

# The Glory Song

*The Gospel According to Isaiah*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 25:1-12

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Let's take our Bibles and turn to Isaiah 25. I picked these hymns for this service without really realizing that that middle hymn that we've just sung, "Lord Speak To Me That I May Speak," is a hymn that I chose for my ordination and then I looked at the date and I think it was either the 18<sup>th</sup> or the 19<sup>th</sup> of May that I was ordained on a Sunday to the Christian ministry. It just took me back to my home church which is a bit like this physically in the lay-out and I had a little moment to myself there. That's what you were observing. That's totally irrelevant to you but I just thought I'd pass that on just so's you know that there's more going on in my head than meets the eye.

Let's turn together to Isaiah 25. One of the things that you will notice if you ever take the time to read through Luke's gospel is that there is a feature in Luke's gospel that is perhaps just characteristic to Luke itself and that is the number of times in which we find Jesus at a meal. In fact, one scholar has suggested that you can divide Luke's gospel up this way: Jesus is either going to, sitting at or coming from a meal. Meals are very important in Luke's gospel and when you add that fact to the other fact that in the gospels Jesus previews the Messianic future, that is the future for the people of God, he frequently does so in terms of food. For example, when he's demonstrating how he has come to meet the needs of his people, what does he do? He feeds multitudes of them: over 5,000 on one occasion; over 4,000 on another occasion. With the 5,000 it was 5,000 men with women and children besides, perhaps as many as 10,000 people, he feeds them. In his parables. For example, the parable of the ten bridesmaids, he describes the future, the people of God, in terms of a great wedding feast with welcomed guests seated and secure and being well-fed shut in with the bridegroom while everyone else is excluded.

And Jesus' emphasis on food, on the wedding feast, on the security of his people, on the satisfaction of his people, that picture that Jesus uses over and over again doesn't come out of the blue but you find it reflected in various parts of the Hebrew Scripture including this passage that we're looking at this morning. For here is God's great big future plan for his own people, chapter 24 and the chapters that have preceded it have kind of gone from being very clear in terms of the people they are talking to and about, that is, mentioning specific nations, specific people, specific historical locations and events which were yet to happen when Isaiah wrote them or spoke them, that had been fixed on the minds of the

people of his day because in a variety of ways he had brought their attention to these realities by having them put on paper, witnessed to and then kept in the local government office as a record that Isaiah had said such-and-such a thing would happen in the future. Or on another occasion, going around for a couple of hours every day in his boxer shorts and getting cold in the winter and very hot and sunburned in the summer in order to fix it in the minds of the people that during that period what he was saying for three years was what was going to happen in the future to Assyria and to Babylon.

Now, he did that in order that the people of his day and the people of subsequent days would listen to him and take him seriously as a prophet of God but when we get to chapter 24 of Isaiah, he's looking now beyond historical time, that is, beyond his own historical time, beyond our time to the end of history as we know it. Chapter 24 describes the end of the human story. Chapter 25 describes the beginning of the eternal story and that's where we come onto the scene. In chapter 24, we see the secular city of the world coming to its final end. We see the people of God there as gleanings, that is, as a remnant. They're not in the majority; they are among the offscouring of the earth and in the midst of the agonies that they go through, in the midst of the normal slings and arrows of outrageous fortune to which they as God's people are exposed day and daily, we find out of that emerging their faith. If you look at chapter 24:14 they lift up their voices and they sing for joy. They may not have much at a human level to be joyful about but their focus is on the future and they lift up their voices with joy. Look at verse 16, chapter 24, "From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One." Here are the people of God from all over the world and they're expressing their faith in God in the midst of the trials they're undertaking. In spite of being caught up in the normal events of life, of sickness and disappointment and grief and so on, here they are and in the midst of that, what are they doing there? Lifting up their voices in praise to God. Then by the time you reach the end of chapter 24, in verse 23, there they've come to the end of their journey. Their pilgrimage is over; their sojourn here has come to an end. Camp life is giving way to permanent life "for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders." Here is the climax of this age and the beginning of that age, the age to come. The state of glory itself has begun to dawn.

