

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

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Date: 30 December 2018

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[0 : 00] Please keep that Isaiah 65 open. We'll be going through that. That's page 748, Isaiah 65. And I want to begin with a question.

And I'd like you to discuss this with the people around you. So just to continue those conversations, here's the question. What city or place do you call home? So over to you, just for the people around you.

What city or place do you call home? Over to you. Cool. Let me just break into your conversations there. A good one to chat through over a bit later.

I wonder what city you said. Is it the city you were born or grew up in? I see lots of people here who are born in other countries.

Is it the city you were born or grew up in? I see my best friend's here. He was born in another country. On Boxing Day, I drove my uncle to the airport. He was going back home to visit India.

[0 : 59] There's a big Indian festival happening through January where loads of Indians from all over the world are going to go back to their home cities where they grew up in and reconnect with family and friends.

Is your home city one where you spent most of your life? Perhaps another city of Australia? Maybe Sydney? If so, we will pray for you.

But I can't resist. But I imagine for most of us, Melbourne is the place you call home. And that's a good choice, actually, because Melbourne is the world's most livable city, isn't it?

No. There's a lot of groaning here. Well, that's the award given each year by, let me get this right, the Economist Intelligence Unit, which is a British think tank.

Every year, they measure a city's livability based on criteria such as stability in 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.

[2 : 08] That is, until 2018, we should all pack our bags and move to Vienna. That has the title. I've been there, and I can't imagine why. But if Isaiah was voting for the world's most livable city, he would have said Zion.

Zion is God's city built on God's mountain. And Isaiah 65 is like inspecting a display home. Have you ever done that? Walk through a display home?

It's all beautiful and shiny, and you think, wow, what a better life. Isaiah 65 is like walking through a display home of God's city. And far from being a cloudy, ethereal nonsense, God's city is real.

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

He paints a picture of God's city that looks so radically different to Jerusalem that Israel will never be confused about where their home is.

[3 : 19] And as they glimpse through the keyhole, Isaiah wants them to develop a sort of homesickness, if you like. You see, maybe you're a person who's 2018, you would rather forget.

And you want the Lord to take you away now. Maybe you're a person who's 2018 was full of good things. Whatever person you are, Isaiah wants us to recognize that for the Christian, their true home is Zion.

So that we too would feel that deep ache of homesickness. Have you ever felt homesick? Do you ever get homesick? 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 feel desperately homesick. Same during footy season while I was over there. But no more so than during the summer when Englishmen felt the urge, as soon as it got above 20 degrees, to take off their shirts. And just go, oh, it's so hot over here. And I think, you don't really know what hot is. And I'd really get homesick for an Aussie summer. See, in Isaiah 65, in chapter 65, Isaiah shows us God's criteria for the world's most livable city.

[4 : 38] And at each point what we're going to do today is compare Melbourne to Zion. Or the city you call home. So that we will recognize our true home.

So that we too would feel that deep ache of homesickness. And so, if you've got a handout there in front of you, that's got some points which will tell you where I'm going.

I'm going to read from verse 17. Chapter 65, verse 17. Isaiah, or God says, See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. Verse 17 is the key today. And actually, verse 17 summarizes, in fact, the whole book of Isaiah. Because it mimics the very first verse of the whole Bible.

Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But now, Isaiah shifts their focus. Verse 17.

[5 : 39] See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things, the things of Genesis, the things of this creation, will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

And this is important, because God's people, Israel, were trapped in an endless cycle of sin and then judgment. And sin and then judgment. Even if their 2018 was pretty great, it only lasted until 2019, when the nation was stuck in sin.

Sin, blessings, judgment. Sin, blessings, judgment. And that happened often and often to that country. In the early chapters of Isaiah, God says, I've had enough. I can't take it anymore.

I'm going to break up with you. And I'm going to judge you. He warns that Jerusalem will be invaded by Babylon, which happens in the 6th century. And that the people will be taken away from their home as exiles.

There's God now, see? Scary stuff. But here comes Isaiah 65 with something new. See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

[6 : 45] The former things of this life will not be remembered. 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.

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 is mentioned three times in those verses. And so that is the first criteria of the world's most livable city. Joy. Zion will be marked by joy between its people and God.

And here is the compare and contrast. How much joy do you experience in Melbourne? Babies born. Family times.

All good causes for joy. We had a few of both this year. But our neighbors across the street from us. My wife and I.

[7 : 45] We would often hear the sounds of weeping and crying. Until finally the police came at 1 a.m. To allow the wife and the little girl to escape. Not sure how certain joy is for everyone.

