

The Lord of the Feast

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[0 : 00] Our passage this morning for the sermon is Isaiah 25, six through nine, and it'll be on the screen behind me.

Before we read this, I wanna say a word about it. This is, despite the way that it looks, it's actually poetry in the Old Testament, and it's a poem that puts before us an image, a picture of what the gospel really is, a picture of the hope that we have for the future, for those of us who follow Christ. And so as we read it, it's really more something to envision than it is something to analyze. And so I wanna invite you to sort of draw the picture in your mind that's being painted by this text.

Let's pray before we read it together. Fathers, we come to your word. Even in the simple practice of reading it, we pray that your spirit would be active, moving, and not only teaching us new things, but changing us and molding us and warming our hearts and melting our hearts to love Christ and to see him lifted up.

That we would find satisfaction and joy in who you are and what you have done for your people. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen. Isaiah 25, six through nine.

[1 : 21] 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.

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.

And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, behold, this is our God, we have waited for him that he might save us.

This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Some of you might know that at the bottom of the royal mile in the graveyard of the Canongate Kirk is a tombstone that was the inspiration for Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol.

You'll have to forgive me for a moment while I talk about the Christmas Carol in the middle of January, but I think it's worth it. Anyway, in that book and in that story, there are two scenes of two different Christmas eaves.

[2 : 40] The first happens in the present and it's Ebenezer Scrooge, closing shop on Christmas Eve, where he's ravenously counting his money and keeping fastidious records.

He accuses his clerk of basically pickpocketing him for getting Christmas Day off, but having paid vacation. He begrudgingly lets his clerk go home on time and then himself flies home to eat a quick meal of functional gruel and a glass of water and go hurriedly to bed.

That's a bleak Christmas Eve. The second Christmas Eve happens in the past when Ebenezer Scrooge is taken by the ghosts of Christmas past to look at previous moments in his life, and it's when he was a clerk for Mr. Fezziwig.

And on that Christmas Eve, as soon as the clock struck seven, Fezziwig jumps up, claps his hands, and commands his workers to put their pens down and help him quickly close shop and clear the furniture, and then comes a feast full of meats and pies, bread, beer, cakes, desserts, talking, music, dancing, and all around joy to celebrate the day of Christmas.

What's the difference between the two? Well, the difference is that Fezziwig knew what mattered, and so he was able to try to get his work done. And so he was able to truly feast.

[4 : 06] He knew how to celebrate, even if it cost him a little bit, because he knew that what mattered was love and relationships, and ultimately, the story of Christmas and God's grace.

Scrooge loved his money above all, and in reality, Scrooge's money was his feast. And so his life was empty and cold and lonely, and his reputation was out of a hard and mean man.

And in a way, to one degree or another, we're all Scrooges. We're all people who gorge ourselves on things that don't satisfy, whether that's food and sex and drink and money and power or things that are more subtle, like achievement or reputation or control or even our own morality or piousness as somebody who's a good person, all the while missing out on the real party of the Feast of the Gospel.

And the cure for this, the antidote, is when God, through his words, shows us something better, shows us a true Feast, a Feast of Feast, so to speak, that is the thing that truly satisfies.

And it calls us, who are Christians, back to that table again and again, and for those of you who aren't Christians, it calls you for the first time about offering something that really satisfies your need.

[5 : 28] And so we're going to dive into that picture and look at it in a bit more detail. And there's really just two things I want us to see. I want us to see how good the Feast is. And I want us to see who is hosting the Feast, the goodness of the Feast and the Lord of the Feast.

So as we look at the goodness of the Feast, you can imagine maybe an invitation to it. The first thing we ask is, where is it? And in the text, in verses six, it says that it's on this mountain.

Well, what mountain is that and what does it mean? Well, what it means, and I'll show you how this is true, is that where the Feast is is actually in Eden, the Garden of Eden, so to speak. Why do I say that when it just says on this mountain?

Well, the phrase this mountain refers to Mount Zion in Jerusalem, which is where the temple was built. It was sort of the epicenter of ancient Israel. That's where God was.

