

# The Death of Death for Believers

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Isaiah 25:1–12  
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For this evening's message, I thought we would look at one of the lesser-known predictions of the resurrection in the Bible, viz., the twenty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, verse 8. Isaiah wrote, *He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces.*

The prophet penned these words when Syria (to the east) and Egypt (to the southwest) were major world powers, but at times he seemed even more interested in another nation that used to be a major power and would be again, but wasn't when he wrote about it. What nation am I talking about? Babylon.

Actually, Babylon never had much of a chance. When Isaiah first mentioned it in chapter 13, he said that God would overthrow it like Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 19). Later, he saw a vision of a chariot and horsemen who announced, *Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground* (ch. 21:9). Several hundred years later, the apostle John repeated this in the book of Revelation. He wrote, *And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication* (ch. 14:8). In both passages, Babylon isn't just Babylon. It represents the great kingdoms of the world that exalt themselves in the place of God. These nations must be destroyed because they challenge the righteous reign of the Lord and his Messiah.

The chapters preceding tonight's text are mostly prophecies of judgment against Babylon, Edom, Arabia, Tyre and even Jerusalem. But why did Isaiah include Jerusalem? It's because Judah's kings sometimes looked to world powers for protection instead of trusting the Lord. Ahaz, for example, turned to Assyria for help. That was when Isaiah gave the virgin birth prophecy. He said that the real Savior of God's people is the least likely one of all — a little boy who didn't have a human father.

## Praise to the Lord

Now, with this background, let's consider what Isaiah wrote in our text. He began in verse 1 by praising the Lord: *O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.* Here he addressed God as Jehovah, the ever-faithful, covenant-making and covenant-keeping deliverer, and Elohim, the one who has all

power to do all his holy will. This is important because it reminds us that our God really does *wonderful things*, like judging the nations and showing *faithfulness and truth* to his people.

Our text emphasizes both God’s judgment and his mercy in verses 2 through 5. Verse 2 begins with the word *for*, introducing the prophet’s first reason for praising God. We should worship God because he destroys everything that rises up against him. The prophet wrote, *For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.* The city mentioned here is probably Babylon. Even before it could become great again, the Lord announced its certain destruction.

Verse 4 also begins with the word *for* because it gives Isaiah’s second reason for praising God. The same God who destroys the proud also helps the poor and needy. He has an eye toward protecting his people. Here’s what Isaiah said about this: *For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.*

Isaiah didn’t just give us ‘good’ reasons for praising the Lord; he gave us ‘great’ ones. The same God who made himself known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and adopted their descendants as his own, reveals himself as the God of the nations, the sovereign potentate who does his will throughout the whole earth.

Now, let’s not miss who we’re talking about here. Earlier in his book, Isaiah foretold the coming of David’s greater Son. We’ve already mentioned his virgin birth prophecy. Later, Isaiah described him with these familiar words: *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this* (Isa. 9:6–7). The Lord who keeps covenant with his people and judges the rebellious nations of the earth is none other than Jesus Christ. He’s the one Isaiah praised when he said, *O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name.* Even Doubting Thomas recognized this when the risen Savior invited him to put his fingers into his nail scars. He exclaimed, *My Lord and my God* (John 20:28).

## Swallowing Up Death

Continuing with our text, verses 6 through 8 provide a wonderful and glorious picture of the salvation God gives to his people.

It begins in verse 6 with a fabulous feast. Isaiah said that it would take place *in this mountain*, i.e., in Mount Zion. Zion was, of course, the hub of Jewish religious and civil life. It's where God's people offered their sacrifices to him. Jesus gave his life there for our sins. But in contrast to the Old Testament, where salvation was more or less limited to the Jews, this feast according to *the LORD of hosts* (the faithful commander of his heavenly army), would be for *all people* — for Jews and Gentiles alike, if they believe in Jesus Christ and embrace his redemptive work. Thus, the New Testament reports that *a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed* (Acts 14:1), and *there is neither Jew nor Greek ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

At this feast, the Lord promised to give his people only the finest delicacies — *fat things full of marrow* (the best steaks) and *wine on the lees well refined* (fully fermented, and mature). Our heavenly Father doesn't withhold any good thing from his children.

