

He Will Swallow Up Death Forever
Isaiah 25 | Pastor Jason Van Bommel

¹O LORD, you are my God;

I will exalt you; I will praise your name,
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

²For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the foreigners' palace is a city no more;
it will never be rebuilt.

³Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

⁴For you have been a stronghold to the poor,
a stronghold to the needy in his distress,
a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat;
for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,
⁵ like heat in a dry place.

You subdue the noise of the foreigners;
as heat by the shade of a cloud,
so the song of the ruthless is put down.

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.

⁸ He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day,
"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

*¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain,
and Moab shall be trampled down in his place,
as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.*

*¹¹ And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it
as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim,
but the LORD will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his hands.*

*¹² And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down,
lay low, and cast to the ground, to the dust.*

- Isaiah 25, ESV

Death

What is death? Why do we die? What can be done about it?

Madeleine L'Engle, the Christian author of *A Wrinkle in Time* and other books for young adults, said, "Death is contagious; it is contracted the moment we are conceived." But Mitch Albom disagrees. He says, "It's not contagious, you know. Death is as natural as life. It's part of the deal we made."

We all know we're going to die. And while it's not actually a natural part of life, Albom is right that "It's part of the deal we made." If you don't remember making a deal that accepted death as a part of the package deal, that's because the deal was struck long before you or I were born, by our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. Of course, they were deceived into making this deal by a lying serpent who told them they would not surely die. They should've believed the Word of God, their Loving Creator, who had given them life and every good thing in the Garden, but who commanded them not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for in the day that they ate of it, they would surely die. And, as we know, they ate.

And so, in swallowing the forbidden fruit, they ate judgment on themselves and on their posterity throughout all generations.

Since Adam and Eve, we are born mortal; we contract the infection of death at our conception. This reality has led to all sorts of evil and oppression in our world, as evil rulers have been able to compel people to follow their plans and do their will using the threat of death to uphold their tyranny. And even the ultimate tyrant of humanity, the devil,

uses people's fear of death to hold us in slavery. Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us this is why Jesus had to take on flesh and blood –

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (ESV)

Here in Isaiah 25, we get a glimpse of that wonderful day when death is swallowed forever and God's people enjoy true and eternal freedom and joy.

I. The Song of the Ruthless is Put Down, vv. 1-5

Isaiah 25 begins with a song celebrating the downfall of the ruthless oppressors of God's people, picking up on the theme of judgment from chapter 24 –

*O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you; I will praise your name,
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.*

The opening line of Isaiah 25 is vital to the whole chapter: “O LORD, you are my God.” This is a chapter that gives powerful hope, a stirring vision for the promise of future joy, but it is only a chapter that brings comfort to one kind of person, the one who can say the opening line: “O LORD, you are my God.” If the LORD is your God, then the victory He has secured for His people is your victory, the future hope is your hope, the eternal feast, the eternal end of death, the wiping away of every tear – all of that is for you. But not unless you can say from the heart that the LORD is your God.

How do you know? Well, one way is found right here in the second line of verse 1: If the LORD is your God, you will want to exalt Him and praise Him. You will want to worship Him and to tell people what He has done for you. You will long for the day when everyone will know Him for who He is and will honor Him as the one true God and only wise Savior.

God's people always have good reason to praise Him. Here, the reason is that He has done what He had long planned and promised – “*for you have done wonderful things, plans formed*

of old, faithful and sure.” What has God planned and brought about? It is the final judgment and downfall of the nations, depicted here as “the city.”

*For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the foreigners' palace is a city no more;
it will never be rebuilt.
Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.*

Throughout Scripture, God contrasts the human civilizations of the world, built by men and for the glory of man, with His Holy City, Jerusalem or Mount Zion. The human city is rooted in a began with Babel, which men built to make a name for themselves in direct disobedience to God, and which had a tower “reaching to heaven,” by which men thought they would not only make a name for themselves on earth but would reach heaven by their own efforts. This “city of man” is embodied in Nineveh, Babylon, Damascus, Tyre and Sidon, and later in Rome. The church father Augustine wrote about the city of man and the city of God in his great classic work of history, theology, and social critique called *The City of God*.

Here in Isaiah 25, we have a picture of the final destiny of these two cities. The city of man is here unnamed because it is not a single human city but the whole project of the city of man which is here judged and brought down to eternal ruin.

The strength of God as a refuge of His people from the world and the strength of this city of man as a refuge of the world against the judgment of God are contrasted in stark terms in verses 4-5:

*For you have been a stronghold to the poor,
a stronghold to the needy in his distress,
a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat;
for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,
like heat in a dry place.
You subdue the noise of the foreigners;
as heat by the shade of a cloud,
so the song of the ruthless is put down.*

God is an effective stronghold and shelter for His people against the wicked of the world, whose ruthless pursuit of God's people is like a storm encountering a solid stone wall. It evaporates like heat in a dry place. When God appears to judge the city of man and bring home His people who have sought refuge in Him, He absolutely silences and puts down forever the rebelliousness of ruthless men.

What are you trusting in as your shelter? Where do you hide yourself? Do you take refuge in entertainment and distraction to silence the call of God to repent and believe? Do you take refuge in your career and your income to secure your identity and your future hope? Or do you flee to the LORD for refuge and shelter against temptation, against your doubts and fears, against the world's relentless attacks on God and His people?