In the temple. But the Bible also calls Mount Zion the place where God's temple is, the Garden of the Lord. And this is why if we were able to walk into the temple and see how it's decorated, all the carvings and all the sculptures are really things that are in a garden.

[6 : 40] The temple was always meant to remind the people of God of the Garden of Eden, the place where God walked with his people. And so by saying that this feast is on this mountain, it's a loaded statement.

It's a statement of saying the feast is really a homecoming. It's going home to the Garden of Eden, going home to the place where God is and where God welcomes his people.

It's a place where, first of all, there's no death. You see what it says in verse 8? He will swallow up death forever. And before that, in the verse before that, it's called the veil or the covering that is cast over all people.

So this feast is really the opposite of eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. That's a statement that sort of says, just let loose because death is the ultimate nullifier of meaning.

It's the thing that cuts everything short. It makes us go home early, feeling terrible, and it's all over. And nothing we did mattered. This feast, where death has swallowed up, is the opposite of that.

[7 : 47] It's a feast of hope. It's a feast that never ends. I mean, the hardest thing about a really good party is that it ends. This is one that doesn't end. And it's a very specific kind of hope.

It's not just a vague sense that death is gone and we fly away in the clouds to be with God forever because the apostle Paul used this verse in 1 Corinthians 15 when he was explaining to God's people about the resurrection of the body.

So it's a very specific hope of getting a new body. It's very tangible. It's not vague. It's not abstract. It's like Jesus came out of the grave with a body that could shake hands, give a hug, eat a meal, and worship God.

And that is the kind of body that we get. And for those of you who are grieving, you see the hope already that for those who are in Christ, those who have followed Christ, there will be a day when death is wiped away and when the bodies that we have that have aches and pain and disease that give out, they will be made new.

And those things that crowd in and nullify the meaning of life will be taken away. This new Eden, so to speak, this mountain where God is hosting the feasts is also a place where there's no sorrow.

[9 : 02] It also says in verse eight, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. And the writer of the book of Revelation picks up on this in verses 21. He says the exact same thing, that God will wipe away the tears from our faces.

And that means two things for us. It means that sorrow is part of life. And becoming a Christian doesn't mean you're never sad again. And in fact, if you know God, there's really all the more reason to be sorrowful because you see how the world is not the way it's supposed to be.

But it's not just that, it's that also there will be a day when that is taken away. There are people, God through His providence gives different sorts of lives to different people and there are those who walk through almost every day of their life with sorrow and loss.

But the promise to them is that Jesus weeps with those who weep. He calls us to weep with those who weep and that there will be a day when that will be done away with.

And if that is you, even just for a moment, or if that's the pattern of your life, or for those of you that haven't experienced deep sorrow yet, it will come. But the hope is that the Lord will take that away. [10:14] This new Eden is also a place where there is no shame. You might remember the story of the Garden of Eden where our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned and the very first thing they did was throw on clothes because they were ashamed.

And there's nothing worse than being naked when you're ashamed. And God says, I will take away the reproach of my people. This will be a place where there's no pretending, there's no posing, there's no sort of giving fake answers about how we're doing because there's no shame.

There's just the freedom of being fully known and loved and made whole by God.

And this is one of these things that as Christians we're called to have foretaste of in our community. It's never perfect, we all experience shame, we spent time in our service already confessing sin.

But the point is that God forgives it. And that our shame is taken away by him, by something outside of ourselves. He says, you don't have to pretend. I know that you're sinners and I love you anyway.

[11:20] And if you'll just trust in Christ, I will take that away. And if you'll let that sink in, if we let that sink in that'll actually change what we're like as a community. We won't be the things that Christians are usually accused of which is a bunch of fake pious posers.

But instead people who are able to admit that we have shortcomings and weaknesses and that we go wrong and that we make mistakes. And we can admit that because God says it's in the admitting of that where you find the blessing of having it cleansed and taken away.

I think about this in my own marriage. I've been married five years and I feel like I'm a newlywed because I still feel like I don't know what I'm doing as a husband. And one of the ways I feel like I don't know what I'm doing is I'm so defensive with Andrea, my wife.

Whenever she has a criticism that she wants to bring my way. Even though I know that she loves me and she before a lot of people committed to stick with me no matter what. I'm so defensive and I refuse to acknowledge where I've gone wrong.