What a wonderful reminder of the gospel's promises! Doesn't the Lord give us an abundance of every blessing in his Son Jesus Christ? He provides complete forgiveness of all our sins (past, present and future), a righteousness that can withstand the most intense scrutiny and judgment, and a life that will never end. What more do we need? Jesus gives it all to us freely. Listen to the sweet invitation from Isaiah 55: *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David* (vv. 1–3).

There's one particular part of this salvation that's especially important. Isaiah mentioned it in verse 7. It's the destruction of a covering or veil. The prophet wrote, *And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.*

But what does this mean? What was this covering or veil? At first, we might think it was the curtain that separated the inner sanctuary of the temple from the outer sanctuary, which God himself tore in half when Jesus died to show that we now have access to him. But that's not what Isaiah meant. His veil covered all people and all nations. It was the one thing that, if allowed to remain, would prevent the Lord's feast from ever taking place. So, what was it? It was death. As long

as God's people die and remain under the power of death, there can be no feast — no fat things, no wine on the lees, just a victorious grave.

Verse 7 promises that this covering will be destroyed. And verse 8 is even more explicit. Listen to it again: *He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.* Death doesn't win; Jesus does. His victory is so thorough and complete that death itself is swallowed up and ceases to exist. We can stop shedding tears for our loved ones who die in the faith. Jesus said, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die* (John 11:25–26). Yes, it's still hard to say goodbye to them, just as Jesus wept at Lazarus' grave. But our sorrow isn't hopeless. It looks ahead to an even more wonderful life for everyone who comes to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, let's see how Isaiah's prophecy unfolded in the Bible. Several Bible passages either mention or allude to it.

The first of these occurs in the book of Hosea. Although it's not clear who wrote first, Hosea wrote, *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction* (Hosea 13:14). Both he and Isaiah predicted that God himself would destroy death once and for all.

The New Testament is even more explicit. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul wrote, *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death* (1 Cor. 15:26). A few verses later, he quoted directly from our text: *So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory* (v. 54). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul argued the historical reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection. Some of the Corinthians claimed there's no such thing as resurrection, but Paul insisted not only that the resurrection is real and Jesus himself already rose again from the dead, but that Jesus' resurrection is the basis for our future resurrection. He wrote, *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept* (v. 20).

Other passages that reflect our text include 2 Timothy 1:10 — *Jesus hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*; Hebrews 2:14 — *he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*; Revelation 20:14 — *death and hell were cast into the lake of fire*; and Revelation 21:4 — *there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*.

Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead guarantee that death itself will die, but those who believe in him will not. We and all his saints, gathered from every nation under heaven, will feast on the fat things and tastiest wine of gospel promises.

And finally, our text ends with another assurance that these things are so. God's promise to us, found in verse 9, says, *And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.* Then follows God's promise of judgment against all the nations and people who reject his salvation. Here I want you to note that the Lord compared these rebellious people to Moab, which, like Babylon, represents everyone who is hostile to God and his people. His justice will prevail.

Having considered Isaiah 25 this evening, there's still one question we haven't explored, viz., how is the tremendous contrast in this chapter possible? How can God be full of love and mercy toward some, even rescuing us from the death we all deserve because of our sin, and pour out nothing but wrath toward others? We're not talking about God's fairness here, but about what some perceive to be a conflict in his character.

Of course, we know that there isn't a conflict in God's character. Like him, we can befriend our neighbors, who love us, without being particularly fond of burglars and vandals, who want only to steal and destroy. We don't see this as a conflict in ourselves, so why should we regard it as a flaw in God?

But even more than this, the Bible doesn't shy away from affirming everything about God's character, at least to the degree he's revealed it. The New Testament especially isn't embarrassed by such things. We see the awesomeness of God's judgment in Revelation 9. When the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, releasing massive plagues on the earth, things were so bad that people demanded death. Revelation 9:6 says, *And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.* But in Revelation 21, we find exactly the opposite. The holy city, new Jerusalem, descends from heaven with unspeakable blessing for everyone who looks to Jesus Christ for salvation.

How can judgment and mercy coexist in God? It's because Jesus Christ bore God's judgment for us. Romans 3:25–26 says, *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus* (Rom. 3:25–26). God's righteous standard hasn't changed. He's not treating one group differently than another. It's just that Jesus' blood and victory over the grave have destroyed

the veil that covered us. He paid for our sins and changed our status before God. And now, the one who was once our judge is our Father, and all is well. Amen.