

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## Isaiah 65:17-25 “What Disciples Do: Live the Dream

When I was a senior in high school I took a psychology class. Not because I wanted to, but because it was the only third period elective that fit my schedule so I could graduate. But, it ended up being one of my favorite classes. Dean Cherbas was an exceptionally engaging teacher and was full of fun facts about the relationship between body and mind. One of the things he taught us is that every human being dreams. Although not everyone remembers their dreams, they are necessary for our bodies to function. It's the brain's way of reorganizing information from the day. Dreams help consolidate memories, strengthen learning, and discard unnecessary information. They are also needed to help the brain process emotions – especially stressful ones.

Some researchers say that dreams help with problem solving and creativity. According to the threat simulation theory, dreams help us practice responding to dangers or complex social situations in a consequence-free environment. Think of it as a built-in training ground for survival. This explains a lot of my dreams. Unlike some people, I remember my dreams just fine, thank you very much. For me, going to sleep is like buying a ticket at a movie theater except I don't get to pick which movie to watch. Sometimes the movie is good. Other times it isn't. Maybe it's a comedy. Maybe it's an adventure movie. But now and then we all run into dreamscape horror movies where we wake up breathing hard, sweating, disoriented and scared. This is where that built-in subconscious survival training goes a little too far. Unfortunately for many these are the clearest and most memorable dreams.

Most of my reoccurring dreams have themes depending on what's going on in my life. I have one where I'm on the other side of a church building. It's time for worship to start. I'm the preacher. But I can't get to the sanctuary because there are things along the path that need *immediate* attention. By the time I get to the sanctuary, people are

walking out and there's no one left. There are variations in time, place, and obstacles, but it's the same basic dream. I've talked to other preachers, teachers and public speakers and discovered many of them have similar dreams too. I think the survival training ground lesson here is, "Plan ahead, be flexible."

Sometimes my reoccurring dreams have a resolution. I used to have this dream where I'd be in a crowd of people, and I'd just start floating. Then I'd discover that I can control my movement and actually fly. But nobody would notice and I'd get frustrated. "Hey, can't you see? Don't you notice I'm flying here?" *Now* when I have that dream, I think, "this is great, I can move freely up here and not be stuck in the crowd!" Problem solved. The lesson is probably, "You shouldn't care what other people think, make the best of the situation for *you*." Again, it's the training ground principle at work.

Now, if you want to meet someone who has memorably vivid dreams, let's talk about the prophet Isaiah. His call to be a prophet started out as a wild dream about being in God's throne room surrounded by six-wing seraphs. One of them touched Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal. Then God asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah, said, "Here I am, send me!" In the text Carolyn read this morning, Isaiah is addressing the people of Israel, specifically those who returned from exile in Babylon. They were struggling to rebuild and find hope after generations of suffering, disappointment, and disobedience. Isaiah used dream language to explain how God was creating a new heaven and earth where life would be significantly better after Israel's time in Babylon. In many ways, this isn't just *Isaiah's* dream for Israel, it's *God's* dream. Isaiah is just passing on the details.

In God's new earth, the infant mortality rate is zero. Under God's reign, senior adults live long, productive, healthy lives. There is no homelessness because in God's kingdom, everyone has a place to live. In God's kingdom there is no shortage of food because there is *always* plenty. People will all have work, and they won't have to labor in vain –

because their work will be purposeful and productive. Families who were torn apart during the exile will be together and will not “bear children of calamity.” This is a good dream, isn’t it? But that’s not all! Here’s the best one – “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw with the ox” and “they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.” In other words, in God’s kingdom, violence and warfare do not exist. Peacemaking between people and nations is the norm. War is unthinkable.