So, what these people sang by way of faith and hope while they were in the journey, as we do today, by the time you get to chapter 25, they're saying it from the position of having arrived in glory, having come home at last into the presence of God. Listen to them as Isaiah sees the kind of thing that will be on their minds, the minds of all God's people when we get home in the end. Verses 1-5: they praise God for his supernatural acts. "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name." Here are the people of God and as individuals they are exalting God. The very same language that is used earlier on which tells us that objectively, whether we say it or not, objectively, whether we recognize it and applaud it or not, God is high and lifted up. He is high and lifted up. He is exalted. And what happens when God's people start to praise him is they say what is true about God. They express what is reality about God. They say to God, "You are exalted and I want to now exalt you with my praises. You are lifted up. I want to lift you up with my voice. You are exalted and lifted up and very high. I want you to be very high with my voice. I want all that I am to be at your disposal to magnify in the

ears of everybody around me how great and how exalted and how wonderful and how high and how lifted up you are as the only God there is.”

So they're exalting God and I want you to notice they're exalting God because he acts first of all, for the individual. You notice this element of personal salvation. It begins in verse 1, “O LORD, you are my God.” You are my God. This is personal. If you look at the Hebrew Scriptures, this is the most fundamental, the most elemental element of real religion. “O LORD, you are my God.” Here is the question that you and I can ask each other this morning as we come into this room: are we able to say about God, “O LORD, you are my God. You are mine. You belong to me. You are my God. I love you. You love me. I trust you. Your hand is on me. O God, you are my God.” Can you say that this morning? Do you know that's all you need to say to be a believer. That's all you need to say. That's as low as you need to step, as it were, in order to pass from death to life, in order to pass from darkness to light. It doesn't require very much except that you believe God and you're able to say to him, “O LORD, you're my God. You're my God.” Before I'd read any theology, I was able to say to him, “O LORD, you are my God.” Before I understood the creeds and confessions of the church, I could say to him, “O LORD, you are my God.” When I was a little wee boy, I could say to him, “O LORD, you are my God.”

It doesn't matter how much you know. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter how distant from God you are. Today you can leave this place being able to say to him, “O LORD, you are my God.” Because although God works with a people, plural, although God works with a community, plural, a church, a congregation, an assembly, and he delights to bring this people together into the assembly of his people, into the congregation of his people, nonetheless as with many of the songs of praise so in this song of praise, it begins with the individual person being able to say, “O LORD, you, you are my God.” Can you say that this morning? Is that something that God has written in your heart? Can you praise God as an individual for all that he's done for you?

And what does he praise God for? I want you to notice this, “I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things,” marvelous acts. Two words are used there which in chapter 9:6 are used in the noun form and there, they're translated “Wonderful Counselor,” and they are titles of the Messiah himself. The Messiah who is the Wonderful Counselor, has done wonderful things. Wonderful things for his people. This idea of wonder and wonderful is usually, not always but usually, applied to supernatural activity. When God created the world, that was not a natural action; that was not natural processes at work. The Bible describes creation as an act of God: out of nothing, he creates the heavens and the earth. It is a miracle. It is the first miracle. Just as Jesus in his first miracle turned water into well-aged wine, God takes nothing and makes something, then takes the something and forms it into order and gives life to it. God is a creative God.

And you know one of the great miracles is sitting next to you in the church. They may not look like a miracle or they may look like a miracle depending on your perspective but you are sitting next to miracles in this room. Do you know that people do not become

Christians naturally? It is a very unnatural thing especially in our world today, isn't it? For people to become Christians. They have all kinds of odds against them. We're reading right now about people in Muslim countries who have become Christians and who are facing death, the death penalty. There is a young lady doctor who is facing death because she has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. What does it take to take somebody who is a Muslim and for that person to become a Christian? What does it take to bring someone who is an entire materialist or secularist or atheist and for that person to become a Christian? It takes a miracle. It takes a supernatural act of God. Stephen Olford who pastored in New York City and before that pastored in Duke's Street where I was minister, used to say, "A Christian is somebody who demands a supernatural explanation. You cannot explain them away." That's why in the New Testament "if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation." It's an action of God at the same level as God creating something out of nothing, bringing people from darkness to light and from death to life. The resurrection was a miracle. The Incarnation was a miracle, a miracle of creation in which God became flesh.

"You've done wonderful things." God has done all of those things and he's done all the things according to his plan. Do you notice that? "Things, plans formed of old," verse 1, "faithful and sure." Actually, those last two words are a play on one word in the Hebrew, "faithfulness." God has done all this because he's planned it this way. He has determined it this way. God is the one who has ordained whatever comes to pass as our confession says. God does not act off-the-cuff. I'm always doing that, acting off-the-cuff: no plan, just kind of initiating on my feet as I go along which really, really frustrates the session and the staff and my family and my wife and everybody who knows me, no plans. God has plans. His plans are from old, they are of eternal value. He has been plotting, planning, forming his scheme for the salvation of the world. God has a script and history is being written according to that script that God has planned.

