

RUF Bible Study – Attributes of God in Isaiah  
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
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Isaiah 65-66 – Our Worship of the Redemption of God

Isaiah 65: 17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 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. 19 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. 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. 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 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. 23 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. 24 Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25 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.

Isaiah 66:2 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....

7 "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. 8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. 9 Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?" says the LORD; "shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?" says your God. 10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; 11 that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance." 12 For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. 14 You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies. 15 "For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. 16 For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.... 22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. 23 From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. 24 "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

It's always a bittersweet feeling to get to the end of book you've been studying. We've been looking at, thinking about and discussing Isaiah for weeks, and we now will be finished. He has challenged us with our sin, with our idolatry and with our too-low conception of God. He has pushed our view of what God can and cannot do in history and creation. He has set before us the idea of a suffering servant, who will come as a conquering king and yet come in humiliation – in order to take our sins on himself. He has set all of this in the context of the Ancient Near East, telling stories of Ahaz, Hezekiah, Sennacherib and Cyrus – two Jewish kings, an Assyrian one and a Persian.

And now he turns his attention to something that is difficult to describe for you. Try to imagine someone brilliant from the past. Think of Socrates or Caesar or Martin Luther – what would it be like to describe to them electricity? How would you tell them about the internet (something I barely understand). Could you accurately paint an understandable picture of cell phones?

Of course, the way you would have to do it is by analogy, using similes and metaphors. X is like Y only better or different or more. Isaiah here wants you to dwell on something like that, like electricity to the medieval man.

He looked around his surroundings and saw an empire about to crumble. He saw the Assyrians barely averted, but the Babylonians about to take all of his great city. He saw death and destruction. He foresaw a foreign king who would make headway into freeing his people. And then he looked out farther than that... and saw recreation, restoration, redemption, renewal. Re-re-re.

What do you see around you? Your paper didn't go well. Your relationship is on the rocks, or you don't have one. You put on the freshman fifteen. You aren't as good at something as you thought you were. I have two friends right now who are having surgery. One is not yet forty and has breast cancer and may have to have a mastectomy. The other has clots and possible tumors around her stomach and uterus and needs them out right away.

It's a messy world out there. Things are pretty disappointing. People are hungry, impoverished and dying. Isaiah hasn't shrunk back from this truth. Things are not as they were meant to be. There was creation and it was good. There was a real fall, and things have degenerated, fallen apart, broken up and are contaminated.

Is this all there is? Christianity says no. Jesus said no. There is something else. The new heavens and the new earth. Isaiah tells us about it here, like explaining electricity to Alexander the Great. How can we fully understand? Let's at least try.

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For this series, I used commentaries on Isaiah from Meyer, Webb, Orland, Oswalt and Motyer. I listened to sermons from Tim Keller, Fred Harrell and Bryan Chapell, and used notes from RUF campus minister Kevin Twit and seminary professor Dr. Jack Collins. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

## Restoration

Julie and I are reading *Tales of the Kingdom* to our kids. It's a collection of stories, analogies to faith and life. In the stories, the knights/rangers often hail each other in two ways. When they are collected and ready to give reports, they are asked, "How goes it in the world?" and they answer, "It doesn't go well. But the king is coming!"

Isaiah paints the picture of restoration for us starting in Isaiah 65:17. "*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 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. 19 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. 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. 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 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. 23 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. 24 Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25 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.*

What can we say about it?

God will be about the work of recreating his creation. Not only will it be physically restored, but every aspect of it will be redeemed and renewed, even our emotions and memories, and there will be no more pain. This restored community won't be completely pastoral, if that is what you think. No, it will contain a great city, Jerusalem. In this new city, there won't be any sense of a spiritual schizophrenia – he will completely know his people and they will completely know him. There will be not only no crying or sorrow, there won't be anything to cause that sort of pain.

