



## Sermon Transcript

### November 11, 2018

## Hospitable God, Hospitable People

### “Let’s Go!”

Isaiah 65:11-66:2

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 11, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text**  
**Isaiah 65:11-66:2**

**65:11** But you who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, <sup>12</sup> I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in.” <sup>13</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; <sup>14</sup> behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit. <sup>15</sup> You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord God will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name, <sup>16</sup> so that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.

<sup>17</sup> “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.

**66:1** Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? <sup>2</sup> All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

## Introduction

On numerous occasions, I have mentioned the name Eugene Peterson from the pulpit. He was a pastor. He was an educator. He was a theologian. He was an author. Some of you may be acquainted with his translation of the Bible called *The Message*. It is a translation of the Bible written in contemporary language.

For example, the key verses in our passage this morning are Isaiah 65:17-18. “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.*” Here is how Eugene Peterson translates that verse in *The Message*. “*Pay close attention now: I’m creating new heavens and a new earth. All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten. Look ahead with joy.*” It may not be the best translation to use for critical study, but it brings fresh eyes to the text. I find it helpful.

This contemporary giant of the faith, died a few weeks ago—October 22, to be exact. Peterson was 85 years of age. Upon his passing, his family issued a press release and I was moved by their description of Peterson’s death bed experience. When I read it, I was reminded of Psalm 116:15, “*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*” Or as Peterson translated it, “*When they arrive at the gates of death, God welcomes those who love him.*” You really get the sense that as his family was watching Peterson pass from earth to heaven, they had front row seats as they witnessed his welcome into heaven.

Here is what they wrote in the press release announcing his death. “During the previous days, it was apparent that he was navigating the thin and sacred space between earth and heaven. We overheard him speaking to people we can only presume were welcoming him into paradise. There may have even been a time or two when he accessed his Pentecostal roots and spoke in tongues as well.” Then they said next. “Among his final words were, ‘Let’s go.’ And his joy: my, oh my; the man remained joyful right up to his blessed end, smiling frequently. In such moments it’s best for all mortal flesh to keep silence. But if you have to say something say this: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy.’”<sup>1</sup>

What a tremendous gift this must have been to his family witnessing his passing. Some of the last words they heard him speak in this life was the phrase, “Let’s go!” You can hear the confidence he had in this statement. They are words of hope. Joy was written all over his face when he made this comment. I couldn’t help but think of our passage this morning when I read this account of Peterson’s passing. “*Pay close attention now:*

*I'm creating new heavens and a new earth. All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten. Look ahead with joy.*" When you read these words, doesn't it make you also want to say, "Let's go!"

This morning I want to marinate in the statement we read in Isaiah 65:17. *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth."* As we marinate on these words, I want us to grow in our confidence that indeed these words are true. Consequently, we should be a hopeful people and a joyful people. But as we marinate in this promise of *new heavens and a new earth*, I want you to see that these are not just words to help us as we or our loved ones are "navigating the thin space between heaven and earth." When we read about this new creation—the new heavens and the new earth—where *"all the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten"* - who wouldn't want to say, "Let's go!" I'm ready!

But I actually think these words help us to look at this broken world and they also give us the confidence to navigate our steps in the "troubles" and the "chaos" and the "pain" of this world. I am reminded of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."* In some sense, what is yet to come is already being formed in us. Oswalt says it this way. "Although we certainly do not yet enjoy that promise to the full, we may experience it in embryo."<sup>2</sup> We talked last week about the "not yet." The kingdom has come in Christ but not in full. But the "not yet" doesn't mean "not at all." And so as we step into this world, we bring a taste of the kingdom that is to come—we bring a slice of heaven to people who are hurting. So when we say, "Let's go!" I get how this passage draws our attention to that day when God will make all things new and we are drawn to that day. But as we wait for that day, I would encourage you to say the same thing about this broken world. Look at it and say, "Let's go!" May we bring a taste of the new heavens and the new earth wherever our feet take us as "new creations" in Christ.

So let us marinate in these wonderful words. *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth."*

## **I create . . .**

*"I create . . ."* I wonder if for some of you this idea of God creating *"new heavens and a new earth"* seems like wishful thinking. But it is not wishful thinking if you begin with the premise that God is the God who creates. This is how the unfolding drama of the Bible begins. *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* And everywhere

you turn at the beginning of God's creation we are told *"that it was good."* God is the starting point of all things.