2. The Future for God's People, vv. 6-8

And then, after the downfall of the city of man, we are given the great and glorious future for God's people –

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the Lord; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

- Isaiah 25:6-9, ESV

A Feast

The first thing we see is a double feast: First, the feast the LORD prepares for all of His people, and then the feast God Himself to Himself.

First. God prepares a feast for all peoples – We can see this as a present, spiritual feast extended to all nations and also as the coming, future wedding supper of the Lamb. At the Lord's Supper, we share an anticipatory meal as we feast our souls on Christ, the Bread of Life, and on His blood that cleanses us from all sin. As we do so, we are lifted up to heaven by God's grace and enjoy a foretaste, a small appetizer, of the great feast to come.

And the feast to come is going to be a glorious, satisfying, wonderful feast. Sometimes even Christians are guilty of thinking in our hearts that God just really wants to deprive us of fun things, of indulgences, of pleasures, but that's a Satanic lie that denies the goodness of our Creator and Redeemer. God created us with the ability to experience pleasure, and He created all pleasures for us to enjoy. Sin distorts pleasure and makes it destructive and enslaving, but when God redeems us from sin forever and we are perfected like Jesus in His human nature, we will be free to enjoy all pleasure to the glory of God in complete freedom with no fear of being enslaved or controlled by our appetites – so we will enjoy “*a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*”

Meanwhile, God Himself will eat. He will swallow up death forever. Swallowing is often an act of judgment. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they ate judgment to themselves. When God's people brought sacrifices to the Tabernacle and the Temple, the sin offerings and guilt offerings were consumed by fire to the LORD, picturing the need for sin and guilt to be swallowed up in judgment. This is what Jesus did when He went to the cross, which is why He prayed, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” He knew He was going to have to swallow our sin and God's wrath, and in so doing, He Himself would be swallowed by death, which was depicted by His being put into the open mouth of the tomb. But while death had swallowed Jesus because Jesus had become sin for us, it was not possible for death to keep its hold on Jesus, because Jesus was and is, in fact, the sinless Son of God, the Righteous One. Once He had made satisfaction for our sin, death had to release Him. He became the firstfruits of the resurrection, the firstborn from the dead.

All who belong to Jesus – all who are in Him by faith – receive the forgiveness He purchased on the cross, are covered in His righteousness, and share in His undying life.

Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*” Though the bodies of believers die and are buried in the ground, they shall be raised. Jesus gave a preview of this when He

raised Lazarus, but a truer demonstration when He Himself was raised from the dead never to die again. Everyone who lives and believed in Jesus does not truly die. Our bodies die and are buried, but our souls already share in the eternal life of God and go to be with God forever immediately on our deaths.

When Jesus returns to fully and finally judge the world for its rebellion against Him and assault on God's people, He will extend His victory over death to all by swallowing death forever. When Jesus returns, everyone will be raised from the dead and no one will ever die again. Death will be no more.

Here's how we read of this in the masterful chapter on the resurrection of the body and the final defeat of death, I Corinthians 15 –

Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. . . .

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. – I Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-57, ESV

The End of Death & Tears

The end of death will be the end of tears, as the old order of creation passes away forever and the new creation that is already inaugurated in the Risen Lord Jesus will be consummated in eternal glory for Christ and all His people. The language of Isaiah 25:8-9 anticipates that which is more fully revealed in Revelation 21 –

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

– Revelation 21:1-5, ESV

3. The End Result of Faithful Waiting, vv. 9-12

Verse 9 of Isaiah 25 shows us the glorious result of faithful waiting: We get to be forever with the One we’ve waited for!

Meanwhile, verses 10-12 tell us of the final end for “Moab” which is representative of those who are close to the people of God but who do not believe and do not enter into the feast but who remain outside of the Mountain City of God.

*¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain,
and Moab shall be trampled down in his place,
as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.*

*¹¹ And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it
as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim,
but the LORD will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his hands.*

*12 And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down,
lay low, and cast to the ground, to the dust.*

We read of these people in Revelation 21, too –

6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” – Revelation 21:6-9, ESV

This is a sobering conclusion to this glorious future for God’s people. It should be a warning to those of you who are here and who are close to the people of God and the Gospel but who remain on the outside looking in – Come in and believe! Come and receive forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life in Jesus! Don’t remain an onlooker but be a full participant in the glorious kingdom of God so that you, too, may sit at the feast and enjoy the blessings of eternal life with the God you’ve waited for, the One who alone satisfies our souls.

Waiting is the Hardest Part

I remember very well waiting to get married. Beth and I had been dating for almost three and a half years, and we had been engaged for over two years. The final weeks after her college graduation and before our wedding were intensely busy and agonizing, waiting to begin our life together. Waiting is hard, but waiting is good when the One you’re waiting for is faithful and true and when being with Him forever is so worthwhile, so unimaginably glorious and joyful! The One we’re waiting for is coming! We will be with Him forever. The feast of rich food full of marrow and of well-aged wine is coming – We just need to keep looking to Him, trusting Him, and longing for Him – until that Day!