

*Isaiah 51:4-6* <sup>4</sup> “Listen to Me, My people; And give ear to Me, O My nation: For law will proceed from Me, And I will make My justice rest As a light of the peoples. <sup>5</sup> My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon Me, And on My arm they will trust. <sup>6</sup> Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished.”

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Imagine the most beautiful place you have ever been. For Jaimee and me, it was the smoky mountains around Gatlinburg, Tennessee where we spent our honeymoon. We stayed a cabin that looked out over the Smoky mountains. And I must say that those tree covered mountains provided a feast for the eyes. When the sun was out, the color of the trees shone brightly. When it rained, the patter of the water hitting the deck only added to the beauty of the scene. Every direction you could look towards was breathtaking.

I am sure that you have a place in also where you have been, a place where the beauty of God’s creation takes your breath away. Perhaps it is the Grand Canyon. Perhaps it is the mountains of Colorado, or perhaps quite simply it is the view of the country that you will see as you exit the church today. But whatever the scene that is in your mind right now, I want you to imagine something different now. Imagine whatever image is filling your mind gone, gone in a second, disappearing like smoke. Wouldn’t it be shocking? That beauty, that moment, that place gone forever.

Well, the shocking news is that it will be gone. No matter the place that you pondered in your mind, there will come a time when it will not be there anymore. Isaiah told the people of his day to look up to the sky above and the heavens below. And then he told them the truth about that which they were looking at. The truth? It would all be gone. The sky gone as quickly as smoke can vanish. The earth destroyed as old clothes are destroyed by moths. Yes Isaiah said that the earth, the sky, and everything in between would be gone. And Isaiah’s statement was not just something that filled his imagination, but it was God’s promise which will be fulfilled in reality. The disappearance of this earth is not something that we only imagine either. It will occur. This sky, this earth, those awe-taking sites are headed for destruction.

Why? Because while some parts of the earth may take our breath away, they don’t take God’s breath away. As amazing as they seem, they are corrupted with sin. They are nothing compared to what God created in Eden. If you want breathtaking you should have been there on the seventh day. But then it all changed. As a result of that first sin in the garden, the whole earth was subjected to

frustration. The book of Romans tells us that all earth is groaning under the curse of sin, waiting for the restoration of all things. Almost every night, we can turn on the TV and hear reports on the news of the earth's groans. But it shall not be like that forever. Peter too reminds us that this corrupted earth will be consumed in fire in his first epistle. Yes, the bible tells us time and time again that judgment day will bring the destruction of this corrupted world. But that is not the end of the story. There will be in place of that destroyed heavens and earth a new heaven and a new earth in which God's people will dwell. No, God won't settle for a world that has some great places in it, He wants and will make manifest a world that is perfect in all aspects. He will restore a place which will take away His breath by its utter perfection. And that is where we shall dwell with Him.

Today we ask though, are these truths something which only fill our future hopes or should they also have an effect on our present lives today. Sure, eventually the heavens and the earth will be gone and a new heavens and earth will be established in which God's people will dwell, but what about now? What does that mean for us today?

Well, perhaps the best way to put it is that while we can enjoy the wonderful things of this earth, we shouldn't let them take away all our breath. When we see something that takes our breath away, we should always remember that better things are yet to come for us as Christians. Whatever that place you imagined in your mind at the beginning of the sermon, it will be nothing when compared to that day when you see the new heavens and new earth before your eyes. Then and only then will your breath truly be taken away.

All too often our lives are focused on this earth and not on the new earth. All too often our eyes are focus on this sky, and not the new sky. And when this happens, sin quickly follows. Paul tells us in Corinthians that we are to be people that use the things of this world, but not people that are not engrossed by them.

So where is your focus? How much time to you spend preparing for life in heaven in comparison to the time you spend preparing for life on this earth? Are you storing up treasure here on earth while neglecting to store up treasure in heaven? Do you spend much time and money on your home which over time will crumble, but very little on supporting God's kingdom which will endure for ever? Do you fill your mind with all sorts of information about this world and its proceedings, but scarcely ever crack a bible to learn more about your eternal home? Do you talk with your friends about politics, weather, the stock market, but never about God and his ways? If so, perhaps today it is time to refocus.

Today is the day to return to our God and ask him to forgive us for letting our breath be taken away by a world that is wasting away while not doing the same or even more when it comes to thinking about our eternal home which will never waste away. We fall at his feet in repentance. And he lifts us back up. He forgives us of our sins and set before us again the hope of eternal life with him in heaven. He lifts our eyes up from a decaying world to a world still to come. He renews in us the confession of belief and focus upon the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting. He makes us people who are not satisfied with this world, and long for something better. We long to be home in heaven.

Oh sure, the mountains are beautiful, the Grand Canyon can astonish, and the view when you walk out of church today will be gorgeous indeed. But it is nothing compared to what you will see in heaven.

John describes it this way, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" ...One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone...The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp...Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then the

angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Now that is breathtaking. Amen.