

Life Marches Victorious Over Death

Isaiah 25:6-9 • 2022-04-17 • 2022 Easter Series "Victorious"



Have you ever noticed what traveling shows are most often about? The host of the traveling show might be surrounded by incredible vistas and huge architectural wonders. But what is it that they want to share? The camera comes in close as they say something like, "Let me tell you about one of the best things about this place. It's this restaurant." And then the next few segments of the show are the host stuffing their face with some delicious meal. Apparently, the food is so good it is worth our time watching someone eat it. Once I had the opportunity to spend several days in central Mexico. And do you know what our group found? The food was incredibly delicious! The street-side shops with their displays and the restaurants we visited really knew how to prepare a plate. But there is a side of the city that the travel shows don't show you. On our way to the restaurant were the children who looked like they never really got proper nourishment. Sitting next to them a mother was begging for help. Some things can't be fixed by mere delicacies and rich tasting food. There were other problems surrounding the delicious food. On about the 14th day of our trip someone in our group got hit hard with a stomach illness. It's hard to enjoy a meal when it bites back and strikes you with pain and illness. So much beauty, so much to see, such good food. But you couldn't overlook the pains behind it all.

I'm sure that's why some travel shows are so popular. They build off the hope, "There's got to be something better." The joys we have in life are tainted by many things –guilt, shame, pain, and even death. And it's not just food. Any pleasure we find will soon enough fail us and not give lasting joy. Will we ever experience real and lasting enjoyment of anything? This morning we look at a portion of prophecy from Isaiah 25 and we see our answer.

The people of Jerusalem in Isaiah's time had their fill of rich food and pleasures. They had enjoyed relative safety and peace for a number of years. They had it all it seemed. Until Isaiah came along and announced what was just around the corner: *"You women who are so complacent, rise up and listen to me; you daughters who feel secure, hear what I have to say! In little more than a year you who feel secure will tremble; the grape harvest will fail, and the harvest of fruit will not come."* (Is 32:9) And it happened just as God foretold. The commander of the army of Assyria had torn down walls of the cities of Israel and Judah. He had successfully taken many rulers and princes from their thrones. He had taken captive many people. The people of Judah trembled at the thought of having him march into their land.

After many threats from their enemy, they had reached a climactic point. Hezekiah, king of Judah was walled up in Jerusalem. And the army of Assyria had them all surrounded. Food was running short. And who could enjoy it anyway? The taunt came from a messenger of the king of Assyria: *"Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, 'The Lord will surely deliver this city.'"* Then came the appealing suggestion: *"This is what the king of Assyria says, 'make peace with me and each of you will be taken to a land with new wine, bread, and vineyards.' Where are the gods of all the other lands we have conquered? How can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"* (Is 36:15ff)

It had to have been appealing to have new land and new food to enjoy! It sounded better than what the commander of the Assyrian army said they'd be eating if they stayed in Jerusalem. I'll leave you to read the rest of Isaiah 36 to find out. I'll just say it isn't a pretty thought. Waiting for the Lord was going to be hard!

We are surrounded by promises of enjoying things on a higher level. Most commercials are designed to have you think they offer the one thing that will make you happier and more satisfied. The young child reasons, "If I grab as many sweets and candies as I can, I'll really have it all." That young child often grows older but doesn't grow out of this thinking. A young man might find himself objectifying the opposite sex. The girls he meets are viewed as merely a means to bring himself pleasure. He turns to pornography and reasons, "I'm not hurting anyone." His addiction grows and masters him. It ruins his life and the lives of those he should love. He doesn't know what love really is. He's racked with guilt and sinks into a depression. Tears flow. A young girl finds that taking a few extra medications helps her calm down. The promise of greater pleasure begins a spiral and addiction to drugs. Tears flow. There has to be a better way! The young couple thinks merely getting married will fix all their problems. It doesn't. One of them has an affair thinking it will fix all their problems. It doesn't. Tears flow. A woman believes her boyfriend will love her more if she commits an abortion. But all it does is reveal how her boyfriend is incapable of love. She's in tears. A man with back pain can't handle it. He self-medicates with alcohol. He is consumed by what he drinks. I could go on and on. The human condition is similar to that of a little child wanting more and more candy until he vomits.

The Christian isn't free from such pains and tears. These situations are shared by those who grew up putting their hope in the Lord. That's how it was with the ancient Israelites trapped in Jerusalem. "Join me and you'll find things will go well. You will eat, drink, and be satisfied." So spoke the Assyrian commander. So speaks the devil to us all today.

We prepare a banquet for ourselves. We try to satisfy the human heart but face tears and death.