That was just two houses on one street in Melbourne. But the joy Isaiah speaks about is a relational joy with God. How much joy does Melbourne take in living for the Lord?

In loving his word? How much did Melbourne celebrate the birth of its saviour this past Christmas? Christians, we often feel alone.

We definitely feel outnumbered in this place. Joy. That's the first criteria. Here's another one. An end to mortality.

Notice that the positives of verse 17, 18 and 19 are enhanced by the negative of verse 20. Never again. In God's city, verse 20.

[8 : 46] 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. 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 that death will be there in Zion. It's just poetic language to say that anyone who dies, even at 100, will be considered or will be thought a mere child.

That is the language. Radically different to Melbourne. Here, when you turn 100, you get a letter from the Queen. Do you know that? You get a letter from the Queen.

I looked up online what it says. And this is what Her Majesty says. I'm so pleased to know that you, Vijay, are celebrating your 100th birthday. I hired it quite well. I send my congratulations and best wishes to you on such a special occasion.

Fantastic. So in Jerusalem and in Melbourne, 100 is a great long life. You get a letter from the Queen. But in God's city, you will be thought a mere child.

[9 : 54] Because in God's city, there will be an end to mortality. So there's no weeping or crying. Everything created totally new.

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

This is our second point. Verse 21. They will build houses and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Now, I did some research. I asked the biggest wine buff I know, whose initials are Doug Norman.

There he is. I said, Doug, in text, Doug, how long does it take to plant a vineyard and eat the fruit? And Doug said, well, anywhere from three to six years, which is right.

But maybe even longer, perhaps. Perhaps longer. Either way, to plant a vineyard is a major investment. To build your own home is a major investment.

[10 : 56] You have to have permanence and security to lay down that kind of cash to plan for the future like that. Here is a picture of God's city.

Here's a picture of God's city where there are no movers, no mortgages, no phone calls from the bank manager, no worries about interest rates or market values.

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. She got the keys just two days before Christmas. And the builder was two years late in finishing because squatters had moved into the old house. For two years, the builder couldn't get rid of them. Now, for me, the idea of squatters sounds outrageous. I can't imagine that, believe that still happens. But to an Israelite, this means much, much more.

[11 : 56] See, these words speak of invasion and of ruin, of poverty and forced migration. You see, worse than a hippie squatter were Babylonian armies waiting to invade and destroy, to exile the people away so they could take over their farms and houses and eat their produce.

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

And the reason, verse 22, for as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people. Yesterday, our families, we drove out to the Dandenongs.

Have you ever done that, driven to the Dandenongs? And in the Dandenongs, there are all these gum trees. But they're not like the gum trees we have here, which are all twisted and hang over your house and threaten to kill you every day. In the Dandenongs, like around Alinda and Calista, all the gum trees are massive.

And they're all straight. They must be decades and decades, maybe even centuries old. And I was saying to my sister-in-law, I was saying, they look like a forest of people, don't they?

[13 : 09] These gum trees in the Dandenongs. Fantastic. God says, But here's the thing.

Down here in Melbourne, we always say, God willing, don't we? I'll see you next year, God willing. I'll pay off the house, God willing.

We'll be alive next year, God willing. Even Christians in this city can't make huge claims about their 2019. Your job, your relationships, your lives, your health, your home and its value, God willing, we always say.

But in our true home, for the person who trusts in Jesus, whose blood has washed their sins away, they can make plans 1, 10, 100, 1,000 years in advance.

Can you imagine buying a house today in Doncaster and considering its value in the year 3,019? Can you imagine investing money, worried about your return 1,000 years later?

[14 : 43] My chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. No longer having to hand over your houses and your businesses to your children who go away and marry total idiots.

It's funny because it's true. No longer any redundancies. No longer having to see the boss. You know when you go to see the boss and he says, have a seat, close the door behind you, and you think, oh, here it goes.

No longer worried about interest rates or property values or university results. No longer in God's city. No longer any funerals or hospitals or that sick feeling about what tomorrow might bring. These are the regular experiences of life here and now. But in God's city, no longer. Are you homesick yet?

Our final set of criteria is the supernatural blessings and peace of verse 23 to 25. Verse 23.

[15:44] 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 blessings, of futility and relationship with the Lord.

Even in Australia, some places feel doomed to misfortune. Would you pack up and move your family to a country town where there was huge unemployment, where droughts and flood were a common experience?

Would you pack up and move your family to a suburb where crime and drugs have a hold on young people, where opportunity and education are pretty low? This is the cursed feeling of verse 23.