In Isaiah 40, the prophet appeals to the greatness of God based on the fact that God is the Creator. He says in Isaiah 40:12, *"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?"* And then he says in verse 28, *"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable."*

When you look at the wonder of what God has made, it ought to cause you to marvel at the one who made it. If we have an understanding that there is a Creator, it puts us in our place as creatures. It reminds us that we are frail and that we are dependent upon the one who made us. It is amazing to me how quickly we forget how small and dependent we are. Even those among us who we consider to be powerful, are nothing compared to the one who made it all. Speaking of the powerful princes and the rulers of our day, Isaiah says that they are nothing compared to God. He says of them in Isaiah 40:24, *"Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble."* Man is like the dandelion that has gone to seed. You blow it and the wind takes it away. So Isaiah says, *"Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?"*

This gets to the reason why this present world in which we live is such a mess. Romans 1 tells us that we forget that God is the Creator. Paul says that we fail to honor God as God and we fail to give thanks to God for the very breath we breathe. And so he says of man, *"Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man."* And so God gave us over to what we wanted—life apart from God. Instead of living for God, we live for ourselves and we make a mess of things. This is why this world is troubled, chaotic and painful.

We live in a world that is filled with frustration and futility. We live in a world that is no stranger to crisis. Jesus says, *"In this world you will have trouble."* Crisis is guaranteed. A crisis is anything that disrupts the normalcy of life. They are not just the things that happen "out there" but they also happen behind the closed doors of our homes: divorce, abuse, debt, illness, strife, addiction, depression . . . and death. We haven't seen our last hurricane. We haven't witnessed our last tragedy or last mass shooting or received our last bit of bad news. In this fallen world, there are daily signs of frustration and futility.

But God so loved the world he made. Through Jesus, the Father said, “Let’s go!” He stepped into this world that he made. He suffered like we do. He died for our sins. He rose from the dead. And so Jesus looks at us and says, “*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*” Our Creator is our Savior.

### **I create new . . .**

So we read in Isaiah 65:17, “*I create new . . .*” It is a great promise for a world that knows its fair share of frustration and futility. “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.*” I am not sure how to fully take that statement. Will we have no recollection of “*the former things.*” Some take it literally and others see it as hyperbole. What will we remember about this life in the life to come? I don’t know. At the very least, it conveys that the transformation of this new heaven and new earth will be so dramatic that the troubles of this world will pale in comparison and simply fade from our memories. It is like going on vacation and forgetting about your problems. Have you ever seen the movie *What About Bob?* He was on a vacation from his problems. But this is more than a vacation. This is a new heaven and a new earth where the former sufferings will be remembered no more. Paul says it this way in Romans 8:18, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.*”

As we read what Isaiah has to say about this “new heavens and new earth” I think it is important to recognize that he is describing something to us that “*no eye has seen and no ear has heard and no heart has imagined.*” And so he uses figures of speech—hyperbole—to put into words what the new creation will be like. Christopher Ducker says of this passage, “Isaiah speaks of a future he can scarcely comprehend and so it is inevitable that he draws on reference points that are familiar both to him and his readers. But we should not doubt that these points of reference stand for the center of what will be a cosmic paradise, one vast sanctuary.”<sup>3</sup> Often the prophets who have seen heavenly visions use the word “like” to describe what they saw because it is hard to comprehend. In other words, the point is not in the details, but in the image these details create for us. So what do we know about this recreated world that awaits us? Basically, what we will discover is that the things that bring about futility and frustration in this present world will be gone.

So first of all we discover that there will be no more sorrow. He says in verse 19, “*no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.*” Why will there be no more “*weeping and the cry of distress?*” Because sin and death will be completely

removed. Weeping and distress is often the result of sin and death. But that will be no more. I think these words need to be taken as a figure of speech. We read in verse 20, *“No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.”* If this is the new heavens and the new earth as we see in Revelation 21, we know that there will be no death. We know that there will be no sin. So what is a sinner and death doing in the new heavens and the new earth? What is Isaiah saying here? I think Isaiah may be using this verse simply to say that the things that bring us sorrow in this earth, like the untimely death of a child—or even death itself; including one who is old—will not be present in the new earth. And let's say—if perchance a sinner made it undetected for a hundred years, he would immediately be accursed and removed upon discovery. Motyer says that the point is simply this: “death will have no more power and sin no more presence.”<sup>4</sup> “Let's go!”