Death won't reign any more. Right now, death cuts off life. Not so in the new Jerusalem. We saw the death of death foretold in Isaiah 25:7-8: "*And he will swallow up death forever...*", and now we read about growing children instead of death, about long lives. Isaiah tells a story of the impossible to make his point. Even if it were possible to have a stowaway sinner in the new heavens and new earth, he would not be able to last. The curse upon sin would reach him and destroy him. There will be no place for death and sin here. It will be like you live to be a hundred. What Isaiah actually means is that you won't die at all, since 100 years old was an impossibly long life in 700 B.C.

Then look at what we read about. Houses and vineyards. What do you think will be happening in the new heavens and the new earth? What is your conception of this? Many of us have been taught that we will be floating around on the clouds with harps in our hands, singing and worshipping all day long. We may be worshipping, but not as you think. We will be worshipping in our houses, and while we work. Nothing we do will be frustrated, yet we will still have work to do. Isn't that interesting? In the end we'll have one commandment to follow: *Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.*

So what we're saying is sort of a paradox. The new creations will be new and not new. New in the sense that, if you take out sin and death and disease and rebellion, wouldn't that be so radical that it's difficult to even imagine or talk about? But not new in the sense that you will you and I will be me and we will have a history and society and *this earth.*

In his excellent little book, *Creation Regained*, Al Wohlters puts it this way: "In a very significant sense this restoration means that salvation does not bring anything new. Redemption is not a matter of an addition of a spiritual or supernatural dimension to creaturely life that was lacking before; rather it is a matter of bringing new life and vitality to what was there all along. It is true enough, of course, that the whole drama of salvation brings elements into the picture that were not part of God's creational design (think for example of the regulations that were necessitated by sin: capital punishment, divorce legislation, cities of refuge, and so on). But like scaffolding attached to a house being renovated, or bandages covering a wound, these are all incidental to the main purpose, meant only to serve the process of restoration. In fact, once that purpose is served, they are discardable... At bottom, the only thing redemption adds that is not included in the creation is the remedy for sin, and that remedy is brought in solely for the purpose of recovering a sinless creation. To put it in the traditional language of theology, grace does not bring a *donum superadditum* to nature, a gift added on top of creation; rather, grace restores nature, making it whole once more."<sup>2</sup>

God is restoring everything to its original, good intent. That's what grace does. It makes things right.

Isaiah finishes up this part of the picture with ideas of oneness. Oneness with the Lord has he anticipates our needs and our now-lack of hopelessness and desperation. (23) Oneness with his voice, his desires and our actions. (24) Oneness with creation, a harmony if you will, without the curse of death on us. (25)

Notice that Isaiah mentions that "*dust shall be on the serpent's food.*" What is he thinking of? Why would he mention that? Surely he is thinking of the great enemy of God's creation, the serpent depicted in Genesis 3:14. And what do we find in the new creation? The curse upon sin still stands. We don't make peace with sin and death. It is still and always will be wrong, evil and condemned. Our God is the Holy God and always will be.

Isn't this what we all want? Isn't this what we're all hoping for? A better place. A restored creation. Where everything is right and nothing is wrong.

This past semester, I've been convicted of trying to do a better job of leading my family as we go out into the world. Instead of just trudging dutifully off to school and then coming back, I've tried to be more intentional about what it is we're doing as we're going to learn and work in the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has challenged me on this in his book about community.

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<sup>2</sup> 71, 72

So we assemble at 8am sharp, all ready to go. Then I read a psalm and pray, asking God to help us as we learn and work and honor him in all we say and do. Then we sing a few verses of a hymn. And lately I've added a last part, again from *Tales of the Kingdom*. I cry and then they repeat "To the King! To the Restoration!" Okay, so my kids think it's a little hokey, and they don't give it the full vigor it deserves. But it should be our battle cry to go out into the world.

### **Worship**

Isaiah next reminds us of who will be there when this new creation is fully ushered in – his worshippers. Will you be in the number? Chapter 66 starts off with something we've heard before – God's transcendence and his holiness. If God is like that, so otherliness, then how do we have any hope of a relationship with him?