We always have an argument and it takes me sometimes as quickly as 30 minutes, sometimes as long as a couple of days to come back and say, you know what, you were right. And that's a moment where if the gospel had sunk in a bit deeper for me, where I believed it when Jesus says, you know what, you're justified because I forgive you, not because you're awesome, but because I forgive you.

[12:44] So just relax and listen to what your wife has to say. I would be a better man because of it. I suspect maybe you're thinking of similar relationships in your own life and that's the invitation to have a foretaste of this feast is to contemplate the goodness of the gospel and to move toward being people who enjoy the freedom of knowing that our shame is taken away by Christ.

So pulling back, where's the feast? The feast is a place that is basically a whole new creation. Like I said, it's a homecoming because it says that the reproach of God's people will be taken away from all the earth.

That word earth often is translated land. This is not sort of a metaphorical idea. It's the place that God made. The story of God's redemption is not, He's gonna trash His creation and whisk us away, but instead it's one that He's gonna make all things new.

The end of the Bible says that. It says, behold, I make all things new. Not behold, I'm throwing it in the garbage can. And so that is a deep and a mysterious hope. I have no idea what it will be like, but there will be a day when God makes heaven and earth new.

When we are taken back into the Garden of Eden and when really what the Garden of Eden is about, which is perfect fellowship of God will spread over the whole earth because God will have freed His people in an ultimate way from sin and death.

[14:12] Continuing to look at the goodness of the feast, the next thing you might think about is who's invited to the feast? And the answer is everybody is invited. Not everybody will come, but everybody is invited.

It says all peoples in verses six and seven, all nations, all faces, all individuals in verse eight. So you have to remember that this text in Isaiah was written to the people of Israel, the people of God. And so the first thing that this would have meant to the people who first heard it was, oh, not just Jews, but also Gentiles, which is the Jewish word for everybody else in the world, but them. I would wager about that most people in the room are Gentiles. There might be a couple of you who are ethnic Jews, but for those of us who are Gentiles, it's good to remember, and we lose sight of this, that our participation in the people of God, that Jesus' gift of forgiveness to us through His death is really an invitation into a story that really wasn't our own to begin with. The point of saying that is it just, it invites for gratitude and humility. We lose sight of it because we don't really talk about that anymore, but in the early church, if you were to read Paul's letters, almost all of them are dealing with the fact that the Jewish Messiah made salvation available not just to the Jews, but to everybody who will receive Him.

[15:37] And most of us are beneficiaries of God's promise that is foretold here in Isaiah, that it will not just be for one nation or one set of people, but for all peoples.

We can kind of pull back from that though and ask ourselves and apply that to our current situation that it also means that the gospel is not just for us in this room, it's not just for the British or the Scottish or the Americans or the free church Presbyterians.

It's not just for the religious and moral and pious people of the world. In fact, if you were to read through the gospels, there are several parables and scenes where Jesus goes to a party or he talks about a party.

And the theme running through all of them is that there are unexpected people who are welcome. The broken, the lame, the crippled, the sinners, the bad and the good all together are invited in. And what that means is if you're here and you're hearing this and you're not a Christian and you're thinking, well, I'm not really the type of person to be a Christian because my life's kind of a mess. [16:43] I sin, I'm not a good person, I'm not a moral person, I'm not a religious person. Forget that. The message of God's word is that you're invited and that those qualities of who you are are immaterial because everybody's invited.

And in fact, all the moral sort of upright standing people of the world are kind of just faking it. So we're all sort of in the same boat. For those of us who have received the invitation, so to speak, for those of us who do follow Christ, it's maybe a moment to think about who would we like to disinvite from the party?

Who is it that we just kind of wish we didn't have to deal with? People who are different than us, people who have harmed us, cultures that we just don't get and don't like interacting with, and the messages, it doesn't make any sense for us to be exclusive because God is not exclusive. He's exclusive in the sense that you have to accept the invitation, but the invitation goes out to all, all sorts of people. And so we should reflect that in the way that we welcome people and not just a church on this Sunday morning, but into our lives and into a relationship with us. What's being served at the feast? And the answer is delicacies are being served. You see what it says? It sounds a bit repetitive in verse six.

