

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

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[0 : 00] And while the younger teens are heading out, I've got a question for everyone here. Again, like Jeff, just to chat with the person next to you. What city or place do you consider home?

What city or place do you consider home? So over to you just for a few seconds. Can I just break into your conversations there? Cool. I wonder what city or place you consider home.

Is it the city you were born or grew up in? On Boxing Day, I had to drive my uncle to the airport. He was going back home to visit India. This year in January, or next year in January, there's a huge festival where Indians from all over the world are going back to the cities that they were born and grew up in.

Is it the home city you spent most of your life in? Perhaps another city in Australia like Sydney. We can pray for you if that's the case. But I imagine for most of us, Melbourne is the place you call home.

And if Melbourne is the place you call home, that's a pretty good choice. Because after all, it's the world's most livable city, isn't it? Well, that's what they say. That's the award.

[1 : 13] There's a lot of heckling today. Not enough trembling. A lot of heckling. Anyway. The world's most livable city. 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 stability, healthcare, culture, environment, education and infrastructure. And according to that criteria, since 2010, Melbourne is the place you should call home.

But in 2018, we should all pack our bags because now Vienna is the most livable city. 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, which is God's city.

Isaiah 65, which Helen read for us, is like inspecting a display home in God's city. Have you ever walked through a display home?

Quite new and fancy. You think, wow, what an amazing thing this is. And far from being some sort of cloudy, ethereal nonsense, Zion is real.

[2 : 28] It is relational. It is radically different. It is eternal. And Isaiah's aim is this. It is to shift Israel's eyes from old Jerusalem to new Zion.

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

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 whose 2018 was pretty rubbish.

Maybe you had a year you'd rather forget. Maybe you had a 2018 that was pretty good, actually. Whatever person you are, Isaiah wants us to recognize where our true home is and for us to develop a sort of homesickness, if you like.

Have you ever felt homesick? Maybe this past Christmas you've been stuck here in Melbourne, away from your family and friends. I lived in London for a long time. And every Christmas time I'd feel desperately homesick.

[3 : 40] Also during the footy season, I'd feel desperately homesick. But no more so than during the summer, when for some strange reason, as soon as it got to about 22 degrees, every English bloke would take their shirt off and walk around going, oh, it's so hot over here.

I thought, you just don't know what summer is, do you? Unless you've lived in Australia. Well, in Isaiah chapter 65, he gives us God's criteria for the world's most livable city.

And at each point, what we're going to do today is compare Zion to Melbourne. So we can recognize where our true home is. So we can get that desperate ache of homesickness.

And so please have a look at the handout. It'll tell you where I'm going. It's important to note as well, everything we're going to say about Zion applies for Christians. It applies only for Christians, people whose sin has been paid for by Jesus, who trust in his death and resurrection for them.

Everything we're saying is just for Christians. And so criteria one, I'm going to start reading at verse 17. See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

[4 : 53] The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. Verse 17 is the key today because it summarizes pretty much the whole of Isaiah. And it mimics the first verse of the Bible from Genesis 1 verse 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But now Isaiah shifts their focus because, see, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

The former things, the things of Genesis, this creation will no longer be remembered. You see, 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 good, they would ruin it in 2019 when they inevitably fell into sin. Sin and then judgment. Sin and then judgment.

They needed a totally new creation. And in the early chapters of Isaiah, God warns them. He says, I've had enough with you. I'm going to break up with you.

[5 : 55] He warns that Jerusalem will be invaded by Babylon and that the people will be taken away, away from their home as exiles. But now, chapter 65, see, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, 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.

You see, a new city and a new people. 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.

And there is the first criteria. It is joy. Joy is mentioned three times. That's the first criteria of the world's most livable city. God's city will be marked by 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.

[6 : 58] They're good sort of times for joy. My family had a few of each this year. But across the road from us, our neighbors, my wife and I would often stay up late at night. We would hear the sounds of weeping and crying coming across the street from their house until finally the police came at 1 a.m.

to take the wife and the little girl away in safety in the middle of the night. Not sure how certain joy is for everyone in Melbourne.

But the joy Isaiah speaks of is relational joy with God. How much joy did Melbourne take in the Lord? In loving him, in living for his word?

How much did Melbourne celebrate the birth of its saviour this past Christmas? See, Christians, we often feel very alone in this city. We often feel outnumbered in this place.

Joy, that's the first criteria. Here's the next one. An end to mortality. Notice the positives of verse 17, 18 and 19 are enhanced by the negative of verse 20.

[8 : 05] Never again. So in God's city, verse 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. 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 that doesn't actually mean there'll be death in Zion.

It's poetic language. It means that someone who dies at 100 will be considered well before their years. Radically different to Melbourne, isn't it?

