

Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶On this mountain
the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples
a banquet of rich food,
a banquet of aged wines,
with the best cuts of meat,
and with the finest wines.

⁷On this mountain
he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples,
the burial cloth stretched over all nations.

⁸He has swallowed up death forever!
The LORD God will wipe away the tears from every face.
He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth.
For the LORD has spoken.

⁹On that day it will be said,
“Look, here is our God!
We waited for him, and he saved us!
This is the LORD!
We waited for him.
Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!”

The Feast of Victory

I.

The big question on everyone’s mind...well, maybe not everyone’s, but some people are asking it...is “What is it going to be like this year?”

Canada already had their version, so maybe we could ask them. Ours is coming soon.

It has always been a happy time. Will that hold? Will it be more subdued? Will the family gather together, despite the circumstances in this moment of time? Some officials are suggesting that the usual gatherings would be reckless and should not be held in the same way they have been in the past, if at all.

I’m talking about perhaps the biggest feast day of the calendar—Thanksgiving Day. The day has always been primarily a “home” holiday. Some home among the family is selected as the gathering place. Others come bearing their parts of the feast. All day long the anticipation builds. There are delectable aromas constantly wafting out of the kitchen. The background noises of football have become just another part of the day.

Thanksgiving Day is typically quite the banquet. It’s not just to get enough place settings that you need to add leaves to the table; you need room for all the serving dishes. The plates from the cupboard just don’t seem adequate for the mountains of mashed potatoes and stuffing and green beans and cranberry sauce. Personally, I could do without the turkey, but most people like it. And who actually eats the pumpkin pie right after the big meal? You have to wait a few hours because there simply is no room left in the stomach.

Thanksgiving Day is one of those days we look forward to all year long.

II.

Do you remember any Thanksgiving Day feasts that were less than enjoyable? It’s not just that the turkey either got burned or wasn’t cooked all the way through. Too many

families just can't seem to put all their differences aside. The day starts with feigned pleasantries and there's some strained conversation about the weather or the football game or how the kids are doing in school, but it doesn't last.

Underlying issues start bubbling to the surface. The discord of damaged relationships begins to take over the day. Tensions rise as unforgiven hurts from the past replace the mundane discussions. Jealousy rears its ugly head; some family members are hurt or offended by the displays of opulence other family members appear to engage in.

Sometimes Thanksgiving get-togethers are just a microcosm of the problems and emotions of every other day. Sin so dominates our existence. It's like "The shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7, EHV). The heading above this lesson in the Evangelical Heritage Version is "A Banquet for All Peoples." Isaiah words hint at the *need* for such a banquet: there is a shroud, a burial cloth, covering the nations.

Shroud is quite a descriptive word. The English word shroud has as its first meaning "a burial cloth." Since "burial cloth" comes right after in the verse, perhaps the second definition fits better: "a thing that envelops or obscures." The shroud is the shroud of sin that just hangs there like a misty fog that just won't dissipate.

Tension at gatherings of family or friends are just the beginning. Hatred and jealousy and lack of forgiveness. Substance abuse and child abuse and espousal abuse. Lying and cheating and stealing and all cover-ups that accompany such fraud.

The stifling shroud of sin brings along with it all the other problems of life that have been added to a world choked with sin: natural disasters, wars and rumors of wars, political strife and sickness and sorrow.

On top of it all comes the burial cloth—the wages of sin—death. Death touches all of us. Loved ones die. No matter how young and vibrant and alive you are, you know that some day death will be coming for you, too.

III.

"On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of aged wines, with the best cuts of meat, and with the finest wines.⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations" (Isaiah 25:6-7, EHV).

This Old Testament Lesson is also used at another time of the year sometimes. Can you guess which festival day it would be? Here's a hint: focus on what God will destroy. Here's another hint: the last hymn for our service today is a hymn often used for that particular festival. The sermon theme for today has even been stolen from that hymn; it has become one of my personal Favorites—"This Is the Feast of Victory."

A week ago the Old Testament Lesson didn't have much gospel—it was mostly law. This week is the opposite. Other than the shroud and burial cloth, the rest of the text drips with the sheer joy of the gospel. Even the law of "shroud" and "burial cloth" is minimized by the joy of God destroying shroud and burial cloth.

The concept of a banquet of rich food and fine wines and the best cuts of meat is quite a way to describe the joy Easter brings year 'round, isn't it? Best of all, "He has swallowed up death forever! The LORD God will wipe away the tears from every face. He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth. For the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 25:8, EHV). The burial cloth that the shroud of our sins deserve has been swallowed up forever. The tears we shed because of the lack of forgiveness and the jealousy we face God promises to wipe away, along with the tears of the pain and sorrow we face from the loss of loved ones

and all the other hurts and challenges of this life. Even the shame the rest of our sins bring with them will be taken away.

“On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples...⁷On this mountain he will destroy” (Isaiah 25:6–7, EHV). How prescient Isaiah was! At the Holy Spirit direction he looked ahead to the mountain called Calvary where Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross, refusing to come down and save himself so that he could save each one of us.

The banquet was prepared on a mountain of pain and agony. Jesus took the beatings of the whips. He endured the agony of the spikes driven through hands and feet. His heart and lungs struggled with the downward pressure of the weight of his body all hanging from arms stretched wide on the cross.

Physical torture and pain might help *us* to understand a little bit of the agony our Lord Jesus endured, but that wasn't where the real suffering came. One of his sentences from the cross sums it all up: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, EHV). God abandoned God so that the burial cloth that had been stretched over all nations could be ripped to shreds once and for all.

As you will sing in the hymn in a matter of mere moments: “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, Whose blood set us free to be people of God. This is the feast of victory for our God” (Christian Worship, 265:1).

The pain and agony of the cross did not last forever, as it would for us if we were to suffer the eternal consequences for our sins. Jesus went to the grave, yes; but he had the power to bring himself back to life. “He has swallowed up death forever!” (Isaiah 25:8, EHV). He is risen; he is risen indeed! Death died when Jesus rose; death has been swallowed up forever. Though we must face death in this life, the eternal death that would be ours because of sin is something we will *never* face.

IV.

“On that day it will be said, ‘Look, here is our God! We waited for him, and he saved us! This is the LORD! We waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!’” (Isaiah 25:9, EHV).

What a cause for rejoicing! This is the Feast of Victory for our God. He has rescued us from sin's misery. We give thanks for the banquet of rich foods and aged wines and the best cuts of meat that forgiveness in Jesus brings us.

“Blessing, honor, glory, and might Be to God and the Lamb forever. For the Lamb who was slain Has begun his reign. Alleluia!” (Christian Worship 265:4-5). This is the Feast of Victory for our God. Amen.