

# REMEMBER THE AMNESIA OF THE SAINTS

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ November 15, 2015



<sup>17</sup> “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> “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 a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. <sup>21</sup> They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> 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 work of their hands. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD. (Isaiah 65:17-25)

These are the words of him who is trustworthy and true,

I think most of us wish that we would have a better memory. Whether it's something basic such as remembering where we put our keys or glasses, or remembering more facts and knowledge. Well, for some people, remembering isn't something they worry about. How many of you have heard of the term, “hyperthymesia?” It's the description for people who cannot forget. So far, over 60 people have been identified as having hyperthymesia. These are people who can remember just about every day of their lives, down to the minute detail. While we may not be able to remember what we had for lunch last Thursday, these people can remember what they had for lunch 40 years ago.

While at first, it might seem like a gift we would like to have, I think we also realize how difficult it could be too. Yes, you could remember all of the good times you had, all of the blessings, but then you would also be able to remember all of the bad times as well. There's certainly something that can be said for being able to forget something.

It's that ability to forget something that Isaiah speaks to this morning in our first lesson. This is not the usual type of forgetfulness – such as forgetting where you placed your keys, or forgetting facts. It is the forgetting of experiences, it is the forgetting of, as Isaiah puts it, “the former things.” We see this forgetfulness is tied together with our calling as saints. That's right, I called you a saint. A saint is not a person who does really, really, really good things, but a saint is a person who believes in Christ and is clothed by his righteousness. And as a saint, you are asked to forget. And I ask you this morning to REMEMBER THE AMNESIA OF THE SAINTS 1) In heaven and 2) On earth

Once again, we turn to the pages of the Old Testament, to the time before Jesus walked on the earth. Last week, we heard from the prophet Ezekiel who was the messenger to God's people in the land of Babylon. Today, we rewind a few hundred years to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was one of the giant figures in the Old Testament. The people of Israel had not yet been taken into captivity, but God through the prophet Isaiah still was warning his people of the coming judgment. The nature of the judgment is similar to what was discussed last week. But today we turn the page and instead of focusing on the judgment of God, we focus on the chosen ones of God – his saints.

For while there were many who had turned their backs on the Lord in Isaiah's day, there was still a remnant left, a small number of people who still worshiped the Lord. It is specifically to these people that Isaiah is addressing his words in this section of chapter 65. He describes that even though there will be tough times ahead, there is light at the end of the tunnel. He points forward toward that light, toward what the saints of God can look forward to.

Maybe as you heard those words read you were able to pick up on some of the glorious pictures that were laid out by Isaiah. But maybe you were left scratching your head about how a particular verse or phrase fit with the context of saints triumphant. Maybe some of the phrases reminded you of what heaven was going to be like – **“be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create.”** But maybe other phrases didn't quite fit with the eternal-ness of heaven, **“the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child.”** That is the first thing we must understand about this particular prophecy of Isaiah.

The nature of prophecy is like a mountain range. You can see that there are different peaks, but you aren't able to tell the depth or the distance between those peaks. For example, it's only when I drive up to Mount Lemmon that I realize the Catalinas are just as deep as they are long. So it is with prophecy. Isaiah received a prophecy about the saints, but in all of this prophecy is a description both of the saints on earth and the saints in heaven. So some of the phrases aptly describe heavenly glory, while others describe the glory of being saints on earth.

But we can rejoice in each description of the saints, both here on earth and in heaven. We can rejoice in the new creation that God has made, both for the saints here on earth and for the saints in heaven. And as we take a closer look at the nature of this new creation, we find something that each of the saints forget or leave behind. This is the AMNESIA OF THE SAINTS.

(1)

The first verses of Isaiah we consider this morning say this, **“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. 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 is these verses that aptly describe what we might think of with heaven. It fits in line with what we heard read from the lesson in Revelation about heaven. In Isaiah, Revelation, and a number of other places in Scripture, heaven is described in this way – as Jerusalem, maybe the New Jerusalem, or another name meaning the same thing – Zion.

Why is it described this way? In the Old Testament, with God's people Israel, Jerusalem was not only the capital city, but it was the place where the temple was, the Lord's dwelling place with mankind. Heaven is where we will dwell with God, and so it makes sense that the Bible calls it the New Jerusalem. And what will make this Jerusalem better than the physical city of Jerusalem? In this

New Jerusalem, **"The former things will not be remembered."** What is this saying? It's saying that the saints will have a sort of heavenly amnesia. The glories of heaven will be beyond compare, we will not look back with fondness or worry upon anything that may have happened here on earth. It also mentions that **"the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more."** There will be no more cause for sadness in this New Jerusalem, for God will be there, and he will wipe away every tear from our eye. REMEMBER THE AMNESIA OF THE SAINTS in heaven.

