

Isaiah 65:17-25
The Ultimate Dream!

*'Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.
18 But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.
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.
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 a hundred will be thought a mere youth;
the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.
21 They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22 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.
23 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.
24 Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.
25 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.*

Are you a dreamer? No, far too practical a person for that? I want to invite you today to become a dreamer! Do you have a dream? We talk about dream holidays, the places that we really want to visit, or the kind of holiday that we've always wanted to take, but never had the opportunity – a round-the-world cruise, safari in Africa – and then it comes along, and we talk about a "dream come true!" Some people have their dream house, the kind of place in which they have always wanted to live; they have seen it in a magazine, or they've passed it on the bus, but again the opportunity has never come along, until one day... and again, they will tell you about a "dream come true". Are we still able to have dream cars? Or do they all have to be hybrids, or electric cars now? There is still a place in our hearts for the old classic technology, because dream cars do exist! Dreams like that can be powerful; they can inspire us to do certain things, or to be like people we want to imitate. Often, they feel just out of reach; we have the dream, but we never really believe that the dream will ever come true!

We've been telling some of the stories of Israel in exile, the people of God having been taken away from home to live in Babylon, weeping by the rivers of Babylon, unable to sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land. They have been forced to live in an alien landscape; the temple of Jerusalem and the city itself have been destroyed and they have lost the "structured, reliable world" on which they depended; the faith which they treasured is mocked and dismissed. That kind of seemingly hopeless situation does two things to our dreams: either it inspires us to dream of better days, or equally it knocks our dreams out of us because the

situation seems totally hopeless, the “frightening bewilderment” of our situation making it seem impossible even for God’s promises to work. Last week, we saw the start of the comeback; maybe the dream is coming true?

Isaiah 65 is full of the Bible’s ultimate dream. This is as big as it gets in terms of dreams. Isaiah sees everything being made new, “a new heaven and a new earth” encompassing everything that exists, and everything that has gone before will disappear, forgotten. He paints a picture of a new kind of life, using pictures and ideas that the people will understand, but giving them a whole new dimension. God will create this new world; there will only be joy in this new world; there will be no shadows to cloud this new world, but life will be totally right and good. This dream is about far more than a people returning home at the end of exile; this is about God creating everything new, a whole new world. There are echoes of this dream in the dream that John dreams at the end of the book of Revelation, in chapter 21.

This is complete salvation! How do you describe this complete salvation? Well, the prophet takes what people know – a city, Jerusalem – and uses that as a picture to set the imagination running. The fulfilment of salvation will be life that is complete: the dream is of life that is totally provided for with nothing lacking or missing; it is life that is totally happy, with no shadow to cloud that deep joy; it is life that is totally secure, with nothing to disturb it; it is life that is totally at peace with God and with one another. I’m reluctant to go into the detail of the dream because then we get tied down in that detail and “what does this mean?” when all the time Isaiah has a dream that he wants to share, and the big idea is that God is going to save His people completely and finally and everything will be made new and we will be filled with joy!

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered...” (verse 1) This dream is shared with a people who remembered Jerusalem being destroyed or at very best being rebuilt but shakily. For many of the Jews who went into exile, their memory of Jerusalem will not be far away from Ukrainian refugees image of their own city as they left it last month, a ruin; a city destroyed by an invading army. Isaiah invites them to dream: God is going to make everything new. The Old Testament quite often uses two opposites to mean everything: a new heaven and a new earth quite simply means that everything in between will be made new as well. This is total. This is a complete remaking of everything; it is too big to grasp in that sense, which is why the prophet paints a picture of long life, secure economic prosperity, God answering prayers almost before they are asked, and the wolf and the lamb eating together. For a people used to their vineyards being raided, or watching people die young, this is a huge dream; everything being made new, and all the old things forgotten. It is a dream that is still to come true.

The apostle John is the dreamer at the end of the New Testament. He invites us to share this same dream. The thing with Bible dreams is that we need to see the big picture without trying to understand all of the detail! At the start of chapter 21 of the book of Revelation, John says: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...” (Revelation 21, verse 1)* and he goes on to describe the new Jerusalem and God being

with His people. There will be perfect peace and light because the old order of sin and death is gone and God says *"I am making everything new!"* This is a picture of salvation completed and life made perfect by God. This is the end of the work that God started ages ago, a work that took a significant step forward in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and the work that one day God will complete. This is our ultimate dream.

Dreams inspire us! If you have a dream holiday and are determined that one day you will take that holiday, then you work hard to make it happen; you do what it takes to make your dream come true. This ultimate dream is meant to inspire us as well, to see that God has not finished with us yet; that God has not finished with the world yet. One day, there is something new coming and everything will be changed, and we will be changed. We are inspired to believe the dream and to believe God and trust Him to keep His promise. We don't know what all this will look like, but God has made this promise; God has given us a dream for us to believe, hold onto, and be inspired by. Today, I'm inviting you to become a dreamer, to dream this dream and believe that one day your salvation will be complete and everything will be made new, in total and complete joy.

It's not always as straightforward as that, though. Israel in exile at first had no hope; all they saw was their bewildering situation in an alien land and thinking that God had abandoned them. They had to be persuaded that God was with them by the rivers of Babylon. Have we lost our dreams, maybe because of Covid? Have these last two years been so bewildering that we can't see past the fog that is still causes in our minds and hearts? Yet, God invites us to lift our eyes from the things that frighten us and leave us bewildered; He invites us to lift our eyes from our own frailties, sins and mistakes. God invites us to dream. Everything will be made new; we will be made new; everything will only be abounding joy. Hold that dream; keep that dream; trust God who makes the promise. We can't see the dream, but hope is about believing what we can't see. Have this hope in our hearts, trusting God and His promise.

This is the ultimate dream for us: *"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered..."* (verse 1) This is the promise of God for a frightened, bewildered, lost people. Everything will be made new with abounding joy; everything will be perfect peace, and salvation will be complete. Can you share the ultimate dream?