

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual
Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church
November 20, 2022

Day 1: Isaiah 65:17

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Isaiah is announcing that there will be an end to the present evil age. The evil is exemplified by the pagans controlling Jerusalem and the people of God in exile. God is saying that the former reason for them going into exile (their going after pagan gods) is now ended. The new heavens and earth refer to a land where Israel can fulfill its mission to be a light to the world. The new age will come from God and not from military action. God would like to bring about a “new age” in us if we will give up our foreign gods and worship the Prince of Peace.

Question: What *former things* do you think are referred to?

Challenge: If God in Christ brought a new Kingdom to earth what are the signs that this Kingdom is really here?

Scripture: II Peter 3:8-18

Day 2: 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. 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.

Jerusalem was in ruins and the Temple (the main place of community life and worship) was torn down. Before the Babylonians conquered the city, the Temple was a very impressive structure. It could be seen from a distance and stood out on the Temple Mount. The Temple and the Temple Mount was the place where God and humanity met and as such was not only a place of worship but one of peace. The New Jerusalem that God is creating will be a city of peace. Peace meant that there was enough for all to eat, a place to sleep and it was safe. From that city God’s light and peace would shine to the whole world. As long as the people put their trust in God they would prosper and find meaning in life.

Question: Is Jerusalem today a joyous place? Why or why not?

Challenge: If we do not take “Jerusalem” as the current city, where is it?

Scripture: Job 38:2-12

Day 3: Isaiah 65:20

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

Long life was a sign of God’s approval of the actions you took in life. Long life was not a reward for keeping God happy, but by being obedient to God’s commands we live in such a way as to prolong our life. Having a child die very young was as much a tragedy then as it is now. Children were seen as the continuation of the person after death. For no child to die and to live past 100 meant that the environment was such that it allowed for those two things to take place. It is important to note that it was not the person that was given superhuman strength but that the environment allowed these things to take place.

Question: What is the life expectancy of a person today and what is the cause of early death?

Challenge: What actions can you take to make your life longer?

Scripture: Genesis 20:18-21:8

Day 4: Isaiah 65:21-22

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

This image, like the others, speaks of the future. The promise is not for just a moment of feeling but for a lifetime of the family (and for many lifetimes). In the new age they will not be slaves (build and another inhabit), they will see the grapes grow and be able to harvest them; they will build a home and live in it themselves for generations. The people are not chosen because they were the best or the brightest. They were chosen because God loved them even though they were stubborn and sinners. God chooses us before we can ever ask for God and God keeps us in a state where we can listen to the Gospel and accept Jesus as Lord. The new life God promised the people in Isaiah’s time is the same offer we have today. Become obedient to God and live in peace with one another and we will have new life.

Question: What tree do you think lives the longest?

Challenge: Rewrite this verse in urban terms, not rural.

Scripture: Amos 9:9-15

Day 5: Isaiah 65:23

They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well.

Hope is what keeps a person going in life. If hope is gone then so is the future and with the future gone a person finds themselves wanting life to end. In hopeless situations a person can only keep staying alive by hope. At Auschwitz a young teacher kept thinking he was at a lecture hall speaking to students during the worst times. He used this image to give himself hope so that he could stay alive. A young marine in Viet Nam kept his hope alive during the worst times by thinking about what he would do when he got home. A woman who had cancer kept her hope alive through the presence of persons who loved her, staying with her, sharing her pain. Living our life as God commands means that our actions in God’s name will always bring positive results and the ripples from those actions will positively affect the future.

Question: What do you think “bear children for calamity” means?

Challenge: What actions can you do before the end of the year that will bring some hope to people’s lives?

Scripture: Isaiah 65:24-66:2, 66:10-16

Day 6: Isaiah 65:24

Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear

John Wesley understood God’s grace to be God’s love that was with us before we asked for it. It kept us in a state of mind so that we could respond to the Good News. In Baptism we know that baptizing a baby demonstrates that God’s love is available to the baby before the baby can ask for it. We have a God who comes to us before we ask. Every year at Christmas we are reminded that God first came to us. The light came into the world but some did not understand that it was the light of God and did not receive the gift.

Question: What does it mean “while they are still speaking I will hear”?

Challenge: Look back on your life to see when God spoke to you but you did not hear.

Scripture: Psalm 48