

Her People To Be A Gladness
Isaiah 65:17-25

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, who is terrified of the last day? I believe that there are many who are scared of the coming of the Lord in judgement. In fact, there are many preachers who use the coming of the Lord on the last day to proclaim a message to scare people into living in a more holy manner. They speak about the Lord coming back – in all His glory! On that day, He will know who has been naughty or nice, and He is going to take some to heaven and send some to hell.

I suppose that the last day could be terrifying. Our Epistle lesson does proclaim that the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night, and destruction will happen. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus says that of the ten virgins, only five will go in to the eternal wedding banquet, the others will be left outside the shut door.

And last week we also heard about the sheep and the goats, some inherit heaven, the others are cast into the eternal fire. It is understandable some might find that kind of discussion a bit unnerving!

But dear friends of God in Christ Jesus, is the last day supposed to be terrifying? While we are to be watchful and vigilant for it's return, does that mean we are to be afraid of it?

In many ways I really enjoy doing shut-in visits. Of course, there are also reasons I do not like them. You could say that oftentimes they are bittersweet. There are those folks who have come near to the end of their lives, and they know it. Some have got physical ailments which have left them less than able to do all that they used to do. Others have come to the point where they have outlived all their friends, spouse, and siblings – sometimes even outliving some of their children.

But, many also know exactly where they will be going upon their death, and so they welcome it, indeed some even pray for it. They understand that they will be with Jesus in paradise. They know that their ailments will no longer bother them.

As I get older, I can relate to the aches and pains of life in this aging body. As we look around us, life in this world is also scary, the moral degeneration of our society seems to be in rapid descent.

Too many people however are so enamored with life in this flesh that they are doing whatever they can to try and make it last forever. Millions of dollars are spent on medical research to find something that will enable the human body to live forever. Many of these believe that there is no eternal life, or, they are afraid because they have listened to those who proclaim that you have to earn your place in eternal life. Knowing they are not perfect, they are afraid of the last day, thinking they will be passed into eternal punishment.

Dear friends, our text from Isaiah also speaks to us about that last day, for on that day there will be a new heavens and a new earth. That doesn't sound so bad! Jerusalem will be a joy and her

people a gladness.

Jerusalem is anything but a joy today, it is about central to a warzone. It is one of the most hotly contested places on the planet. It is called the holy place of Jew, Muslim, and Christian.

But it is only true Christians who understand that this text from Isaiah is not talking about that city in the middle east called Jerusalem, but about God's kingdom of grace, His church. Jerusalem is more than a place, it is also a people, the people of God. It is only Christians who understand themselves to be a gladness to God. It is only Christians, for those who are in Christ are those who understand that on the last day they are not destined for wrath, but will join the King in the eternal wedding banquet of the Lamb.

If you and I look at our works, we would always wonder if we had done enough. If you and I think of faith as our work, then we would always wonder if we had enough. In either case, notice who we are trusting. Whether we believe our works will earn heaven, or if we believe faith is our work, we are trusting in ourselves – and in trusting in ourselves, there is always doubt.

Dear friends we must all repent. We must repent of our love of this life over our trust in God. We must repent of clinging to our works, even repenting of those times of trusting that our faith is our own work. And all these times we just our own work. We must repent, for trusting ourselves turns us from Christ.

Faith does not point to faith, but to the object which faith trusts. Faith points to Christ and only to Christ. If asked do you have faith? The reply is, "Yes, in Christ!" Why do we have the confidence of forgiveness of all our sins? Why do we have confidence of eternal life and salvation? Because of Christ! Our confidence is not in our faith, but faith always points to Christ.

Jerusalem's citizens are a gladness to God because they are sons of God, robed in Christ's righteousness. Baptized into Christ's death and His resurrection, Christians know what is theirs now and for eternity.

You are those who are a gladness to God as His Jerusalem, for you trust Christ. You are here to receive Christ – to bask in Him – to rejoice in His Word of forgiveness – to eat of His flesh pierced for you – to drink of His blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Christ comes to you today and again claims you as His own, caring for you, feeding and nourishing you. Today you will proclaim, even if unaware, that you are ready to depart in peace for you have held your salvation in your ears, and in your mouth.

The word you hear, the body and blood of Jesus you eat and drink, are not tenuous things that can waver, there is no doubt in them, for they are not based upon anything that you do or think. These are the gifts of God, promised to you by Christ, purchased for you with His blood shed upon the cross, sealed when He rose from the grave. And so, as you receive them you are a gladness to God for eternity.

So God creates a clean heart in you, He renews a right spirit within you, you are not cast from His presence, but His Spirit restores the joy of salvation in you – and you are upheld in His Spirit, freely given to life everlasting. All we do now is wait in joy, with eager longing and expectation, for the day He will return and takes us to enjoy His heaven for all eternity. On that day, we will be raised from this life, from this valley of the shadow of death to life everlasting.

Until that day, let us wait with rejoicing for we are God's gladness, for we are in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.