He acts for the individual. He acts against the proud. Do you notice that? Look at verse 2, "For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin." The city is not specified here, no doubt it's the city just referred to a few verses later in what we call chapter 24 where he is referring to the world city, that is he refers to it chapter 24:10, as the city of meaninglessness. In the New Testament this is the city called Babylon which is amalgam of Babel, with the very first city in the Bible. You remember, it was established with a particular point of view and ethos and intention and that was of organizing humanity without any reference to God, men achieving his own salvation, his own security. After the flood, as people tried to assemble themselves in such a way we will not let this happen again. We will look out for ourselves. We will have no intervention of God here because we won't believe in God. And Babel becomes Babylon and Babylon becomes a mixture of Babylon and Tyre in the book of Revelation. It becomes the secular city, the city of the world. It becomes the world system and the city refers to the world system and God acts against that proud world system.

There is coming a day when that system will never be rebuilt, it comes to an end. This world system will come to an end and the people in it who are caught up in the conflagration of its end, we are told, will glorify and fear God. Everybody will. There is

coming a day when “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Did you know that? Not out of love and faith but out of awe and wonder and desperate terror. But there is coming a day when everyone will admit and acknowledge Jesus is Lord, when everyone will acknowledge that God has had a plan for history and has worked out history according to his plan. When that secular city falls, people will be filled with awe and wonder but not with joy and not with salvation.

But God not only acts against the proud, he acts for the oppressed, verse 4 and 5. The oppressed here as his own people. They are described as the poor, the vulnerable, those in distress and those suffering from the heat. When I was in Scotland I always had to explain the last one because they could not understand how you could possibly suffer from the heat but perhaps you know what that means. Certainly in the Middle East they knew what that meant. That was one of the worst things that they could think of, being out, exposed to the powerful heat of the midday sun. And Isaiah brings these three words together: those who are poor and in distress and suffering from the heat. In other word, this is the worst thing he could possibly think of. Here are the people of God, here are the people of God who are marginalized. Why are they marginalized? They're not marginalized because they don't have money. They're not marginalized because they don't have a house to live in. They're not marginalized because of what they wear. They're marginalized because of what they believe and they're regarded as being “you poor soul. You poor misguided, mistreated, misdirected person.” It doesn't matter how many degrees you have, how many doctorates you have, they are regarded by the world as being poor souls. How often does the world say: people believe because they need a crutch to lean on? God acts for such and it's such people who praise him for his supernatural acts.

Then secondly, they praise God for his superabundant acts. Look at verse 6-8. Remember that the key verse for this entire song, chapter 25, is the last verse of chapter 24, “the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.” The Lord reigns. Here the idea is of a new Emperor who has just captured territory and you're part of his territory and he's establishing himself, he's introducing himself to you as your conqueror and your King. Very often in those ancient days what would happen would be there would be a kind of inaugural banquet and the key people would be invited to the inaugural banquet. So, you remember God the Lord brings Israel out of Egypt, he brings them to the desert, eventually brings them to Mount Sinai, he comes down and he visits them. They see the cloud and they hear the thunder and they hear the voice speaking to Moses and they see the lightning flash and God is there. And after God has delivered his word to Moses for the people and established his covenant with them, the elders are invited onto the mountain and they sit down at a banquet with the covenant Lord to celebrate the inauguration of God the Lord as King over Israel.

That's the background to this picture we have painted here. God the Lord reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and his glory will be before the elders and on that day, look at this in verse 6, the Lord of hosts will throw a party. The Lord of hosts will throw a party. Look at this, “On this mountain,” that is on the Temple Mount, on Mount Zion. Increasingly in Isaiah, Mount Zion represents the heavenly Jerusalem. It's our destination.

It's where we're going. The place where God dwells, where God is manifested. It's a temple. God has his permanent address there. And on this mountain, that is, in the very presence of God on Mount Zion, "the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples," notice that: Gentiles are included in this. Salvation is of the Jews but the salvation that is of the Jews and that a Jew bought our salvation and the Jews communicated to us the way of salvation, this salvation now comes through the Jews to the world, to the nations, to the peoples, to you and to me. All nations, verse 7; all peoples, verse 6 and 7; all faces and all the earth, verse 8. All are gathered now to Mount Zion.