Another thing we experience in this life is the sorrow of not having the time to enjoy the fruit of our labor. We work hard, and maybe get to enjoy a few years of retirement, but by that point we can't do what we used to be able to do and our enjoyment is limited. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon spoke about the vanity of life. In Ecclesiastes 2 he talks about the vanity of working all your life to accumulate your “stuff” only to have someone else enjoy the benefits of your labor. He said, *“So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.”* In Deuteronomy 28:30, the curse is pronounced this way. *“You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit.”*

But that sorrow will not be experienced in the new earth. It says, in verses 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.”* In this new earth, there will be nothing that brings a sense of frustration or futility. You will enjoy the work of your hands.

Isaiah goes on to say that your days shall be like a tree. How often is our current existence on this earth compared to the grass that quickly fades? But in the new earth, our life is compared to the trees that last from generation to generation. Drucker writes, “One enduring image here is that of the tree, which stands for longevity, stability, the setting down of roots, closeness to the land, and productivity through God's blessing. It

is interesting to note that man's fulfillment will not be found in leisure, nor in the exploitation of others, but in honest labour."<sup>5</sup> He goes on in verse 23 to add, "*They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.*" In other words, our life endures.

Then in verse 24-25 we find that there is perfect harmony between God and man. It says, "*Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.*" We long for that kind of intimacy with God. Right now, our spiritual life can be prone to dry spells and our prayer time can fall plague to wandering thoughts. At times God seems distant; but not in the new heavens and the new earth. There will also be harmony in all of creation. The wolf and the lamb will graze together. The wolf will no longer be a predatory animal. In other words, nature will no longer be our enemy. In Romans 8:22 we learn that all of creation is groaning, longing for that day of redemption when the new heavens and the new earth comes; that harmony will be real. All will be new.

When you read this passage and consider what awaits us in the "*new heavens and new earth*" you can't help but resonate with Eugene Peterson's final words. "Let's go!"

### **I create new heavens and a new earth . . .**

"*I create new heavens and a new earth . . .*" As we continue to marinate in this phrase, there is something that could easily get lost in this discussion. It is possible to think of heaven and earth as separate entities and not see the intention God has to bring heaven and earth together. The goal of the story of the Bible is to connect heaven to earth—it is the union between heaven and earth. We see this reflected in Isaiah 66:1 where God says, "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.*" It is all connected. We see this in Revelation 21:10 where "*the holy city of Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven from God.*" As it says in Revelation 21:3, "*For the dwelling place of God is with man, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*" Is this not the focus of our daily prayer, "*on earth as it is in heaven.*"

Perhaps a good way to think about heaven and earth is to think of it this way. Heaven is God's space and earth is our space. In the beginning of the Bible when God created heaven and earth, though these spaces are different dimensions, they overlap with each other and were fully united and God was fully present with man and man partnered with God to build a beautiful and flourishing world. But when sin came into the world, heaven and earth were driven apart and man was removed from God's presence. So the story of the Bible is how God is in the process of reuniting the heavens and the earth.

One of the early ways we see God bring together these two spaces—heaven and earth—is in the temple where Israel came and met with God. It was a space where heaven and earth came together. The decorations of the tabernacle and the temple were intentional. There were symbols of earth—trees and flowers—mingled with symbols of heaven—angels and gold and jewels. It was to demonstrate that this is a place—like the Garden of Eden—where heaven and earth come together.

But the difference between earth and heaven is not just the materials, namely “trees and flowers” and “angels and jewels.” But our space is also filled with sin and death and rejection of God as our Creator. God’s space is filled with holiness, the kingdom of God, the worship of God and righteousness. So how can these two opposing spaces even come together? Well in the temple sacrifices for sin were made so that the sin that marks our space could be absorbed and that heaven could once again overlap with earth.

But here is the limitation of the temple. It was limited in scope. It was a building that rested in a city. It is the aim of God is for all of heaven and earth to be joined together. He can’t be contained in a building and nor can be confined to a city. You get a hint of this in Isaiah 66:1 when Isaiah says, *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’”* In other words, all of God’s creation was to be his temple and his sanctuary. He can’t be confined to a building or a city. He aims to unite all of heaven and earth into one—*new heavens and a new earth*.

Along comes Jesus. How does John introduce Jesus to us? He says in John 1:14, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* That word *dwelt* means “tabernacled.” Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*, *“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.”* Heaven moved to earth in Jesus. Jesus is the place where heaven and earth overlap. Jesus doesn’t insulate himself from people and from suffering and from sinners. Rather, Jesus enters into the suffering and the pain of this world. He embraces people. He heals people. He forgives people. He hangs with sinners. In other words, he is brining a slice of heaven on earth by embracing people. His announcement was that *“the kingdom of heaven was at hand.”* He even told his disciples to pray for the coming of this kingdom and for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When Jesus goes to the cross, he is doing what the temple sacrifices pointed to. He was making it possible for heaven and earth to come together. John the Baptist said while pointing to Jesus, *“Behold, this is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* So the cross is the place where Jesus absorbs our sin and he creates a clean space where

heaven and earth can meet. Right now, planted in communities all over the world, the church becomes a slice of heaven on earth. We are the presence of Christ on earth.

