

Isaiah 25

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn to that passage that we read in Isaiah chapter 25. Isaiah chapter 25. That day is coming. Now, I wonder how you react to the prospect of the imminent dawning of that day. Is it with excitement? Is it with trepidation? Is it with indifference? Now, a very reasonable response at this point would be, well, it would help to know what we're talking about. What is this day that I am referring to? In the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus makes reference to that day. If you just turn with me quickly to Matthew's gospel and chapter 25, you'll find how He speaks of that day, a future day, in Matthew chapter 26 rather, and in verse 29,

I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. So, Jesus speaks of that day, a future day that will come around in due course. And so, as we participate, as we will this evening in the Lord's Supper, we're encouraged to have in view that day. And what I want us to do is to think about, to ponder, to look forward to that day. But in order to look forward, we need to look back in the Scriptures to what the prophet Isaiah had to say about that day. Now, there are other parts of the Bible that would give us insight and light and in some measure a description of what to anticipate on that day. But our concern this evening will be to listen to what the prophet Isaiah has to say in the passage that we read, and particularly verses 6 to 9 of that chapter. Notice in verse 9, we read, in that day they will say, those gathered there, in that day. And I think we can, with good reason, identify the that day that Jesus speaks of there as He instituted the Lord's

Supper with that day that Isaiah speaks of as being the same day. One thing that I can certainly tell you about that day is that it's going to be a very busy day.

Notice all that the Lord will do on that day, even as it's described in these verses, verses 6 to 9 of Isaiah 25. We're going to focus on three of the verbs that we find in the passage that will allow us to consider what the Lord will do on that day. The first one that we find in verse 6 is prepare. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast. That's one thing that God will do on that day. He will prepare a feast. But then we also find another verb that speaks of something that God will do. In verse 7, on this mountain, He will destroy the shroud. And then it's actually the same verb in verse 8, though it's translated in a different way in English. He will swallow up death.

He will destroy or swallow up death. So, He'll prepare a feast. He'll destroy death. And then the third thing I want you to notice, and then we'll think about each of them, is that He'll wipe away every tear. In verse 8, the sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. So, what will God do on that day? Well, He'll prepare a feast. He'll destroy death. And He'll wipe away every tear. Hence, I think we are justified in calling it a very busy day. Now, we're going to consider each of these tasks in turn, but we do need to first definitively establish the occasion of this great feast that will be hosted by the Lord on that day. When will it happen? Now, I think there are elements in Isaiah's prophecy that have, in a measure, already been fulfilled. The death and resurrection of Jesus has got to figure prominently in any fulfillment of a prophecy that speaks of death being destroyed or swallowed up.

[4 : 39] Now, that said, it's also clear that the feast Isaiah speaks of awaits its fullest fulfillment when Jesus returns to gather His people to Himself. And if confirmation is needed for this conclusion, we can listen to what Paul has to say when he writes to the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 15, and verses 51 to 57, we won't read the whole section, but within that section, Paul anticipates the coming of Jesus at the sounding of the last trumpet. And as he does, Paul makes a direct allusion to Isaiah's prophecy when he speaks in these terms, death has been swallowed up in victory. I don't think we could call it a quote from Isaiah, but certainly a direct and deliberate allusion to the language that Isaiah uses of death being swallowed up. And Paul identifies that as happening when Jesus returns on the last day.

So, when Isaiah speaks of that day, and when Jesus, as He celebrates the Passover, speaks of that day, they're speaking about the same day, the day of the glorious return or second coming of Jesus.

Well, that established, what will the Lord do on that day? What will He do at the feast that the prophet so vividly describes? Well, He'll prepare, He'll destroy, and He'll wipe away. Let's think of each of these things. First of all, He will prepare. Now, just taking a step back before we go to the verse itself, I think it's true. I wonder if you agree with me. You can listen to what I have to say and see if you agree or not. But I think it's true that you can learn a lot about somebody by observing how they host a dinner or celebration of some description. And, you know, if you're a guest at a party, at a celebration, and you know that there's somebody who's responsible for the organizing of it, as you see how it, you know, how the party is organized, you know, what food is served, the manner in which it's served, you know, what games are played, or whatever it is, you can come to a conclusion, at least in some measure, about the person, what they're like.

They're reflected, in a sense, in the party that they host. And if you're hosting the dinner party or the party, then you will leave your mark, in a sense, on that. And people will be able to draw conclusions about you. Just to put the pressure on you, if you are hosting a party, people might be observing and deciding what kind of person you are. But whether you think that's true or not, I think we can learn a lot about the Lord from the feast that He prepares for us, that Isaiah anticipates here. On the mountain, on this mountain, and it's clear from the end of chapter 24, which is really part of the same section, that this mountain that Isaiah speaks of is Mount Zion. There in verse 23, rather, of the previous chapter, on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.