You know that tremendous description in Hebrews 11: you have come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the innumerable angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven and to God, the Judge of all and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. That's where you belong today if you're a believer and one day you will be there as a believer. Whenever we gather for worship, we gather, as it were, around Mount Zion. We don't see it but when we sing God's praises, we're joining with the praises of innumerable angels and archangels, the cherubim and the seraphim and the whole host of God's people wherever they are across the world and down through the ages. We gather together but one day we will not simply be doing that with a veil hiding our eyes from the reality, one day we'll be there. That's what is being pictured here.

What does salvation look like? Right here, this is what salvation looks like. It looks like a bunch of sinners gathering together Sunday by Sunday and admitting their sin and receiving the Lord's pardon. Right now salvation looks like this: it looks like people who are recovering sinners. Doing better at not sinning than we did but still not not sinning. It looks like people on a journey somewhere. But what does full salvation look like? Full salvation looks like this: the journey has ended. Full salvation looks like this, one word that is most frequently used to describe the capstone of our salvation, what is it? Do you know what it isn't? It isn't a church service. Can you believe it? Church services are done with and the reason they're done with is we don't need them anymore. Preachers are done with. We're going to have to retrain and do something else. It's going to take some time but I guess I'm going to have time. But they'll be done with. Why? Because we'll be there. We'll be there. That's the picture that's painted.

Here is the language that is given to us, that Jesus uses, that John the apostle uses and that Isaiah uses here. Look at this, "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." Let me translate that: succulent, dripping richness of the food and the wine that has been allowed to mature on the lees and increase in alcoholic content and then well decanted. This is, in other words, the best Isaiah can think about. High cholesterol. Very tasty. The best you can imagine. Now, the Bible doesn't do that blithely. Why is it doing that? This is something that you can get your teeth into, you can get your head around this, you can understand the party, you can understand the feast. It's going to be as real and as tasty and as edible and as wonderful and as real as a great party.

I'm really glad in a sense that our destiny is not a spiritual one. I'm really glad that God has chosen to save us spirit and body so that the fullness of what we are as humans is provided for there. Look at this: God deals with something. Verse 8, the people who have come to the party have a covering or a veil over their heads. We might want to say that they have a cloud hanging over them. If you went to Scotland where we used to live, we used to often have days like this, usually in the summer, where by midday it was as dark as it is midnight here because of the low clouds. The clouds would be right down hanging over the tops of the houses. No sun in sight. Dark, dark cloud followed by heavy, heavy rain. Misery all around.

These people, you notice, they have a cloud hanging over them, a covering cast over all the peoples, a veil that spread over all the nations. That word for "veil" means "a very, very heavy, thickly woven thing," that is so thick and so thickly woven that it obliterates all light altogether. What is that veil? He tells you, what is it? Verse 8, it is death. The people who come to that banquet have throughout their whole lives had this covering hanging over them. What? Death. Death with all that it brings with it. Death that separates people. Death that breaks love relationships. Death that brings sickness, pain, tragedy into our lives. Everything that is associated with death. The people who come to this party have lived under that shadow all their lives like you have, like you do today. Some of you are mourning the loss of a beloved spouse. Some of you are still recovering from the loss of your parents perhaps or the loss of a child, maybe a child you didn't get to know because they died in the womb. Maybe you're struggling with your own diagnosis, your own long-term future. And all of us live under the shadow of death and what's going to happen on that day. Listen, listen, verse 8, "He will swallow up death." He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that's cast over all people, the veil that's spread over the nations. "He will swallow up death forever." He won't just remove it, he'll swallow it up and then it's gone. It's gone forever. Gone forever.

Not only that but do you notice he will go around each person individually, listen to this, the sovereign dignity of the Lord God, the Lord God, the sovereign God, the reigning God of the universe, will do what? He "will wipe away tears from all faces." You bring your tears with you, he deliberately goes from person to person to dry each eye, to remove the cause of the tears: the memories, the failures, the hurts, the grief, all the causes removed. He will dry each eye and not only that, the reproach of his people. What's the reproach of his people? The reproach of his people are the taunts that we receive from the world every day because what we profess and what we experience don't match. We profess to know God but we can't show him off to anybody. We profess to love God and yet God doesn't seem to do much for us sometimes. And the world taunts us. We live under the reproach of the world as the world reproaches us for claiming to believe in a God who can heal and yet who doesn't heal most of us. On that day, he removes the reproach of his people.