He tells us that he will relate to some - *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word....*

He looks at the *humble*. "The humble are, socially, those who are at the bottom of life's heap, dominated by stronger forces and interests; religiously, they are those who willingly take the lowest place before God."<sup>3</sup>

He looks at the *contrite*. The contrite are the "disabled, here used with spiritual significance: one who is aware of the damage wrought by sin, of personal inability to stand upright before God."<sup>4</sup>

And he looks at the one who *trembles at his word*. "Trembles speaks of a sensitive, concerned longing to please."<sup>5</sup>

I recently went to a Celebration Service for my friend, Rev. Chris Garriott. He has been the youth pastor at Heritage Presbyterian Church for eight years and is now moving to Maryland to be the RUF Campus Minister there. Chris and I went through our ordination exams together, standing side by side answering questions before the assembled elders. The Celebration Service was a wonderful time of singing hymns and praying for Chris.

When I think of Chris Garriott, I think of a man who is humble and contrite in spirit. He is self-effacing, kind, compassionate, looking out for others, a servant and a man of God. He is what Isaiah 66:2 is talking about. And at the service, the pastor, Mark Balthrop, gave him a charge from 2 Timothy 3 and 4, reminding him that he has been called by the church and by God to preach the word.

There are so many temptations to do anything but preach the word. It honestly doesn't feel that effective sometimes. You look around and see other churches or other campus ministries who don't preach the word and they have three times the number of students. But we must remain faithful to our calling – to preach the word.

You must remain faithful to your calling to listen. To, as Isaiah puts it, tremble at the word. Read and preached.

Paul commended the believers in Thessalonica this way: *13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.* (2 Thess. 2:13)

Is that you? Is that me? Is that our modern, American church? Are we humble, contrite in spirit and trembling at his word? What would it mean to be like that?

Isaiah next contrasts this sort of person by pairing four permissible acts with four impermissible ones. Alongside lawful acts he presents unlawful ones. First a sinful action, then one of meaninglessness, then an unacceptable one, and finally one that is apostate.

He is saying that we can have the form of worship, but yet be an abomination in our hearts. We can go to church, offer sacrifices, make offerings and do all the things that good 21<sup>st</sup> century, Oklahoman church kids do – and yet it will account for nothing if we are not regenerated, made new in our hearts, minds and wills. He detests it even.

Now I have to be honest, I'd take maybe even a little bit of faking this sort of attitude and behavior sometimes. I don't even see that much. But I see people get all upset when the campus screamers come to town and cry for holiness. Sure, they don't fully understand the gospel, but I'm willing to bet that the people most upset aren't the ones who are in church, in prayer, in chastity and in a Bible community. No, they want peace, peace when there is no peace. I have often prayed the prayer of Amos 8:11, the prayer for revival: "*Behold, the days are coming,*" declares the Lord God, "*when I will send a famine on the land — not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.*"

We don't need less Bible in our lives. We need more. We need to commit ourselves to the Word of God, submit ourselves to it and invite others to join us. Sitting under good Bible teaching is one of the marks of a Christian. The ravenous hunger for the truth of the gospel has always been a mark of revival, and not only revival but of a growing Christian anywhere.

Repent for the kingdom of God is near, Jesus said. The Lord will one day soon render recompense to his enemies.

That is the message of the kingdom. To some it sounds like sure and utter death. But to those whom he has called, it sounds like life and peace. And he assures us that it is possible because he is able to do it. And not only do it, but do it abundantly. He likens it to painless childbirth (!), and that to a whole litter of children. As these children grow, they are able to nurse in satisfaction and abundance.

I remember watching Julie nurse our children, and thinking how both strange and wonderful it was. I had no experience of this, no way to relate to it, and yet I felt a joy in watching the natural aspects of how it all worked, of how God designed her body and our child's need. And then I marveled at the emotional connection that I could practically see – what a bond between mother and child! It may be sort of uncomfortable, but one of the pictures of assurance we get is that we will drink deeply with

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<sup>3</sup> Motyer, 401

<sup>4</sup> Motyer, 401

<sup>5</sup> Motyer, 401

delight from her glorious breast. Whoa. This would have been a glorious picture to an ancient culture, much more so than ours where we feel squeamish about this topic. It is natural, and it is good.