And then, once again, the language on this mountain, on Mount Zion, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines. What do we learn about the Lord from the feast He prepares for us? Well, let me suggest three aspects of God's character revealed by the feast that He prepares.

[8 : 21] The first thing that strikes me, and that I think we can draw from this, is the Lord's startling condescension. You know, this is the Lord Almighty that we are talking about, the Creator and sustainer of the universe, the great I Am. And what is He doing? He's preparing a feast for the likes of us. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast for His people. The Lord is preparing a feast. He doesn't, you know, book some celestial castle or bring in outside caterers. He prepares the feast. He delights in preparing the feast for us. He delights in serving us. We'll just let that sink in. The Lord Almighty delighting in serving us. That's what Isaiah says. The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples. Now, startling though that is at one level, at another level, we ought not to be surprised. God has previous in the matter of condescension.

Of course, we're using the word condescension there in the very best sense of the word. We generally use that word in a negative sense, but here we're using it in a very positive sense. God's willingness, God's disposition to condescend to us, to come down to our level, to serve us.

God, as I say, has previous in this matter. He has proved Himself to be a condescending God. In the person of His Son, Jesus, He left heaven and took on flesh and dwelt among us. And He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. And here at this great feast on that day, He will once again demonstrate Himself to be a God who is willing to come down to our level and to serve us, to display His startling condescension. But I think we can draw out maybe another truth concerning God from the picture that's painted here by Isaiah, and that is His boundless generosity.

And I think His generosity is evident in the guest list and in the menu that is served. The guest list, as we can see, is composed of all peoples. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples. Now, we're in summertime, and we know very well, and you know very well that summertime is wedding season. And we know that one of the great challenges of organizing a wedding for the couple who are getting married is often the wedding list, and who's going to be invited to the sit-down dinner, if that's the form that the wedding's going to take. And it's a difficulty because unless you have very, very deep pockets, or unless your parents have very, very deep pockets, you know, you've got to draw the line. You can't have everybody. You've got to limit it to a certain number, family, friends, and you have to by some means draw the line as to who is invited, who will be able to take part. And if you don't get an invite to the sit-down meal, well, you can always go to the ceilidh and just be happy that you're invited to the ceilidh. But that's the reality. You can't have everybody.

How different to the feast that is spoken of here. How different to the resources and the generosity of the Lord who is preparing a feast for all peoples, for all, the word there is ethnic, all ethnic groupings, all tribes, all that are invited, all will be present. This speaks of God's great generosity in those who will be present. But also the menu is marked by extravagant generosity, a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines. If you're concerned as to whether there'll be a vegetarian option, I don't have insight into that. It speaks of the best of meats, but no doubt there will be plenty to choose from. The point is that the provision is extravagant, it's generous, it's the very best that is being served at that feast on that day. Now, sometimes when we read a passage like this, and many have read a passage like this, and immediately conclude, I think maybe somewhat precipitately, that of course this is all symbolic, that the banquet, that the rich food symbolizes gospel blessings, gospel delights that Jesus has secured for His people by His saving work, forgiveness of sin, righteousness not our own, reconciliation and friendship with God, adoption into His family, eternal life, and we could go on.

[13 : 27] All of these gospel blessings, all of these gospel delights symbolized by this feast of rich food, of this banquet of aged wine. Now, I don't for a moment have a difficulty in acknowledging that this feast does speak of, does symbolize these gospel blessings, but that doesn't mean that there isn't an actual feast as well. You know, we will be resurrected with physical corporeal bodies. You know, we're not going to be, you know, with our hearts on clouds on this day. It will be us. And why not anticipate, why not consider that it's entirely reasonable that this feast will be a real feast, an actual feast, where we'll be present, joining in celebration of all that God has done, feasting on the delights that God prepares for us. I look forward to an actual feast where Jesus is both at the head of the table and serving His guests, a feast with real food and real wine, served by Jesus. Now, don't push me on how that will work or what that will look like. I don't know. But maybe when the time comes, you can look me out and we can compare notes on what we had expected and what the reality was on that day. However we understand the precise manner in which this feast will be fulfilled, it speaks of a God who is boundless in His generosity. So, the preparation of the feast points to the character of God, first of all, in this regard, His condescension, He prepares a feast for us, His generosity, all those who are invited, the fare that is served. But then one third aspect of God's character I think we can draw from this preparing of the feast, and that is His joyful demeanor, character. The Lord will mark His return in glory and His cosmic coronation with a feast, a celebration, a party. Now, what does that tell us about God? Does that not reveal to us a joyful God,

God? Not a stern God who is weary of celebration or of smiles or of singing. No, this is a joyful God who is revealing Himself in this prophecy. As I think of God rejoicing, the picture that comes to mind is the one that we sung about from Zephaniah, the prophet Zephaniah speaking quite possibly about another delight that awaits us at the feast on Mount Zion. And in Zephaniah's prophecy in chapter 3 and verse 17, we read, The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing. Wouldn't that be a fitting thing to be done at this great feast? The Lord rejoicing over His people with singing and no doubt inviting us to join in. So, what will God do on that day? He will prepare. He will prepare a feast. But the second thing that we find that He will do is that He will destroy, destroy or swallow up. Now, that's quite a contrast between preparing and destroying. So, what's going on? What is it that is to be destroyed?

