

West Valley Church  
12/18/11

## **Christmas Restoration** **Isaiah 65:17-25**

Today we are going to see how the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that with Christmas, God would bring restoration. You might think that Christmas is a New Testament thing, but from beginning to end, the entire Old Testament promises a Messiah who will make right all that is wrong, who will bring peace to the planet, and who will restore all that has been broken by sin and rebellion. This is the God the Old Testament tells us about—a God who takes things that are broken and puts them back together again. Isaiah 65 shows us three areas of our lives where God promises to bring restoration. He's not just talking about "someday in heaven," either. He's referring to the baby Jesus—Messiah on earth, and his work of restoring our lives even today. Here's what he says: "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. Be glad; rejoice forever in My creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in My people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more. No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young! In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards. Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses and confiscate their vineyards. For My people will live as long as trees, and My chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains. They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune. For they are people blessed by the LORD, and their children, too, will be blessed. I will answer them before they even call to Me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers! The wolf and the lamb will feed together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. But the snakes will eat dust. In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on My holy mountain. I, the LORD, have spoken!" (Isaiah 65:17-25, nlt)

If you haven't yet, please take your notes out of your worship folder, or go to our website with your iPads or smart phones and download the notes from our sermons page. I want you to keep track with me of three areas of our lives that God promises to bring about restoration. First,

## 1. God wants to restore your *broken past*.

The greatest obstacle to happiness that many people face is not the present or the future; it's the past. Millions of people live miserable lives because they are haunted by something that happened many years ago. Maybe it was something they did. Maybe it was something they didn't do. Maybe it was something that happened to them. Whatever it may be, the past has the power to keep us stuck and from moving forward from some horrible things done to us or some event that happened, and has the power to destroy our lives. Hurtful words that were spoken decades ago bring new pain every time we remember them. Many marriages fail simply because people can't get past the past.

But thanks be to God, who sent Jesus—and through him can break the power of the past and bring restoration to our lives. Verse sixteen in that passage we read says, "I will put aside My anger and forget the evil of earlier days. Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore." (Isaiah 65:16-17, nlt)

When I decided to become a Christian and began reading the Bible, I was surprised the first time I read the letters of Peter. They obviously were written by a man who was confident in his role as a leader. I remember thinking, "This is the same guy who denied Christ three times, and the people he's writing to must know about that. Isn't he embarrassed? Isn't he ashamed of his mistakes? How can he write with that kind of authority, knowing what he did?" The reason Peter was able to make such a comeback is because God restored Peter's broken past. Peter made mistakes—huge, colossal mistakes—and God restored him. And Peter isn't the only one, either. Paul had a past, and God restored him; David had a past, and God restored him; Moses had a past, and God restored him; Rahab had a past, and God restored her; Mary Magdalene had a past, and God restored her—I could go on and on, because the Bible (and Christian history!) is full of stories of those whose broken pasts have been restored by the power of God—my story is included in that, and so can yours be; that's what God does!

People have said to me, "I made a terrible mistake and now I will have to live with the memory of this for the rest of my life." True, we may have to live with the consequences, but we don't have to live with the guilt and shame and bitterness and pain. That's why Jesus came to this earth. Isaiah says, "...the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more." (Isaiah 65:19, nlt) God will restore your broken past.

Secondly,

## 2. God will restore your *broken dreams*.

During this month of December the church has helped 3 families that had lost someone they loved, and others who may be facing loss of some kind. We've also been diligently praying for one family—Matt and Alissa Peppley. Just over a week ago, their baby girl, Anna Joy, was born with three serious heart birth defects. She wasn't expected to survive birth, but miraculously she did, and she survived open heart surgery, and is continuing to gain strength while she is hooked up to so many different machines that are assisting her recovery. Baby Anna Joy is Harold and Dorothy Gooderl's great granddaughter.

Imagine facing the news that you might lose your newborn baby. We went through that over a three year period with our youngest, Brenden, between the ages 1 and 4—we literally didn't know if he'd live or not. But that's a story for another time.