Well... this *has* to be a dream, right? Because nowhere in the history of ancient Middle Eastern empires do we find anything like this. Certainly not with the Babylonians. As much as they tried to make the Israelites happy in Babylon by giving them perks and privileges, the people were still miserable. “How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?” The Persians weren’t on board with the dream either. When they conquered Babylon, King Cyrus the Great made it possible for the Israelites to return to Judea to re-build their temple. But there was still tension because the freed captives were expected to remain loyal to Persia. You don’t get something for nothing. The relationship with Persia was very transactional. Sure, the captives were allowed to return to Israel, and yes they were given the material resources they needed to rebuild, but were they *really* free? The rules of the earthly kingdoms were *still* in place. This wasn’t the dream. This was just a temporary solution to get the Israelites out from under foot.

The problem is that this was Israel’s “normal” cycle of promising to get right with God, turning away from God, rejecting the prophets’ warning about the calamities to come, falling into calamity, then finding themselves in captivity – physically and spiritually. Rather than using the dream as a training ground for responding to dangers and complex social situations in a consequence-free environment, they just kept repeating the same destructive patterns over and over again expecting different results -- which is the definition of insanity by the way. Then they have the audacity to say that it’s the dreamers who are the crazy

ones. And this still goes on to this day with *all* of God's people, the church included.

Here's a diversion tactic that the church has used during *our* cycle of sin, salvation, and awakening over the centuries. We get fed up with how hard it is to work together, so we shift our focus on personal salvation. I can't be responsible for other's choices, so I'm just going to work on mine. It's just me and Jesus now, to heck with everyone else. No more hymns with the word "we," it's all going to be about "me." That's when we become so detached from the dream that we don't even recognize it. How can the "wolf and the lamb feed together" if you can't get a wolf and a lamb to even be in the same room with one another? How can we "enjoy the works of our hands" when there are those who we refuse to work with?

Here's an unfortunate consequence of making everything about "just me and God" or "me and Jesus." We end up becoming staggeringly selfish. Not just your garden variety, "I don't want to share" selfish. I'm talking about total apocalyptic, "I will let you die rather than inconvenience myself" selfish. Oh, come on pastor, God's people would never say that ... *Christians* would never say that! Especially Christians in modern-day civilized nations like ours. Well, at least not out loud. Well, okay, when we're granted permission to say it out loud and not have to face any consequences, then maybe.

Hear me when I say this -- We matter to God. Not just me. We. And we are all a part of this dream that Isaiah laid out for God's people when they returned from exile. And *because* we matter to God, God's dream should matter to *us*. Individual Christians, local churches, denominations, and the entire worldwide church are expected to advance God's dream as found here in Isaiah 65 and countless other passages throughout the Bible. And don't think that "advancing God's dream" means "forcing *our brand* of Christian values on other people." It means letting your personal values inform how *you* interact with other people and work for the good of *all* people, regardless of their personal faith.

Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, a ministry that seeks to live God's dream often says, "Faith should be personal, but never private." That's the heart of Isaiah's dream, isn't it? God's dream was never meant to stay in Isaiah's head like a nighttime vision that fades by breakfast. It was meant to be lived. Made real. Practiced. Embodied. Because God's dream is not escapism. It's assignment. When God says, "*I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth,*" God is not handing us a postcard of a "someday down the road paradise"—we're being handed a blueprint. A calling. A way of life right now.

And here's the part the world keeps forgetting: God never asked us to dream *small*. God asked us to dream *with God*. To imagine a world where children don't die young, where elders flourish, where housing and food are not privileges but givens, where everyone has work and that work has purpose, where families thrive, where predators and prey share the same pasture, where the strong do not devour the weak, and where peace is so normal that war becomes unthinkable. That's not naïve. That's discipleship. So what do disciples do? Disciples live the dream. Not the Argentinian dream, not the Australian dream, not the American dream, or the Israeli dream. Not a self-centered dream. God's dream.

We live it when we refuse to settle for cynicism. We live it when we choose community over isolation. We live it when we work for the *common* good, not just our *personal* good. We live it when we decide—again and again—that love is worth the trouble. The world has enough nightmares. But God is still dreaming. And God is still saying, "*Whom shall I send?*" May we, like Isaiah, have the courage to say, "Here we are. Send *us*." And may the world wake up—just a little bit more—because God's people refused to stop dreaming.