This is the way it has always been. From the time when Adam and Eve desired a mere bite of something more until today –we search and strive for what will please but can't obtain it. No matter how hard we work or strive, we can't

get what we really desire. The human condition is a constant struggle and constant lost battle. What's wrong with enjoying a little bit of food and wine? Nothing. But every bite seems to have behind it a toothache, a hidden worm, a price we can't afford. All the blessings and gifts we strive for are all lost in the mess of sin. Sex, marriage, food, drugs, all gifts of God to be used for our benefit. But all ruined by the works of our hands. No matter how tasty, how sexually attractive, how fine, or rich our strivings will fail us in the end.

But we lost the battle before we even set foot on this earth. It is there from our very conception. The curse is there when we drink the purest water and the healthiest of foods. The curse is there when our bodies succumb to disease, illness, and age. Will we ever be able to fully enjoy anything we can buy or make with real and lasting joy? No. We will face the curse and will all die. Until then we will all wear the veil of mourning for those suffering and dying around us.

And that is why this prophecy from Isaiah is so rich! It tastes so sweet! We cannot ever enjoy food and wine so long as there is sin and death. So, this prophecy is precious: The Lord himself will prepare the feast! *"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."*

The Lord came in the flesh to prepare this great blessing! He came and he filled that wedding banquet with the finest of wines. He came and he multiplied food for over ten thousand as they ate meat and bread. But the Lord came in the flesh to provide and prepare far more than even that! He came as a man to drink the bitter cup we could not drink. In the garden he prayed that Thursday night, "Father if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done." And on the cross he swallowed the bitter curse and the whole world's cause for tears. His cup was the suffering and agony on the cross. He died for us.

But his death is our victory! *"On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples."* A more poetic imagery exists in the Hebrew of this prophecy, "He will swallow up the covering that covers all the people, the woven veil that veils over all the nations." It is a prophecy that he would destroy our cause for tears. All people grieve and wear a veil of mourning. There is no human being who does not cry. I don't care how tough you are —you once cried as a child and you will cry when your friend, your parents, or your spouse dies. And you'll likely cry over many things in between. Jesus came to swallow up that veil, soak up our tears. Life swallows up and marches victorious over death.

Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb of Jesus. Mark records that all the disciples who had been with Jesus were mourning and weeping. John records for us that Mary wept as she went to the tomb. You can imagine the veil of mourning was still over her face and the other woman as they went to the tomb Easter morning. Talk about a cause for tears! The one they had put their hopes in was dead.

"He will swallow up death forever." "Mary," Jesus said as he approached. He was living and well —back from the dead. Alive once more Jesus put aside the curse of death. It doesn't say that Jesus wiped Mary's tears that day, but you can imagine how her tears changed! *"The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces."* Isaiah prophesied. *"He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth."*

Are you carrying guilt? Do you find yourself in tears? Guess what? You're human. But you know what? Jesus is more than human. He is also fully God. The death he died counts for yours. And he has risen back from death. And he who lives has destroyed death. He lives to wipe away your tears. He lives to remove your disgrace from sin and fear. It doesn't matter whether your tears come because you are guilty of divorce, abuse, guilty from an addiction to pornography or alcohol or drugs. It doesn't matter whether your tears are from death or your own illness and cancer and impending death. This is what was prophesied, *"The Lord Almighty will prepare a rich feast... for all peoples. He will swallow up the mourning veil... the one over all peoples. He will swallow up death. He will wipe away the tears... from all faces."* Did you catch that? All peoples. All nations. All faces. The Lord has done this for you. Your disgrace is gone. It is covered. Jesus took it. And he presents you with his everlasting feast of joy!

You couldn't prepare the feast. But tune into the pages of Scripture and hear the testimony, "Let me tell you one of the best things about this place. It's God's feast prepared by Jesus!" The day has come when this prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled! Those who first saw Jesus alive knew what had just happened! The Lord himself had wiped away death and wiped away all tears! The Lord himself had taken away all disgrace. There is no "first class" or "second class" or "more important" or "less shameful" when it comes to God's people. We are all equally free of all disgrace and sin! And still today whatever the cause for tears and disgrace we find victory and feasting from the Lord. And today we sing and point to Jesus, "This is the Lord, we trusted in him!"

Will we ever enjoy lasting blessings? Put your hope, trust in Christ, the living one. The word for trust here in the Hebrew also means "to wait in hope" or to "look for." The people in Isaiah's time had to wait in hope, trusting the Lord would deliver them. He did. An angel came and killed all the Assyrian army. But the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is when the Lord prepares that perfect feast. No tears, sin, curse, pain, or death can stop this great victory feast! One day soon all our tears will be forever behind us. We will see our Lord and say, *"This is the Lord, we trusted in him, and he saved us! Let us rejoice today and forever and be glad in his salvation."*