Here, when you turn 100, you get a letter from the Queen, which says, I looked this up by the way, I'm not 100. But I looked this up. This is what Her Majesty says.

I'm so pleased to know that you are celebrating your 100th birthday. I send my congratulations and best wishes to you on such a special occasion. There's something to aim for, isn't it? That letter from Her Majesty.

[9 : 02] In Jerusalem and in Melbourne, if you turn 100, that is a great long life, isn't it? You even get a letter from the Queen. How fantastic. But in God's city, the language is, you'll be thought a mere child.

Because in God's city, there is an end to mortality. And so there's no more weeping or crying. Because it's a totally new creation, full of total joy all the time.

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

This is our second point. Verse 21. They will build houses and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. I asked the biggest... Is anyone a wine buff here?

I asked the biggest wine buff I know. I said, how long does it take to plant a seed and actually get a mature vineyard? And he said, at least six years.

[10 : 05] And I went online, which is probably a bad idea. But I went online and they reckon around a decade. From the time you plant a seed to the time you get grapes that you can actually make wine from.

And so to build a vine... To plant a vineyard is a major investment. To build your home is a major investment. You have to have long-term plans.

You have to have permanence and security. Here is a picture of God's city where there are no movers, no mortgages, no bank managers calling you up, no interest rates, no worries about market values.

And again, the positive of verse 21 enhances 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 built a new home. And she got the keys just before Christmas, on the 23rd actually. And the builder was two years late in handing over the keys to her because squatters had moved in to the old house.

[11 : 12] And so the builders couldn't demolish it and start over again. And to 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 and poverty and forced migration. You see, worse than a sort of a hippie squatter were Babylonian armies waiting to invade and destroy.

To exile the people away and take over their farms and their houses. It is catastrophic stuff if you are an Israelite. But in God's city, no longer will they build houses and Babylonians live in them, or plant and invaders eat.

And the reason why, verse 22, B. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people. Yesterday, my family, we drove through the Dandenongs.

Do you ever do that? Go for a drive through the Dandenongs? Pretty good stuff. There were so many huge gum trees through Alinda and Callista and all those places. And we looked at the gum trees and they must be, they could even be a century old, some of them.

[12 : 23] And they're really tall and straight. And they just go straight up. Not like the ones that sort of hang over your house and threaten to fall on you. These ones are perfect. There's tons of them, tall and straight.

And they look like a forest of people. Sort of people trees. They're quite something. God says, My chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

Why? For as the days of a tree, like a forest of people, so will the days of my people be. No invasions, no exile.

You can build and live and sow and reap and invest and profit. And plan for a future as long as an ancient tree in Zion.

But down here in Melbourne, we always say, God willing, don't we? We say, I'll see you next year, God willing. Maybe I'll be alive next year, God willing. My business will go all right, God willing.

[13 : 22] We'll pay off the house soon, God willing. You see, in this city, not even Christians can presume everything about 2019. Even we have to say, God willing.

Your home and its value, your relationships, your health, your lives, God willing. But in our true home, for the person who trusts in Jesus, they can make plans 1, 10, 100, 1,000 years in advance.

Can you imagine investing money today, worried about your return in the year 3019? Can you imagine buying a house in Doncaster, thinking, I wonder what the value is going to be like in the year 3000?

My chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. No longer handing 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 redundancy. No longer having to see the boss. You know when you go see the boss and they say, take a seat, Vijay, and shut the door behind you.

[14 : 33] And you think, oh, here we go. No longer. No longer worried about interest rates or property values or university results or ATARs. No longer in God's city.

No longer any funerals or hospitals or that sick feeling. About what is coming tomorrow. These are the regular experiences in this city.

But no longer in God's city. Are you homesick yet? Our final set of criteria is the supernatural blessings and peace of verse 23 to 25.

I'm going to 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 blessings. And even in Australia, even this country, some places can feel doomed to misfortune. So would you pack up your family and move to a country town where there is huge unemployment, where droughts and floods are commonplace?

[15 : 43] Would you pack up your family and move to a suburb where crime and drugs have a hold on young people, where the standard of education and opportunities are pretty low?

This is the cursed, futile, hopeless feeling of verse 23. But in God's city, no such feeling. Because they will be a people blessed by the Lord.

They and their descendants with them. Verse 24 seems to make prayer a redundant thing. How's that? No more prayer. Before they call, I will answer. While they're still speaking, I will hear.

This is a radically new relationship. And have a look at the imagery of verse 25. The wolf and the lamb will feed together. Yeah, but only one of them is going to get any sleep that night.

I've watched enough of David Attenborough to know that in nature, or naturally speaking, wolves and lambs don't sort of lie down together.

