

The LORD Makes Us Ready For A Feast

How do you explain heaven to a child? Or, for that matter, how do you explain heaven to anyone? How do you describe that wonderful place that our LORD has reserved for us? How do you describe a place that is perfect, without death, without sin, without pain. How do you describe a place that is good, perfectly good. In the words we ponder this morning, the prophet Isaiah uses a very beautiful picture. Listen to how Isaiah describes heaven: *"Is. 25:6 On this mountain 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."*

Notice how Isaiah describes heaven: It's a banquet, a feast, a dinner. And it's not just any feast. It's a feast with only the best drink and only the best food. There are meats there. But, there aren't just any meats. They are not the weight-watchers, dry-as-a-deer carcass, low-calorie meats. No, instead they are meats that are full of fat and full of flavor. And the drinks are the same. They don't drink water. They don't drink wine mixed with water. They drink wine—and good wine!

Isaiah uses all of these as pictures for the joy, peace and comfort we will enjoy forever in heaven. But, as soon as these words leave his mouth, he knows that he will hear objections from the LORD's people—not angry, rebellious objections, but rather, questions and obstacles that need to be taken care of before there can be any banquet in heaven at all. And then Isaiah goes on to speak of these two big objections: *"Is. 25:7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."*

The huge obstacle that threatens to destroy this heavenly banquet is tears. For nothing can destroy a good feast and party like sadness. And what is it that causes this sadness? The cause of this sadness is death. When I was going to college in Minnesota, I had a friend whose younger sister died. And, one of the most difficult turmoils he had to go through was to eat a meal with all his family gathered around the table. But, there, where his sister used to always sit was an empty seat. How could they enjoy their feast with their sister and daughter gone? The huge obstacle that death brings to any party, banquet or feast is tears.

But, notice what the LORD says about this huge obstacle: *"Is. 25:7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces"*

The LORD will swallow up death forever. This is a strange way of speaking, isn't it? What does it mean to 'swallow up'? All throughout the Old Testament this is a favorite picture for completely, thoroughly getting rid of something.

And how did the LORD swallow up death? He accomplished this through Jesus. Jesus took away our need for tears with his holy, perfect tears in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus took away our need for tears by rising from the dead. He wipes away our tears forever in heaven and even right now. He does this with his gentle, enduring, unbreakable promises. He promises that those who have died knowing Jesus and the great victory he has won for them will be there at that banquet. That place at the table may be empty now. But we will see our brother or sister in Christ at the banquet in heaven. Or, if the LORD calls you home and the empty seat at the table is yours, the LORD will wipe away their tears with this unbreakable promise: Jesus has swallowed up death forever.

The LORD makes us ready for the banquet. He removes the obstacle in our way. He removes the tears by swallowing death. But there is still another obstacle. Isaiah tells us: *"he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."*

The LORD will remove the disgrace from all people. These words teach us a very important lesson. Sin brings evil, selfish, spiteful words. How many of us can look back in our lives and see that the sinful, spiteful, selfish words we have spoken have destroyed our relationships? It's one thing to use harsh words against us because we are Christians. But, how horrible is it to have people say mean things about us because we *deserve* it. We look back over a lifetime of sinful, spiteful, selfish words and see all the destruction they have brought. And what's the result

in our lives and in our hearts? Disgrace and shame.

How can you go to a banquet when you have spoken sinful, spiteful and selfish words to the person sitting across the table from you? How can you be ready for a banquet when they have done the same to you? No choice meat and not excellent wine will be able to cover up the hatred in that room. And the result will be clear: disgrace and shame.

But the same thing the LORD does with tears he does with the disgrace and shame. He turns it away. Jesus rose from the dead. He has swallowed up death and sin. Because Jesus rose from the dead no one will say mean, spiteful words against us. Because Jesus rose from the dead, at that banquet, we will never say mean, spiteful words ever again. Because Jesus rose from the dead we will never be ashamed again!

And just in case there is still some doubt left. Just in case we might wonder if all the tears will be gone and all the disgrace and shame will be turned away, at the end of that verse, the LORD includes four beautiful words. He says: *"The LORD has spoken"*. How do we know that the death and sin and tears and shame will be gone? Because the LORD promises. The same God who promised Abraham a son, delivered on that promise. The same LORD who promised to deliver his people from the abusive hands of the Egyptians delivered on that promise. The same LORD who promised that a virgin would give birth to the Christ, delivered on that promise. There are so many promises in the bible and the LORD has kept them all. Since he has kept them all, he will keep these too. He will prepare this banquet for you. And he will make you ready for this banquet.

But we still have one question left to ask: What will we do at this banquet? Isaiah tells us: *"Is. 25:9 In that day they 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.'"*

When we are in heaven we will rejoice and be glad. We will feast. We will pray. We will sing with unbroken voices. And that is wonderful for us to think about. For, even today we have a foretaste of that joy. We taste that banquet every time we gather together to study God's word. We taste that peace every time we sing the songs the saints before us and angels sung in our Divine Service. We taste that banquet every time we come forward to the LORD's Table for Communion. So, my brothers and Sisters, there is a great banquet waiting for us in heaven. It is a banquet without tears. It is a banquet without shame. But, don't forget to continue to taste that banquet now. Amen.