One of futility and hope, of laboring in vain, of having children doomed to misfortune. But in God's city, no such curses 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 are still speaking, I will hear. This is a personal reflection on myself. I've noticed that lots of my prayers, not about you, but my prayers, I don't often pray for character things, godliness things, eternal things.

[17:04] I'm always praying for stuff, worldly things here and now. And it's not necessarily because I'm selfish or materialistic. It's just because there's so much wrong with life here and now.

How much more livable is God's city? Prayer is not even needed. Verse 24. Before they call, I will answer. While they're still speaking, I will hear.

You won't even be able to get your prayers out. Such is the closeness of your relationship with God. Have a look at the imagery of peace in verse 25. It says, 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 speaking, wolves and sheep don't eat together, per se.

Just like the lion and the oxen. What it is, it's the old creation of Adam versus the new creation of Christ. In the creation of Christ, there is an unnatural or supernatural peace.

[18:13] Lions and oxen, wolves and lambs, all together. It is otherworldly. And that is music to the ears of an Israelite who is constantly facing war on all sides.

Maybe that is music to your ears. Maybe your 2018 has been full of family conflict. In God's city, there is an otherworldly peace. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountains, says the Lord.

Do you long for a home like that? And as we move to apply this passage, Isaiah has been developing that deep homesickness within us.

And I think he's been speaking to two different people. So the first person hates or is discontent with life in Melbourne. Life here and now.

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 loving Zion is not the same as hating where you are.

[19:20] They're not the same thing. It is amazing that when life is tough, when we feel our bodies crumbling with age and sicknesses and things like that, it's amazing that we have an entirely new home to go to.

But discontentment where you are needs to remember that God has plans for us where we are here and now. To love him and our neighbours. To tell others about Jesus.

So they too can be called home by the Lord. A constant state of discontentment and anger where you are. It undermines God's mission for you wherever he has placed you.

To the person who hates life in this city for whatever reason, please remember Paul's words from 1 Corinthians. He says that God arranges the parts of the body as he sees fit.

That means God has arranged for you to be here. God doesn't make mistakes. He has arranged for you and me to be where we are. And also remember Philipians 1.21 which says, To live is Christ.

[20 : 26] To die is gain. To live is to live for Christ. And to die is gain. Because we'll get taken home. That's person number one. Person number two is the person who feels like this city is their home.

Please let me ask you, Are you using the right criteria of liveability? How did you score Melbourne against God's criteria? Australia is the lucky country.

There's no doubt about it. New Zealand is a little bit as well. Some Kiwis here today. They are the lucky countries. We all enjoy a measure of blessings now. We all do. And that is the caution.

That is the important thing. Because an experience of some blessings now in life confuses us to thinking we are already home. And so here is the challenge.

Let me prod you gently. Where do, where does it appear your true home is? Is your life organised in such a way that shows your true home is here or elsewhere?

[21 : 31] If Melbourne is your home, if you consider it your home, if you've had a pretty decent 2018, everything in this home will always be subject to a God willing.

And if this around us is the best we could want, Isaiah would want to say, you've got a pretty low view of home. If everything we have now is the limit to which you think God can bless you, Isaiah would say, you've got a pretty low view of God.

You see, maybe person number two has lived in their home for years and years. Maybe they're building their dream home. Perhaps they're like me. They waste hours on realestate.com. Why not, here's a challenge, why not put a message, why not put a message on your fridge when you get home, especially if you own your home?

Why not put a message on the fridge which says temporary? Why not do that in 2019? Every day when you go to get the milk, a reminder that even your home, these things are temporary.

It's an amazing thing to spend every day thinking about the new creation. That way you're not consumed and confused by life here and now. And the tension should be like someone going on a holiday overseas.

[22 : 46] They serve God where they find themselves, but they don't go overseas and apply for a driver's license or inspect local houses or apply to vote or get a passport over there.

They know where their true home is. They know they're getting on a plane soon. Instead, they should feel that deep ache of homesickness.

That is the deep ache that people number one or person one should feel when life is horrible. That is the bigger expectation person number two should feel when life feels pretty good.

And that is the bigger expectation that hangs over the whole Bible right until the very end, Revelation 21, when John the Apostle ticks off God's criteria as he sees our new home coming down.

And I'm going to finish here. This is from Revelation. 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.

[23 : 58] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eye.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things. The life on earth has passed away. What a home.

Let me pray. Our Father God, what a home. Father, thank you that you have something so much better for those who trust in Jesus. Father, please help us to have that deep ache, that deep longing to go home.

help us not to be consumed by life now, to think that this is permanent and better and everything good. Please help us to keep our eyes fixed on your new creation.

The place, the home that Jesus has won by his blood as he pays for our sins. We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.