But is that all there is to it? That we plod through the mire of this life until we reach the heavenly gates and we can enjoy our inheritance of saints? Sometimes that is the way it's described, but we mustn't think that the blessing of being a saint only begins in heaven. And right here in Isaiah, it describes some of the blessing of being a saint here on earth as well. When Isaiah was writing these words, he was writing them specifically for the saints in Israel, those who had not turned away to follow other gods. But they are equally valid and important for us. And especially since we are saints walking here on earth, we would do well to REMEMBER THE AMNESIA OF THE SAINTS on earth.

(2)

To see how aptly the new creation applies to the saints here on earth (and not just to the saints in heaven), we can turn to 2 Corinthians 5 where it says, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come."** As believers, God has put a new creation in us as well, right here, right now.

This was important for the Jewish believers who had not abandoned the Lord. Yes, they too would be taken into captivity, but Isaiah was telling them that there would be days ahead that they could look forward to being a saint. There would be a remnant who would come back to preserve the line of the Savior. When they would return to Jerusalem, they could build houses and plant vineyards and enjoy the fruit of their labors.

But these words of Isaiah are also important for us Christians who live now in these last days. We can certainly look at the worldly, physical blessings God has given us. I dare say that each one of us here, whether we think we are rich or poor, is rich in the eyes of much of the world. We have roofs over our heads, we have food on our tables, we have friends, family and so much more. But even the physical blessing of God are not all that we as saints enjoy.

We can look at such phrases like **"never again will there be...an old man who does not live out his years;"** and **"nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune,"** not so much describing a 'heaven on earth' scenario, but rather God allowing us to live lives without immediate retribution on our actions. Think about it. In the Old Testament, there were many times when God would inflict immediate punishment on his people for their actions – when they worshiped the golden calves, King David's son who was conceived in sin with Bathsheba died, certain people God inflicted with the skin disease of leprosy (Miriam, Gehazi). But now, God is promising he will act differently. That's not to say there may not be immediate natural consequences, but God is not going to send a bolt of lightning to harm us when we commit heinous sins.

We call this the patience of God upon his people, and really not just upon his people, but upon all mankind. A patience that all might come to a knowledge of the truth. Unfortunately, some take God's patience and lack of immediate action as approval of their wicked actions. May we

never do that. If God's patience were not enough for us, we have the added blessing of being able to go to our heavenly Father in prayer with confidence that he hears and answers our prayers. And if all this were not enough, God would have given us even more.

But if we're honest with ourselves, don't we sometimes wish for more? Maybe we wish for more blessings in our life – more physical possessions, more family time, or maybe different possessions and family time. Maybe we wish for more of a heaven on this earth and we try to get it by changing the laws in the country, or boycotting a certain red holiday cup. Maybe we look to support our idea of heaven on earth by looking to the Bible – to such passages at the end of our reading this morning.

I think to a certain extent we as believers would like to think there would be a time on this earth when believers won't be persecuted but exalted, a time to enjoy all the blessings the rich people have. Many have taken the last verse in our readings like this. **"The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox...they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain."** Many have taken this to mean a time here on this earth where natural enemies will resolve their differences, where literal lions will eat with literal lambs, a time of complete and utter peace.

But when this describes the world in which we live, it is no different than picturesque language used to elaborate on the kind of peace. It's no different than the angels crying out at Jesus' birth, **"Peace on earth, and good will to men on whom is favor rests,"** or when the land of Israel is described as a **"land flowing with milk and honey."** These are good things, but they are picturesque things led to remind us of the truth that we have peace with God now, not of some future heavenly time here on earth.

Thanks be to God that he has rescued us even from such sinful thoughts as these. This is where the AMNESIA OF THE SAINTS on earth comes in. What we are to remember is the new creation that God has made us to be and all the blessings that come along with it. What we are to forget is any idea that God has not given us all that we need, or that God is somehow preparing a heaven on earth for us.

Throughout this sermon, we have seen benefits of being able to remember things, and some benefits to forgetting things. What we can forget is "the former things" which take away from our joy as saints. What we can remember is that we have been chosen by God to be his saints, both now here on earth and in a little while in heaven. Since God has chosen us, we have been made a new creation, this is what makes us saints. This new creation is living inside us right now and influences all of the decisions we make. It is when we are in heaven that we see the full glory of what being a saint looks like. Right now we know in part, then we will know in full. This new creation gives us reason to rejoice both now and forever. Amen.