

Two Christians have lived very good, and also very healthy lives. They die, and go to heaven. As they are walking along, marveling at the paradise around them, one turns to the other and says "Wow. I never knew heaven was going to be as good as this!" "Yeah", says the other. "And just think, if we hadn't eaten all that oat bran we could have got here ten years sooner."

Our Old Testament scripture was written by the prophet Isaiah who lived about 700 years before Christ. He witnessed to Israel who had rejected God. God said through Isaiah: "I will destine you for the sword and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me" (Isaiah 65:12). God was fed up with the Israelites and was going to punish them. However a small group of Israelites was still faithful to God. To these believers God spoke words of comfort. Though they were surrounded by the wicked and their land was about to be run over by the Assyrians and then later the Babylonians, God had something wonderful planned for them. God promised, "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;" (Isaiah 65:17).

This is God's unshakeable promise for us. John announces this same hope in the closing words of the New Testament, "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. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. And they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away 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.”

God hasn't given us many details of what this new world will be like, it's best not to speculate. What God does tell us is that in the new world, “The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17b). God won't remember all the dumb comments we've made, all the shameful and foolish things we did in our youth, and all the sinful things we have done against God.

Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” We will live in a new heaven and a new earth through Jesus Christ.

A woman had been diagnosed with cancer and had been given three months to live. Her doctor told her to start making preparations to die. So she contacted her pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what she wanted to be wearing.

The woman also told her pastor that she wanted to be buried with her favorite Bible. Everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her. “There's one more thing,” she said excitedly.

“What's that?” came the pastor's reply. “This is very important.” The woman continued, “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.” The pastor stood looking at the woman not knowing quite what to say. “That shocks you, doesn't

it?” the woman asked. “Well, to be honest, I’m puzzled by the request,” said the pastor. The woman explained. “In all my years of attending church socials and functions where food was involved, and let’s be honest, food is an important part of any church event, spiritual or otherwise, my favorite part was when whoever was clearing away the dishes of the main course would lean over and say ‘you can keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming.”

“When they told me to keep my fork, I knew that something great was about to be given to me. It wasn’t Jell-O or pudding. It was pie - something really good. So I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them, ‘Something better is coming, so keep your fork too.’”

The world views the future with great uncertainty. The believer views the future with God’s great certainty. All around us are many who worry much about what might happen or not happen in the future. As believers, there is comfort in knowing that God controls the future of all things, especially the blessings for his believers.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed in Isaiah 65:18-19, “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.”

With God’s unshakeable promise, the perfect joy comes to us in a new heaven. That is why we ought to celebrate when a believer dies. For that believer has left

behind all sorrow and sadness. That believer enjoys the perfect joy that every believer desires. In the midst of that joy, there is still sorrow at the loss of a loved one. We survive sorrow. We put grief behind us by looking ahead to what is yet to come. God will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain in a new heaven and a new earth. A New Heaven and a new earth are beyond what we can imagine. We know that in heaven all things will be new. There will only be joy upon joy for every believer forever and ever.

However, can we have any joy here on earth? Yes, definitely! God's true joy for us on earth is tainted with sin. We cannot escape that. But God is greater than sin.

God reminds us that not only will heaven be our home but also heaven is even now God's gift to and for every believer. The joy of heaven is ours to enjoy and rejoice in here and now. A psalmist sing, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11). We look forward to the day of seeing God face to face. Until that time we already enjoy eternal pleasures from God's right.

But we may not always feel as if we have God's joy in our hearts and lives. Satan wants us to doubt God's grace. Satan wants us to forget just how much our heavenly Father loves us. Satan wants us to ignore God's promise. Our world offers only empty promises. What can we do?

We must renew our mind to God's promise for a new heaven and a new earth. Put our doubts to rest and open our heart to receive the truth about God's promise for a new heaven.

Second, we must believe we will dwell in the place God prepare for us. If we want to taste the heavenly joy in Jesus Christ, we need to believe we will taste the

perfect joy in our lives. God has things in store for us that we have never even dared to imagine. That's exciting to think about!

Third, we must receive God's promise that a new heaven and a new earth are ours. Once we renew our mind and believe we will taste joy God gives us, God reveals His new heaven and new earth to us and for us daily. We do not have to wait until we are in heaven to enjoy God's promise. Right here, right now God's promise is revealed. Lamentations 3:22-23 says to us, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" God's love never fails. God's mercies are new every morning. God's faithfulness is great. Day after day God's promise is already here but not yet comes fully. Each day our lives can be filled with joy through God's promise. That perfect joy is ours because a new heaven and a new earth are our home. Every day, every week, every month and every year, generation after generation we all experience God's promise. God's promise for us is already here. Rejoice with God's promise of a new heave and a new earth today.