I can't help but wonder if a greater grief than losing what you had is losing what you will never have. That's what broken dreams are. And that's something God understands, since Jesus came to this broken world. He has felt each and every loss we feel. And he doesn't just feel helplessly hurt, nor does he leave us feeling that way. He gives us hope:

"No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young!" (Isaiah 65:20, niv)

Death causes us to experience the pain of broken dreams, but God can restore our hope. He promises that death is not the end, it is the beginning. Because Jesus came to earth, lived, and then died, but then rose from the dead, death is no longer the end. It's the beginning. With Jesus, broken dreams are only the beginning; Christmas is the beginning of the end of death and broken dreams!

By the way, broken dreams are caused not only by an untimely death, but also by an unfulfilled life—and God offers us hope here, too: "No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat...." (Isaiah 65:22, nlt)

Do you ever feel like that? All your work just goes to someone else? All your dreams end up empty. Maybe your dreams have been broken by death, or maybe they've been broken by life, but God can bring about restoration. That's what He does—He takes things that are broken and puts them back together again.

Notice, thirdly,

### **3. God restores your broken relationships.**

This includes in our families. Many children today are born into situations where, from a sociological standpoint, they don't have a chance. Because of economics, or drugs, or abuse, or lack of education, some children seem destined to mirror the miserable lives their parents have suffered. Families—more than ever before—seem to be falling apart, if they even started together. Even among those who manage to stay together, there is often such relational rifts that they might as well be strangers. But it doesn't have to be that way. God has the power to restore family relationships when they turn to him.

When she turned 21, Tammy Harris from Roanoke, Virginia, began searching for her biological mother. After a year, she had not succeeded. What she didn't know was that her mother, Joyce Schultz, had been trying to locate her for twenty years.

According to the Associated Press story, there was one more thing Tammy didn't know: her mother was one of her coworkers at the convenience store where she worked! One day Joyce overheard Tammy talking with another coworker about trying to find her mother. Soon they were comparing birth certificates. After several probing conversations and an exchange of birth certificates and baby photos, it became clear that mother and daughter had been working alongside each other for six months. When Tammy realized that the coworker she had known was, in fact, her mother, she fell into her arms. "We held for the longest time," Tammy said, "It was the best day of my life." They now plan to search for her two brothers. Isaiah said, "They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them." (Isaiah 65:23, niv)

God loves to restore broken relationships. In even deeper ways, God wants to restore our spiritual relationships. Isaiah says, "...for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." (Isaiah 65:23-24, niv)

This promises that the gap that exists between God and man will be bridged—and our broken relationship with him will be restored. Since the days of Adam we have been separated from God, not only by Adam's sin, but by our own as well. God promised in Genesis 3:15 that this broken relationship would someday be restored; and that's exactly what was accomplished through Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:12-13, niv)

God promises our relationship with Him can be one of peace, fellowship, and blessing. Unfortunately, these are not the words that many people use to describe their relationship with God. Many people view a relationship with God as a source of guilt and judgment and unrealistic expectations and rules and institutions.

Everyone has experienced a broken relationship with God (Romans 3:23), but God offers us restoration through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. And He offers us peace. Again, Paul said, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1, niv) Most of all, God restores our broken relationship with him.

Dr. James Dobson relates a story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died just a few months prior through a slow developing cancer. Now, several days before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone—so much so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas.

Late that afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden Labrador Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, Ma'am. He's six weeks old, completely housebroken." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity.

"Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked.

The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope and said, "It's all explained here in this envelope, Ma'am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift to you." The young man then handed her a book, *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*.

In desperation she again asked, "Who sent me this puppy?"

As the young man turned to leave, he said, "Your husband, Ma'am. Merry Christmas." She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then. She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the

neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of "Joy to the World, the Lord has Come." Suddenly Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and a wonder greater than the grief and loneliness. "Little fella," she said to the dog, "It's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'd like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you. And there's a manger scene down there. Let's go get it."

Back when Jesus came to earth at Christmas, he sent a gift in time to us—to restore us in our brokenness today.

This is a broken world we live in, and we are victims of this brokenness. As a result, many of us live in need of restoration; we live with a broken past, we experience broken dreams, and we endure broken relationships. It may be that way for you now, but it doesn't have to remain that way. God has made an offer of restoration. That is what He does: He takes things that are broken and puts them back together again.

*Pray*