

All through this section, Isaiah has been promising "a new thing" - because "the old" will pass away. "The old" includes stuff like pain and suffering.

Now comes the climax to these promises -

*Behold I will create
a new heaven and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered
nor will they come to mind.*

And he lists a lot of Israel's troubles -
e.g. children who die young
building houses that someone else will live in.

Never again will God's people suffer this.

And the section ends
with an idyllic picture of peace.

*The wolf and the lamb will feed together
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

and a wonderful quote in the last verse

*"They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the Lord.*

Isaiah, sees far into the future
he sees God's promise, he sees God's perfection,
he sees what cannot be seen
because it will not be in this age.

New Heavens and a New Earth
Something better for us

All Saints Sunday
(4 before Advent)

Isaiah 65. 17 - 25
Hebrews 11. 32 → 12. 2

It may be that God's people understood this to be a prophecy of things to come at the end of this age when God would come and defeat Israel's enemies and give them authority and power to rule over all their enemies.

You can see that this is what they might want. But it is a perversion of God's loving plan. It is God's loving plan for Israel but no love to be shown to the nations.

Israel has suffered at the hands of the nations who they therefore see as their enemies.

Justice, in their sight, is to let Israel do them to them as they had done to Israel. Even though it was wrong.

They believe there is justice in revenge Whereas true justice, the heart of God, is grace, reconciliation, forget the hurts.

*The former things will not be remembered
nor will they come to mind.*

In Isaiah's picture, the lamb doesn't get to eat the wolf! They eat together, on green pasture.

Another example of kingdom values so different from worldly values - spelt out clearly even in 7thC BC Isaiah and yet never understood.

We see it today.

Western forces march in to liberate the oppressed and all that happens is that roles are reversed.

The Kurds are just as inhuman to the Iraqis, and even worse to each other!

Remove western imperialism from Africa, and the tribes begin to annihilate each other in continuance of historic feuds centuries old.

It's human nature, our fallen nature.

And that is what will be changed in that new age.

And that is why it will never be true in this age.

So we are called to trust in these promises - by faith - we will never see them before the grave.

It's not just "pie in the sky when you die".

We can smell it cooking.

Through God's Holy Spirit,

we get a foretaste of things to come.

Eternal life -

that quality of life lived in fellowship with God - begins now.

But that is not what this passage is about.

And this gets picked up in the Hebrews passage.

Hebrews 11 is all about people of faith.

The first half is all about Abraham

but our bit is about more obscure names.

Not totally obscure.

I remember preaching once on Hebrews 11

in my last parish

and I read out the bit about Gideon, Barak,

Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets

There was a couple in church we hadn't seen before

and didn't see again

but the elderly man's name

turned out to be Jephthah

and he'd never heard this passage -

didn't know where his name came from.

I haven't yet met a Barak!

These really are commendable people

they suffered for the sake of their faith

some refusing to be freed

lest they lose their heavenly reward.

But the point of this list is (verse 39)

that none of them received what was promised.

It is earlier also in verse 13

*All these people were still living by faith
when they died.*

*They did not receive the things promised
they only saw them and welcomed them
from a distance.*

And it goes back to verse 1 -

the biblical definition of faith -

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope
for
and certain of what we do not see.*

Abraham saw by faith, not with his eyes.
Isaiah in Isaiah 65, saw by faith, not with his eyes.
God's promises are to be trusted
not because we see - but because we have faith.

But here is the important bit
and it fits in with the writer to the Hebrews theme
that Jesus has made a difference.
AD is better than BC.

Hebrews 11.40

God had planned something better for us

Hebrews 12. 2

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter of our faith.*

Jesus granted the faith
to all that "cloud of witnesses"
Now he has perfected that faith in us
by going through his suffering and death
and finally being raised from death
and seated in the heavenlies.

Jesus has conquered sin and death
has begun to bring in the reversal
of the effects of the fall
and inaugurated his kingdom.
His kingdom not yet come - we pray for it daily.
But it has begun.

The point of the Hebrews passage is a particular reversal of the fall the power to resist temptation and sin.

But it is more generally true.

Where we submit to God's authority in our lives we see answers to every kind of prayer strength and victory over temptation healing and forgiveness the presence of God in our worship and in our lives a relationship with Jesus which is alive and real.

BC they didn't have that, only a promise.

We do - and we mustn't throw it away.

Today is "All Saints' Sunday" and it is reflected in our readings.

"All Saints" is not about the dead whatever the Hallowe'en traditions say - it is about those who are "saints" because they belong to Jesus saved and sanctified by his blood. That includes the living and the dead.

It is also the first Sunday in the season before Advent when we think about Christ and his Kingdom.

So we do have this "cloud of witnesses"
who put us to shame by their faith.

And we have Jesus,
who has conquered sin and death
and sent his Holy Spirit
to give us not just a sight, but a taste of heaven.

So let us do as the writer to the Hebrews tells us

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus ...
so that you will not grow weary
and lose heart.*

We serve him now
and he will not forget us in eternity.

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