Isaiah finishes this idea of worship in the new creation with peace, hope and joy. He says he will comfort us like a mother comforts her children. He will do that in the new Jerusalem. There will be peace like a river extending your way. You shall see – you shall experience in a way that cannot be taken away. You will see and your heart will rejoice. You will flourish.

You know those moments? Those moments when everything comes together, just for a second maybe?

Listening to the symphony. Hearing the beautiful sounds intermingle with perfection.

Sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon with your kids. I did this last weekend (14 hours one way). I had one of those moments. All is well. This is good. God's creation is both enormous and relational.

Finishing a job well done. Holding his hand on a walk. Taking the Lord's Supper at church. Turning the last page of a great novel. Acing a test. Sipping your coffee on the porch. Laughing with friends. Winning a game of Settlers.

But that feeling never lasts does it? It either ends too fast or slowly starts to deteriorate. You have to go home from vacation. The coffee gets acidic and cold. The next game of Settlers you lose. Your friend moves away. You have another test next week. Why is it so hard to get at that "thing"? Maybe because the thing isn't here at all, but resides somewhere else.

As CS Lewis so aptly writes: "If I find myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures can satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing... I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same."<sup>6</sup>

Those moments will continue forever. Your bones will flourish. You will have peace. It will never be taken away by his enemies. To the King, to the Restoration!

### ***The Restoration***

Ah, but remember this, those moments will come to those who the Lord loves. And those are the humble, the contrite in spirit, to those who tremble at his word. Did you forget? Are you one of these?

To the rest – to the proud, the arrogant and the self-sufficient – he won't appear like a comforting mother, but very differently. He will come in fire. He will come with chariots, weapons of destruction. He will come in anger, fury and rebuke. He will come in judgment, with the sword. And here is the chilling end of his jealousy: "*And those slain by the Lord shall be many.*"

Friends, I have to remind you of something. There is a judgment coming. It may come today. It may come tomorrow. I may come for you tonight. I do not know. But there will be a final payment. This has to be true, and you know it does. If God is truly right, good and holy, then wrong has to be paid for. It cannot be swept under the rug. God is good, yes. He is gracious, to be sure. He is merciful. He is longsuffering. But he is not stupid, nor is he unjust, nor is he going to wink at sin.

The truth is the wrong must pay. You can pay for it, or you can acknowledge your wrong and your need, cry out to him and have your sin paid for by this suffering servant in Isaiah, by Jesus Christ.

You see, he has sent a sign. The cross has gone out to be a sign of victory over death. It is the image of a torture device that you wear around your neck and we hang in our buildings. But it is a sign of the death of death, given partially when Jesus raised from the tomb on Easter morning, and fully coming one day soon.

That is what we look to. People from all nations, little and big, prominent and obscure who have seen the sign – they are coming. Missionaries are bringing their friends and families to worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They come on all known means of transportation, they come as gifts to God. They come safely to the holy mountain of the Lord.

We see a new creation, a new city, a new society and we are coming to a new house. What will we do there? We will worship; we will enjoy equal acceptance in Jerusalem and constant communion with the Lord.

It is a glorious vision, but with a sobering end. You see, in the midst of this great city, there is a cemetery. This is rather remarkable. And when all have gathered, they make a point of going out to look at the fate from which they have been delivered. "They enjoy the day of salvation, but they do not allow themselves to forget the day of vengeance... The accusation leveled and made out against them is that they rebelled: they knew the word of the Lord but deliberately and willfully went their own way."<sup>7</sup>

Does this talk of Hell embarrass you in some way? Jesus isn't embarrassed about hell at all. He considers it a very real reality. Jesus quotes this verse, the very end of Isaiah, in Mark 9:43-48, as he discusses temptation, sin and Hell. He is asking you if you will eradicate the worm in life, the thing that eats away at the bud. Will that worm, that rebellion, win? Or will you slay that dragon, the one you love even but the one that seeks your harm, your very life? All of us are choosing either for our own self-salvation for our glory or for God's salvation for his glory.