[16 : 44] They don't feed together. Just the same as lion and oxen. They are naturally enemies. And the imagery here is the old creation of Adam versus the new creation of Christ.

In the new creation of Christ, there is an unnatural or supernatural peace. Music to the ears of people constantly in the grip of war, like the Israelites.

Music to your ears if your 2018 has been one family conflict after another. Verse 25 says that dust will be the serpent's food.

That is the image of sin from Genesis 3, where the serpent tempted man to sin against God, to act like his enemies. You see, we need a home, a new home, because this one is so badly infected by the work of Satan.

And so the work of Christ saves us from sin, but also for a new creation, a new home. Jesus enables a supernatural peace with God.

[17 : 55] So much so that natural enemies, us and God, wolves and lambs, lion and oxen, can be friends. Supernatural peace.

Isaiah says, they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. Do you long for a home like that? With that sort of peace?

And as we move to apply this passage, Isaiah has been trying to develop a sort of homesickness in us. That deep ache to want to go home.

And I think Isaiah has two people in mind. And so we'll deal with the person one and person two. So person number one hates life in Melbourne. They're totally discontent here.

Either they want to go home with Jesus or they want to go home to another city. And we just need to caution that because I don't think that loving Zion and hating Melbourne are exactly the same thing.

[18 : 54] Discontentment needs to remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians. That God arranges the parts of the body as he sees fit. He has arranged for you and I to be here.

God doesn't make mistakes. Jesus calls us to love him and our neighbours, to be his witnesses, to tell others about him as well. Discontentment and anger where you are will undermine Jesus' mission for you.

Where he has placed you. But for person number one, we need to remember that every time we feel our bodies crumble with age, or we have that continual unmet expectation and disappointment, when the things of this life seem to be going against us, how amazing that this is not our home.

That we have a better, new creation. Radically different. We should also remember that within the church, we should be able to get a glimpse of the new creation now.

On Sundays, we come to remind one another of the promises, the purposes, and the presence of God as we gather as his people. All these things are a taste of life now in Zion.

[20 : 13] So that's person number one. Person number two is the person who feels like this city is their home. Please let me challenge you. Are you using the right criteria of home?

How did Melbourne score in terms of its liveability with God's standard? Australia is the lucky country. It is. And we all enjoy blessings in many ways.

But that is the trick. And this is really important. Because any blessings we experience now, sometimes they work to confuse us to thinking we've already arrived.

That this is our home. And so here's a challenge for you. I think I put it on the bottom of the handout. Where do our lives show our true home is? Where does your life show you find your home?

See, even if you've had a pretty decent 2018, everything in this life has to be tempered with a God willing. And if this around us is the best we could ever want, maybe we have too low a view of home.

[21 : 21] If we're confused that this is the extent of God's blessings, maybe we've got too low a view of God. See, maybe person number two, maybe that's you.

Maybe you've lived in your home for years and years. Or maybe you're building your dream home. Or maybe you're like me. You spend hours a day on, not a day, hours a week on realestate.com.

Maybe that's you. Why not put this message on your fridge? Especially if you own your own home. Put this message on your fridge, temporary. Put it on a post-it note or whatever.

Stick it on your fridge so every day when you go to get milk, there's a reminder that even if you own this home, it is just temporary. Wouldn't that be something? To begin a 2019 with a plan in place to daily remind yourself of the new creation so you wouldn't be consumed and confused that you've already arrived.

And I think the tension should be something like this. It should be like a person who goes on holidays. So you go on holidays. You serve God where you find yourself.

[22 : 29] But on holidays, you don't go off and buy a house. You don't try and get a driver's license in the foreign country. You don't enroll to vote or apply for citizenship. You're purely on holidays. You know you've got another home elsewhere.

You know you'll be on a plane pretty soon. Instead, you should have that deep ache of homesickness.

That is the ache that only people who trust in Jesus should have. This is the ache that person one should feel when faced with the disappointments in life. And this ache is the bigger expectation that person number two should feel in the here and now.

This bigger expectation, it hangs over the rest of the Bible right to the very end, in fact, to Revelation 21, as Victor read for us. As John sees this home coming out of the sky and he ticks off Isaiah's criteria.

So I'm going to finish here reading Revelation 21. This is our home.

[23 : 59] 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.

Why don't I pray that we would all get there. Father God, we praise you for the work of Jesus who saves us from sin, who saves us for a new creation, a home like this.

Please give us that deep ache of homesickness. Please help us long to be home. Please help us to be productive and fruitful until we get there.

Father, please help us not to confuse life in Melbourne with life in Zion. Thank you that Zion is so radically different that nothing in this city can compare.

Please start teaching us this as long as we live until we get there. In Jesus' name. Amen.