But there is coming a day when God will *create new heavens and a new earth*. In other words, heaven and earth will come together in the form of a city. And it is a picture of a day when God will put an end to sin and death. There will be a renewed creation. God's space and human space will completely overlap again. As we already saw, all the frustration and futility of this world will be no more. Is it any wonder that joy and gladness fills the verses of this text. "*But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.*"

### **For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth . . .**

The word *behold* is designed to get your attention. Peterson translates it this way, "*Pay attention.*" It is an appropriate thing for Isaiah to say because we need to respond to what we have just heard. Here is the interesting thing about the last two chapters of Isaiah. It goes back and forth, like a tennis match, between hope and judgment. He does the same thing in the first five chapters of Isaiah, he goes back and forth between judgment and hope. Here is the difference between the beginning and the end of Isaiah. In Isaiah 1-5 he begins and ends with judgment and has hope sprinkled in the middle. But in these last two chapters, he does the opposite. He begins and ends with hope and speaks of judgment in the middle. This tells us that judgment is still a real threat. But for those who turn to Jesus, hope abounds because Jesus has the final word. What is this hope? It is the hope of a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no futility and no frustration.

Isaiah distinguishes between two groups of people. In Isaiah 65:11 he speaks of those "*who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain.*" These, he warns, are destined to the sword. But in Isaiah 66:2 he speaks of another group of people. Here he says, "*But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.*" So "*pay attention.*" There is a way to God there is a hope that is eternal. It is found in Jesus.

This is why Eugene Peterson could die the way he died. He repented of his sin. He relied on what Jesus did to forgive him of his sin. He submitted to Jesus as the good ruler of his life. On his death bed he was certain, hopeful and joyful. This can be your

certainty, your hope and your joy.

## Conclusion

Let's go! Let's go into this week and into our neighborhood and into our workplace, knowing that because of Jesus, with us comes a slice of heaven on earth. Let them see a glimpse of heaven by the way you talk and the way you express compassion and the way you are marked with joy. Pray for people. I can't think of a better way to bring forward a slice of the kingdom to come than to pray over people. Pray for their healing. See what chooses to do. Know that we are God's means of uniting heaven to earth until that day comes. *"Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

Let's go! Someday, the full force of this promise will come true. The Creator will make all things new. Heaven and earth will completely overlap again and this broken world will be renewed. Let us live in the confidence of this hope and let us be filled with the joy that comes in knowing the certainty of this truth. *"Pay close attention now: I'm creating new heavens and a new earth. All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten. Look ahead with joy."*

---

<sup>1</sup>Kate Shellnut "Eugene Peterson Has Completed his Long Obedience [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com) October 22, 2018

<sup>2</sup>John Oswalt *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 660

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Drucker "An Exegesis of Isaiah 65:17-25" May 2007 pg. 3

<sup>4</sup>J. Alec Motyer *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993) 530

<sup>5</sup>Drucker, 4

**Sermon Title:** Let's Go!

**Sermon Text:** Isaiah 65:11-66:2

**Sermon Date:** November 11, 2018

## COMMUNITY GROUPS



### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What is one favorite activity from childhood you wish you could do now?
2. What is one thing you are looking forward to this week? Is there anything you are dreading about this coming week? What is it?
3. What did you take from the sermon on Sunday?



### Diving Into The Word

4. Read Isaiah 40:21-31. What life lessons do you learn from this reminder that God is the Creator?
5. Read Romans 1:21-23. How are you guilty of what you read in these verses? How does this impact your everyday life?
6. Read Isaiah 65:17-25. What do you learn about the new heavens and the new earth in this passage? What about the new heavens and the new earth stands out to you?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-22. What does it mean to be a new creation? What are some ways we can bring a slice of heaven to the places we go? How does this change the way you look at life? How does it change the way you look at the church?
8. Read Isaiah 66:1-2. What do you think it looks like to be humble and contrite?



### Taking It Home

9. What is one thing you are taking with you from your discussion?
10. Discuss whether or not there is some way as a group you can work together at bringing "a slice of heaven" to someone in need.