As I mentioned, I think even in the reading, the two occasions when you have the verb appearing in verse 7, on this mountain, He will destroy the shroud that unfolds all people. And then in verse 8, He will swallow up death forever. The Hebrew verb on both occasions is the same verb. And in English, the translators have chosen to translate it with two different words, perfectly legitimate. But I think it is worth being aware that it's the same word that Isaiah employs that can be understood in these ways, destroying or swallowing up. Now, of the two uses of the verb, its use in verse 7 is maybe less clear, and so it merits just some explanation. I guess the question is, what is it that Isaiah anticipates being destroyed on that day in what he says in verse 7? On this mountain, He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations. What's that about? What is this shroud that will be destroyed? What is this sheet or covering that will be destroyed? It seems reasonable to presume or to conclude that there is a connection with the destruction of death that is spoken of in the following verse. Clearly, these are connected elements that will be destroyed. But what is the connection? What is the connection with death that has been spoken of in verse 7 as being destroyed?

Now, some have suggested that the shroud or covering is the covering of the grave. And so, in that sense, it would simply be a poetic synonym for death. So, Isaiah is saying in two different ways, God will destroy death. He will destroy the grave. He will destroy death. So, verse 7 doesn't add anything additional in terms of what's being destroyed. It simply presents the same truth in a different way, a complementary way. But I think what is more likely is that the shroud or the covering refers to a veil used by one in mourning, in mourning caused by death. Isaiah is foreseeing how the sorrow that accompanies death will be destroyed or swallowed up by the Lord on that day. Death will be destroyed, death will be swallowed up. And as death is destroyed, so the sorrow that death produces, the mourning that is the result of death with all its misery, will also be destroyed on that day. And we've really answered the question I'm going to pose right now, why will sorrow be swallowed up? Because the cause of sorrow, death itself will be destroyed. Now, by any measure, if we're thinking about the significance of this day, this is a big deal. The cold hand that blights every human happiness, death, will be destroyed by the

Lord on that day. And the destruction of death implies the lifting of the curse manifested by death death and the product of human sin and rebellion. And as we think of the destruction of death on that day, it's maybe helpful to note two elements of death's destruction on that day that we can draw from the passage, or certainly as we bring to bear the overall message of Scripture to the passage.

[20 : 34] I think the blow that will be dealt on that day to death is what we could describe as both a final blow and a definitive blow. Now, let me explain what I mean by using these two adjectives to describe this blow as a final blow and as a definitive blow. I say the final blow on that day, on that day the final blow, because in a very real sense, the mortal blow was dealt long ago, long before that day that we're speaking of. The mortal blow was dealt by Jesus in His death and resurrection on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Jesus conquered death at Calvary. Jesus drew its poisonous sting by submitting to death and rising victorious from the grave. But in God's providence, and it may be a mystery to us why it is so, death has continued to blight human existence. We know that, we all know that. We know that death still swallows us up, still is the source of misery and mourning. That continues to be true to this day, even though Jesus conquered death by His own death and resurrection. Death continues to be a scourge for us, but not so on that day, where the Lord will deliver the final blow. So, the blow is final when Isaiah speaks of death being destroyed. It's a final blow, but it's also a definitive blow. The very language that is used of death being swallowed up, it's a very powerful verb that Isaiah uses that would speak of final and definitive destruction. It will be destroyed never again to rear its ugly head. Death, if we can put it this way, will not experience resurrection. It is gone. On that day, it will be destroyed never again to reappear. The devouring mouth from which no one can escape will itself be swallowed up. At the end, on that day, it won't be death that does the swallowing. Rather, it is death that will be swallowed up by God Himself. And so, on that day, God will prepare a feast for us, a feast that speaks of and points us to the very character of God as one who condescends to us to serve us, as one who is boundless in His generosity, as one who is marked by joy and rejoicing. And on that day,

He will also destroy death, and He will destroy the sorrow and the mourning that accompany death. But there is a third thing that Isaiah tells us that the Lord will do on that day, and we find it in verse 8. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. Now, who can fail to be moved by the tenderness of the picture described? Can you picture the scene as Jesus makes His way through that multitude that no man can number? And one by one wipes away the tears? Tears that are described by Augustine very vividly as the blood of a wounded soul. The blood of a wounded soul wiped away tenderly by Jesus. He'll wipe away your tears, every last one of them wiped away by the Lord on that day.