The people don't go out there to gloat, for it is far too awful for that. They go to see again the wages of sin and the fruit of rebellion and thereby to be motivated to obedience and love of the word of God.<sup>8</sup>

Do you realize that you deserve Hell? Are you angry at God? Are you offended that he allows a fallen world? Then you don't understand yourself and your part in this tragedy. You are missing it. Do you think God is keeping people in Hell who don't want to be there? A more accurate thought is that Hell is simply eternal souls who don't want God, who are getting their way.

Do you see that God has done something about it after all? It may not have been what you expected, but after all, he is God and you are not. As we have read in this book of Isaiah, "God himself came down into this world and suffered Hell out of the

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<sup>6</sup> *Mere Christianity*, 106

<sup>7</sup> Motyer, 407

<sup>8</sup> Motyer, 408

love for us: to save us from our folly. It's time for us to humble ourselves. It's time to change the subject in our minds from blaming God for ruining the world to owning our real moral guilt before him, so that we can receive his saving love in Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup> In other words, Heaven is eternal souls who long for God, and they are getting all they want and more – God himself in infinite, eternal measure.<sup>10</sup>

In a song entitled "Friday Morning" by Sydney Carter, we hear the nonBeliever's view of what happened over Easter.

*It was on a Friday morning when they took me from the cell  
And I saw they had a carpenter to crucify as well  
You can blame it on Pilate, you can blame it on the Jews,  
You can blame it on the devil. It is God that I accuse.  
It's God they ought to crucify instead of you and me,  
I said to the carpenter hanging on the tree.*

*Now Barabbas was a killer, and they let Barabbas go.  
But you are being crucified for nothing here below,  
And God is up in heaven and he doesn't do a thing  
With a million angels watching and they never move a wing.  
It's God they out to crucify instead of you and me,  
I said to the carpenter hanging on the tree.<sup>11</sup>*

Is that what you think? Is that the way you view things? Of course, in a way, this song captures the way that that is still sort of right. But oh, so wrong at the same time.

Better is this song, *Beams of Heaven*, which is a negro spiritual written by Charles Tindley.

*Beams of heaven, as I go, / Through this wilderness below / Guide my feet in peaceful ways /  
Turn my midnights into days / When in the darkness I would grope / Faith always sees a star  
of hope / And soon from all life's grief and danger / I shall be free some day*

*I don't know how long 'twill be / Nor for what the future olds for me / But this I know, if  
Jesus leads me / I shall get a home some day  
Often times my sky is clear / Joy abounds without a tear / Though a day so bright begun /  
Clouds may hide tomorrow's sun / There'll be a day that's always bright / A day that never  
yields to night / And in its light the streets of glory / I shall behold some day*

*Harder yet may be the fight / Right may often yield to might / Wickedness awhile may reign /  
Satan's cause may seem to gain / There is a God that rules above / With hand of power and  
heart of love / If I am right, He'll fight my battle / I shall have peace some day*

*Burdens now may crush me down / Disappointments all around / Troubles speak in mournful  
sigh / Sorrow through a tear stained eye / There is a world where pleasure reigns / No  
mourning soul shall roam its plains / And to that land of peace and glory / I want to go some day*

There is a place for you, a place without sorrow, a world where pleasure reigns. A land of peace and glory. Do you want to go? In the book of Isaiah, God is saying, I will take you there. In a real sense, instead of Isaiah's cry, Here I am, Lord!, we see throughout the book, God saying, Here I am! Look! Follow! Trust!

Are you willing to see him? To come to him. All you need is your need. Recognize your need of him. He is looking for the humble, the contrite in spirit, those who tremble at his word. He is bringing a great people to himself, to his new city. Will you be a part of the joyous number.

Friends, I do not want to gather at the headstone of your grave in the new city. I will mourn for you, and will never see you again. Instead, why don't we fulfill our destinies together as the redeemed community, worshipping God in extreme happiness and contentment? Just think of all the work we'll get done. All the beauty. All the places we'll be able to explore. How it will be to talk and relate to each other without sin. We'll be able to leave our things unlocked and they won't be stolen. We'll be making the world better and better.

To the King! To the Restoration!

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<sup>9</sup> Oswalt, 456

<sup>10</sup> from Oswalt, 445

<sup>11</sup> found in Oswalt, 457