We praise God for his superabundant provision. Isn't that an amazing thing? Listen: salvation is eternal bounty, hilarious joy. In the words of an old hymn, "The shout of those that triumph, the song of them that feast." And so we praise God lastly, look at verse 9-12 for his saving acts. Of course, not everyone will and if you look at verse 10,

11 and so on, you will find a reference to Moab and there Moab simply is an example of people who in their arrogance and pride reject the rule of Yahweh the Lord of hosts because they don't want to be saved. They don't want to be saved. But for those who are among God's people, notice this, verse 9, "It will be said on that day, 'Behold, look, this is our God.'" They'll say to each other, nudging as they see the Lord Jesus Christ in his risen splendor and they'll say, "There he is. There he is. Remember, that's him. That's him. We waited for him. There were long days of waiting. We hoped for him. They were long days of hoping. People mocked us because we were hoping for this day. People taunted us because we were expecting this day. We used to wonder when every time we sat down at the Lord's table and we said we're eating and drinking this until he come, whether he would ever come. Now it's arrived and there he is. Behold. Behold, this is our God."

And on that day each one of them will appear before God in Zion. This is our God. This is the Lord. You notice everybody is together. They're all together talking to each other. The language in the original injects this concept of excitement and amazement, "Look! Look! Behold! Wonder! Behold, there is our God, the God we've waited for, the God we've been expecting." By why are they expecting him? Because this is when he will save them. This is salvation. You notice that? Let's rejoice and be glad in his salvation. This is it. This party, this great reunion, this great meeting, this superabundance, this is our hope made real. And on that day their eyes are full of God, their mind so attuned to God's will that everything else is in perspective because, "Look, there, there, there is God."

Our youngest daughter, Sarah, unlike her father, is fairly level-headed and not given to theatrics and emotional outburst. She'd been planning her wedding for a long time, from about the age of 15 she'd been designing dresses, selecting where the reception was going to be, it was going to be in a castle, Airth Castle, and what she would like to have on the menu. Everything was very well organized but then she had to find a man, of course, just to complete the picture. Eventually she did find her knight and the day of the wedding came. I remember that morning, after all the bridesmaids had left, it was just Sarah and I alone in the house waiting for the car to come and take us to the church. It had been a bright beautiful morning up to that moment and then suddenly it all darkened over and the rain came down, one of those Scottish days where the rain comes down vertically and also horizontally so you need two umbrellas, really, one to protect you from what's coming down and one coming from the side. Well, she got agitated then, let me tell you, and then we tried to get her out to the car. There was the hair to protect and there was the dress to protect but somehow we managed to protect the hair and the dress, get her into the car and then I got in beside her and we moved on the way down to the church and she was inconsolable. "This has destroyed my day," she said. "This has destroyed my day. I can't think of anything worse that could happen on this day." She was distraught and I can't remember what as a Dad I said. I think I said, "The day is not over yet, dear. Don't get me going because if I start I'm going to be more theatrical than you can."

Then we got down to church and, again, making sure the umbrellas were there, we got her out, the hair was still okay, the dress a bit wet but it was okay. Then I took her arm and we walked into the church and coming down the aisle something changed. As we



came down the aisle, my wee girl saw her man, her Steven turn around and he was overcome when he saw her in that dress. Tears poured down his face. Steven doesn't do that. He's into rugby and sports and cars. And her face lit up and it stayed lit up for the rest of that day. Going to the castle, having the meal, having the dancing and she said to me at the end of the day, "Dad, it's the greatest day of my life."

And here we are, we're in the middle of our earthly life and pilgrimage and there are days when you feel this is the worst day, this is the worst day, this has destroyed everything. Let me tell you there's coming a day when you will see him, you will see him whom our souls love and all these days that have been disasters will disappear. All of them, dear friends, disappear because you will have got home. You will be home and you'll be with others, people you know, people you love, reunited with them. You will be at the feast. Samuel Rutherford wrote some words that Annie Cousins put into a hymn,

"The Bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear Bridegroom's face;  
I shall not gaze at glory,  
But on my King of grace:  
Not at the crown He gives me,  
But on His pierced hands;  
The Lamb is all the glory,  
Of Immanuel's land!"

Let's pray together.

*Father, we pray that today you would give us that earnest expectation of and that faithful waiting for the day when you are demonstrated to the watching universe to be reigning on Mount Zion, the day when we come home, the day when we see him who once took on flesh and who still to this day carries our humanity and is exalted just as one day we will share. Help us to live from day-to-day and moment-to-moment looking forward to that great day we ask you in Jesus' strong name. Amen.*