And this tender act of grace performed by Jesus is grounded, of course, in the previous act described by the prophet, the destruction of death. With the swallowing up of death, the very source and cause of our mourning has been removed. And so, it is with good cause and with a firm foundation that Jesus is able to wipe away every tear, knowing that nothing will happen from that point on that will cause tears to reappear. For death has been destroyed, and sorrow has been destroyed, and the veil of mourning has been destroyed. As I also speaks of how the Lord will remove the disgrace or the reproach of His people there in the last part of that verse 8. And I think we can understand this as the reproach caused both by disobedience and obedience. Now, that seems somewhat bizarre to say that this reproach is caused both by disobedience and obedience. The reason I think we can say that is that our disobedience as God's people brings the reproach and disgrace upon us, but also our obedience brings the reproach of an unbelieving and hostile world. And so, in a sense that the reproach that we are objects of sometimes is self-inflicted as we are disobedient, but sometimes it's a mark of our obedience, and we are the victims of the reproach of others. Well, however you understand it, what is certainly true is that that reproach or disgrace will be swept away. He will remove the disgrace, the reproach of His people from all the earth.

God prepares a feast. The Lord prepares a feast. He destroys death. He wipes away every tear. But one final question to draw things to a close. Who will be there on that day of feasting and celebration?

[26 : 24] The language that Isaiah uses in these three verses is very revealing and I think very deliberate, the very vocabulary that he uses. He begins by speaking there in verse 6 of a feast of rich food for all peoples. And I've already suggested, already indicated, the word there is a reference to all ethnic groupings or every tribe. So, the people of the world distinguished on the basis of their race, or ethnicity, if we want to use that language. All will be present. But then he goes on to speak of all the nations. There in verse 7, Him destroying the shroud, the sheet that covers all nations. And there the word applies to what we would understand as countries or political entities, nation states.

All nations will benefit from this destruction on that day. Every nation will be represented on that day. He goes on to give greater insight into who will be present when he speaks there in verse 8 of how he will remove the disgrace of his people. So, from among the nations, from among all peoples, his people will be gathered there on that day. And then there's even greater precision in what the prophet goes on to say there in verse 9, when he says, in that day they will say. When the language Isaiah uses really has a sense of in that day each will say. So, each individual present at the feast, everybody present there on that day, each will say. And then we go on to see what they'll say. And we're going to look at that just in a moment. The point is, those gathered there, though a great multitude that no man can number, are individuals. Men and women, boys and girls with names and identities will be present, each one treasured by the Lord. To draw together that idea of all the nations, but also individuals, listen to what Jesus says as recorded by Matthew in his Gospel. In Matthew chapter 8 and verse 11, he says, speaking of this same day, I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

This great feast. Nations, peoples represented, but also individuals. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they'll be there. How cool will that be? There at the feast, rubbing shoulders with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But what will determine if you are there? We've looked at what Isaiah says about who will be there and how the nations will be represented. But what will determine if you are there? And the answer is provided with great clarity in verse 9. We focus on verse 9 simply to note how it can be understood or translated, in that day each will say, but we're particularly interested in what each will say. In that day each will say, surely this is our God. We trusted in Him and He saved us. This is the Lord. We trusted in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation. Notice that the testimony of the redeemed on that day present at that feast is in the past tense. They're saying, we trusted in Him. They're not beginning to trust in Him now. No, they'd already trusted in Him.

So, if we are to be there on that day, participating in that feast, we need to trust in Jesus on this day. We need to trust in Jesus in the here and now. We need to trust in Jesus today if we are to be present on that day. Those who are there will testify to that. They'll say, yes, we trusted in Him and He saved us.

We trusted in Him. And so now we can rejoice and be glad in His salvation. And so the question for each of us this evening is, are you trusting in Jesus today? Because it is those who trust in Him today and who serve Him today and who seek with His help to be faithful in Him today who will gather and be gathered on that day and participate in this great feast of which Isaiah speaks. As we participate in the Lord's Supper, what we're declaring, what we're testifying is that we trust in Him today. We may trust in Him very tentatively. We may trust in Him often marked by doubt and questions and a measure of faithfulness that is way below what it ought to be and what we would want it to be. But nonetheless, we're enabled and we're able to say that by God's grace, we trust in Him today. And so we testify to that as we participate. And as we participate today, we look forward to participating in drinking anew of the fruit of the vine and with Jesus in His Father's kingdom on that day. Well, let's pray.