

The American author John Steinbeck was once told by his English professor that he would become a published author “when pigs fly.” As far as that professor was concerned, Steinbeck’s chances of writing a decent book were as good as the chances of a pig somehow sprouting wings and taking flight. But as it turned out Steinbeck did write popular books like *Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*. On all the books that he published he included the Latin phrase: *ad astra per alia porci* (to the stars on the wings of a pig).

Flying pigs would indeed be a strange sight. In fact if you saw such a phenomenon, you would believe anything possible. Although our text doesn’t talk about flying pigs, it does speak about a time when lions will no longer devour zebras and wildebeests but eat straw like an ox. When this strange phenomenon happens Christians shall see a new heaven and a new earth, we shall never cry again, and we shall live in everlasting harmony. It sounds too good to be true but it isn’t. So let’s take a closer look at: *When Lions Eat Straw*

Our text was written by the prophet Isaiah who lived about 700 years before Christ. He witnessed to an Israelite nation who had, by in large, rejected God. God was fed up with the Israelites and was going to punish them. Still he had kept a small group of Israelites faithful to him. To these believers God spoke words of comfort. Though they were surrounded by the wicked and their land was about to be run over by the Assyrians and then later the Babylonians, God had something wonderful planned for them. He said: “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth”. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

We like new things like the smell of fresh sheets that have been hanging on the line, or that new car smell, or the new computer that goes so much faster than the old machine that slogged along, or the new dress that brings compliments from people at work, or new a friend that comes into your life and brings you joy and happiness. In the place Jesus has prepared for us, everything will be new. The present troubled world will be destroyed.

In this new world the Lord has for us there will be no painful memories of the past. Some of our soldiers experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) They may have flashbacks to deaths of other soldiers, triggered by the smell, or sight or sound that suddenly brings up the past. All the pains and scars from life on this earth will not haunt you in the place Jesus has for you. Angry words that hurt you will be forgotten forever. That nasty surgery or the sorrow of losing someone you loved, these will all be forgotten. All these things you did wrong in your life that never seem to quite go away from your memory bank will all be forgotten. Even the horrible rejections you have seen to Jesus’ love among family members and friends, they will also be forgotten and they will not haunt you when you are with Jesus.

But what about loved ones that don’t end up on this new earth with us? Won’t we be sad when we think about them? Listen to what God said in our text: “I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more” (Isaiah 65:19). I don’t know how God is going to take away the sting of a loved one not being there on that new earth with us, but he will do that because there will be no sorrow on the new earth. Perhaps God will selectively erase our memory and it just won’t occur to us that a loved one is missing. Or, more probably, those memories won’t cause pain because our thoughts will be in total harmony with God’s thoughts. We will fully understand and rejoice at God’s righteous judgment as much as we’ll rejoice at his saving love. This may be too difficult for us to comprehend now but we have God’s word that nothing will make us sad in that wonderful place.

Can you be sure that this very special place is yours and it is waiting there for you? If your hope is based on how well you have performed this past week, then you are in serious trouble, and so am I. Take an inventory of the best moments of your life. Take those shining

moments that sparkle. Take your best acts of kindness and your most glorious moments with the Lord. You will discover they still have a smell of sin attached to them, like smoke that lingers on clothes and hair. It just doesn't go away. Listen to what Isaiah said in the previous chapter. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like wind our sins sweep us away." Even if you were to donate a thousand turkeys to the local food bank it could not compensate the Lord for one bad thought you had when you were a little child.

We need Jesus. We need his blood to wash us clean, and his righteousness to cover us. Here is what the Bible says about how Jesus has helped us out. In Revelation it says; "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Our robes have been washed clean by the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ. We are going to make it through the great tribulations we face on this earth. A Great new location awaits us.

Perhaps the biggest reason there will be no crying in the new world is because there will be no more death. God expresses that truth in our text using a literary technique called litotes, or understatement. He proclaimed: "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed" (Isaiah 65:20). At the time of Isaiah, living a long life was considered to be a great blessing. God is not saying here if you die before 100, you are not his child. God does not promise that every believer will live to 100. Rather, the point is that every believer in Christ is blessed by God. We are under his special care and protection. Every day is an opportunity to celebrate the reality that goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life. As we look to heaven, There won't be miscarriages, stillbirths, or fathers dying when their children are still toddlers. Sons and daughters won't get killed in car accidents. There won't be any of that because there won't be any death.

Of course you already knew that there would be no more death in paradise. But there's even more to look forward to. God says of that place: "No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. 23 They will not toil in vain" (Isaiah 65:22, 23a). If you think that the new earth is going to be a place where we sit around and do nothing, think again. We will be working in the new world just as Adam and Eve were to work and care for the Garden of Eden. Only work won't be work. Every day there will be like the rare day here where everything clicks. What exactly will we be doing? I imagine that the talents we have now will be carried over into that new world. Great musicians may keep producing great works of art. Those of you who are good organizers of people and events may keep doing that and you will love your work. You'll never be frustrated by those who don't return your calls or think that your ideas are dumb. Likewise you won't think the people you are working for are a burden. You'll live to serve them because you'll be perfect just as Jesus is perfect and lives to serve us.

Yes, we'll live in everlasting harmony with one another in that new world. God illustrates well that point when he says, "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 65:25a). On the new earth, things will go back to the way they were meant to be. Animals (if in fact there will be animals on the new earth) will no longer tear each other apart like you see them do now on the Nature Channel. They'll live in harmony and so will

we. No longer will we blame each other for our sins because there will be no more sin!

So, are you excited for the new earth? I hope so. But perhaps you're wondering how a text like this helps you face getting a crown on Monday at the dentist, and a heart catheterization on Friday? Studying this text is like circling your Caribbean cruise dates or your European trip on your kitchen calendar. You do that, not because you'll forget to go on the trip, but as a motivational tool to keep you plugging away until then. When the shortened daylight hours lengthen your dark mood, it helps to flip ahead on the calendar and be reminded that in a month you'll be basking in the sunshine on Waikiki. Circling the dates of your special trip may also motivate you to eat right and exercise so that you look good on the beach. In the same way reminding ourselves that we are headed to a better place will keep us from giving up on life or from getting wrapped up in this life so that we lose focus and direction.

Yes, the words of our text about the new earth do motivate and strengthen us. For when we speak carelessly to one another and damage a friendship, we know that all is not lost. Jesus will create a world where that painful memory will disappear. So why bother holding on to grudges now? Get an early start on that new life and forget the sins that have been committed against you, just as God has already forgotten the sins that you commit daily. And we will continue to sin in this life, won't we? You could say that pigs will fly before we ever stop sinning. But pigs won't have to fly before we're assured of forgiveness. That's because a lamb has climbed a cross. Therefore look forward to the day when lions will eat straw like an ox, and when believers will no longer cry but live forever in perfect harmony with one another. My friends, you have arrived in the ultimate gated community. Your security guard, Jesus has allowed you in. You are in the courtyard. Keep walking. Your large mansion awaits.