the same as hating where you are. I think they're different things.

And it's amazing though, when life gets tough, when 2018 is rubbish, we have an amazing better home. That is amazing. But discontentment where we are now, discontentment needs to remember that God has plans for us in the here and now.

We're to love him and our neighbours as ourselves. We're to be witnesses for Jesus so other people can call Zion home. A constant state of discontentment and anger here and now undermines God's mission for us.

[19:56] To person number one who hates life in this city, feels totally discontent for whatever reason, please remember Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 12, that God arranges the parts of the body as he sees fit.

That means God has arranged for you and me to be here and now. God doesn't make mistakes. Please also remember Paul's words from Philipians 1.21, to live is Christ, to die is gain, to live is for Christ and to die is a gain because you go home to Zion.

That is person number one. To person number two, who feels like this city is their home, please let me gently nudge you or challenge you. Are you using the right criteria of livability?

How did Melbourne score or how did you score Melbourne based on God's criteria? Australia is the lucky country, there's no doubt about it. We all enjoy those good things of life all the time and that is caution, that is the trick because the good things of life in Australia confuses us into thinking we are

already home and so we stop lifting our eyes and looking forward the way Isaiah wants us to. So here's a challenge again, where does your life show your home is? How does the organisation of your life show where you find your true home?

[21 : 29] See, if Melbourne is the answer, even if you had a pretty decent 2018, everything of this city will always have to be tempered with a God willing.

And if this around us is the best you can hope for, Isaiah says you've got a pretty low view of home. If this around us is the best blessings you think God has for you, you have a pretty low view of God as well.

See, maybe person number two has lived in their home for years and years, maybe they're building their dream home, maybe they're like me and waste hours on realestate.com. Why not put a message on your fridge that says temporary?

Could we do that in 2019? Even if you own your own home, it's easy if you're a tenant, but if you own your own home, put a message on the fridge so every day when you go for the milk, you'll see it and remind yourself of your other home, this home temporary.

Could we do that? That would be a remarkable thing to every day have a reminder of the new creation, that this is the old creation. The tension between here and our future home should be like someone going on a holiday.

[22 : 48] When you go on a holiday, you don't look at property to buy, you don't apply for citizenship, you don't get a driver's license or enroll to vote because you know you've got your true home elsewhere.

You'll be going on a plane soon to go back home. And every photo while you're away, every photo of the fun times you're missing out on back home, the times of family and friends, the weather, the parties and the food should give you that deep ache of homesickness.

That is the ache that only people who trust in Jesus can feel. That is the ache that person one should feel when they're faced with another terrible 2019.

And this is the ache or the bigger expectation that person number two feels when they think life is pretty good. That is the bigger expectation that hangs over the rest of the Bible right till the end, pretty much, to Revelation 21, when John ticks off God's criteria as he sees our new home.

We're going to finish here. This is what John says. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

[24 : 14] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

What a home. Let me pray that we would all get there. Father God, we long to go home. To be with the Lord Jesus, to be in a home like that, where there is no longer any of the rubbish of this life.

Father, please help us to be content and serve as we are, where we find ourselves. And please help us not to be confused that this is our real home.

Please give us an expectation and a deep ache of homesickness for Zion and a life with you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.