

Heaven is Full of "Nots!"

"Behold, 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. 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. "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; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 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 works of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for 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. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

It is hard explaining something to someone who will not understand. Parents, you know how that goes. Your three year old asks you where babies come from. You pause, not because you don't know the answer. You just don't know how to explain it to him so he understands.

If someone asks you what heaven is like, what do you say? Martin Luther tried to explain heaven to his little son named Hans. He said that heaven is full of ponies to play with. I don't think heaven is a garden of ponies, but I don't think Luther did anything wrong. He wanted him to think of heaven as full of things that he loves.

And that is the dilemma God our Father has with us, his children. How can he describe something we just understand now? He describes heaven in Revelation as this magnificent city with streets made out of solid gold and huge gates carved out of a single giant pearl. I don't think the streets are really solid gold—maybe they are—but the idea is heaven is so great, our jaws will hit ground in amazement.

Another way God our Father can explain heaven to us is to tell us what heaven is not. And that is what he does in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah. He explains heaven to us by telling us it is full of "nots."

I. What our heavenly home is like.

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth." Already he is telling us what heaven is not like. That word, "new," tells us it is something we have never experienced before. It is brand new.

How new is it? ***"The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."*** Our computers have delete buttons. We can delete anything and it goes away. If you could delete something, what would it be? Wouldn't it be wonderful to delete a tragic accident or tornado or the death of loved one? How about a sin or two that you can't forget? Today we remember our members who have gone home to heaven. They will not remember what it was like to struggle for breath, or the pain of having to bury a child, or diabetes. We remember the pain and sadness. They don't and some day soon, neither will we.

Instead of a place of bad memories, heaven is nothing but pure joy. ***"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. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people."*** You know what it is like, that first Thanksgiving without mom. You miss her laughter. You may not hear it, but she is laughing and rejoicing right now. In heaven it will be like the sound of family around the Thanksgiving table 24/7.

And the saints will not be the only ones rejoicing. God our Father will be rejoicing over us. God isn't like some aloof person who speaks from a distance. He is madly in love with us. He loves it when we are with him—in prayer and his Word now, but also while we are with him in heaven. He can't wait to see us each day.

There will be constant rejoicing because of another couple things that will not be in heaven. ***"... the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. "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; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed."*** We don't like to cry and we don't like to see people cry. I remember playing Candyland with my children. One of them had to go all the way back to the beginning, to Mr. Plumpy. You can see the tears begin in his eyes. It bothered me so much I cheated. I told him he could draw another card.

We can't always cheat to stop tears. You can experience the joy of a new baby and the next day hear that your uncle died. But not in heaven. Not a single tear will be shed. Right now there is a hole in your heart where you loved one use to be. It hurts. But in heaven that hole will be filled by that very same person. A mother lost her child to death here on earth, but in heaven she will hold him or her again. Death will be unknown. Our text uses a strange play of words to tell us that. It talks of people still dying, but not after a hundred years or more. Of course there is no more death in heaven. But as death is so common today that it is rare if any makes it to hundred, death is so uncommon that a hundred is like a day.

And there are still more "nots." ***"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 works of their hands. They will***

not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.

This was a huge problem in Isaiah's day. You could build up a successful business or farm, but in a single day you could lose it all. Suddenly your country is invaded and they take over your land. They don't let you stay on your farm; that is why they invaded so they can move their own people in. We spend a lot of money on insurance because rain can keep you from planting or a tornado can knock down your home. But not in heaven. Everything we do will last forever. Corn prices will be high; the house will need no repairs. No longer will we raise children with the fear of what will happen to them or what the world would be like for them.

"... for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them." Only God can make this happen. It is a blessing only God can give. But how? In another place Jesus said, ***"Blessed are they who heard the Word of God and obey it."*** The blessing of the "nots" of heaven is ours only through the blessing of God's Word. Parents, you know. We are constantly fixing our kids problems whether it is wiping up spilled milk or replacing that window a baseball shattered. The Bible is solely about God fixing what man broke.

He does this through Jesus, the Christ, his only Son. He lived the life we can't live. He died a death that pays for the sins we commit. He rose again guaranteeing us eternal life. Do you remember the Samaritan woman? She came to the well to draw water at an odd time of the day. She was ashamed of her sinful life and wanted to avoid people. But she couldn't avoid Jesus who revealed himself as the Messiah and her Savior. How did this affect this woman? She put her water jars down and ran back into town to tell everyone about Jesus. Gone was her shame. She left it there at the well with Jesus. This is what Jesus does to sinners.

That is our home called heaven. That is where our dear loved ones are who died in Christ. This is home for us one day soon. But where do we go until God takes us home? Well, we have home on earth called church.

II. Stay in your church home.

We lived in St. Peter during the 1998 tornado. Our church was destroyed. The parsonage where we lived was damaged. They decided to move the parsonage to make room for a bigger and better church. What happened to us? A sweet widow, Nancy Krenik, offered her home to be our home. When she built her new house, she thought of everything. The entire basement was like its own house, with two bedrooms, a living room, bathroom, a fireplace and its own full kitchen. That was our home for the six months it took them to move and fix the parsonage. We went there every night to sleep. We cooked our meals there. Our middle child was born while we were there. It was home until the parsonage was ready.

Heaven is our home. Jesus told us he is there getting it ready for us. Where do we go until then? Well, we have another home. I am not talking about Arlington. I am talking about Church, God's house. Remember that passage I quoted earlier, ***blessed are those who hear and obey God's Word?*** That is what makes church our home. It is here we receive God's Word through Baptism, preaching and teaching, Communion. It is here we believe for faith comes from hearing the message.

"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD. It is here we pray to the Lord and he answers. In fact, he knows our prayers before we speak them. It is here we find a true peace between God and us. With sins paid for, it is as peaceful as a lamb sleeping in the arms of a mighty lion, unafraid he will eat him. It is here we leave our shame with Christ like the Samaritan woman. It is here we see our enemy, the serpent, defeated by Christ. It is here we receive God's Word and he blesses us. I don't sleep in the car or the office. I go home to sleep, eat my meals, enjoy family, rest. Make church as regular as home. Come here regularly and find the rest Christ gives.

I read the Star Tribune yesterday. It had a lot of bad news: impeachment; school shooting; murder trial; vandalized businesses; floods; business closing; almost a full page of mortgage foreclosures; we are at an all time high for visits to the food shelf; ads for cemetery lots, funeral services and nursing homes; there were ten death notices including a 22year old; all of this in just one day's newspaper.

What is heaven like? I know it is not like this. None of this will be in heaven. Our dear fellow believers who passed away this year don't have to deal with this anymore. They don't remember any of it. We are happy for them. But guess what? They are waiting for us. Let's not disappoint them. Until we go home, let's stay at home at church. Let the Word bless you with the blessing of a new heavens and a new earth. Amen.