[18:13] A feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine, well-refined. If I won't bore you with it, but if you could read the Hebrew, the thing about it is that it all rhymes right here.

It's sort of one of those easy to see moments where somebody's writing a poem because they're excited about something, and the point is that the food that's being served at this feast is luxurious. God is not a minimalist. This is not Scrooge's bowl of gruel and tepid glass of water, just meant to get in through the night, but this is a party. This is delicious delights, so to speak, and exquisite wine.

That's highly nutritious. The thing you have to remember about the ancient world is nutrition was thought of basically in terms of calorie content. So it was good for something to be greasy. We think about nutrition in slightly more different ways because we have so much abundance in our culture, but rich food full of marrow basically means greasy food because that's what was highly nutritious in that moment.

[19:22] But it's not just that it was highly nutritious, it's that it was luxurious. Aged wine, well refined. This is wine that somebody took time with, that they strained the dregs out of it.

The kind when you lift it to your nose, you smell all sorts of interesting things, and it compliments the meal. This is a feast of delight, which is why it says that the tears and sorrow are replaced with gladness and joy.

There's a movie that maybe some of you have heard of called *Babette's Feast*. I don't know if you've seen it or not, but it is about a commune of very ascetic Christians living in Uteland in Denmark, which is sort of sticking way out in the sea.

And when the movie starts, the scenery is all in sort of winter whites and grays of this very austere, hyper-religious sort of group of Christians living in this area of Denmark.

But one of the members of that community is a French maid named Babette, who found her way there through various circumstances, and she found out that she had won a lottery, so she had a lot of money to spend.

[20 : 36] And so she decides to spend it all on hosting a feast of every amazing French delicacy that she can think of.

And all the people in the village accept the invitation, but they're really afraid of it, because they're afraid of indulgence, and they're afraid of enjoying, and so they make a pact together that they're gonna go and they're gonna do it, but nobody's gonna talk about enjoying it.

They're just gonna go through the motions, but they're gonna make sure they retain their veneer of austerity. And so you get to the part of the movie where the feast is being served, and all of a sudden the cinematography itself becomes really colorful and rich, deep-used, and the food is amazing, things I've never heard of, things that were very expensive, and there's lots of wine served, and the guests start to enjoy themselves immensely, and they're packed not to talk about it, starts to unravel a bit, and the effects of coming to this feast and enjoying the food and the wine, but also the company of each other, and the graciousness of the host who did this for them, begins to melt their suspicions, and there's a couple who used to be in love that aren't anymore and haven't been for years, and they rekindle their old love.

There are old grievances that are wiped away and forgiven as new relationship is restored. And I think that, in a way, is a picture of what feasting does, what true feasting does, and what the feast of the gospel is meant to do to us, which is, it's to be enjoyed so that it warms us toward each other, and so that we are moved by the gratitude that we have toward the host of the feast.

One commentator on this movie said that the feast in *Babette's feast* was similar, in a way, to the Lord's Supper, because it reminded the guests of the infinite grace that had been allotted to them, and they did not even wonder at the fact for it had been but the fulfillment of an ever-present hope.

[22 : 45] And I think that's right, that the feast that is on offer in the gospel is the fulfillment of an ever-present hope, and I also think that it's right that that's part of what we're experiencing when we come to the Lord's Supper, together as a community.

I'll talk about that for a minute, because we're actually gonna be doing that next Sunday morning, that I think maybe it's just the tradition I grew up in, maybe you'll relate to this.

We tend to think of communion as sort of this individualistic moment of penitent self-flagellation, where we sit there really solemnly, staring at our knees, thinking about our sin.

And the reason we do that is because we know that it's important to have a certain reverence about why Christ died for our sins, and that we come to the Lord's Supper aware of our need for forgiveness.

But I think it's a bit one-sided, because there's a way in which we sort of act like we can atone for our sin by being more morose about our partaking of communion, when really the message is communion is someone has already taken care of it.

[23 : 53] And the death that Jesus died was not a death of defeat, but a death of victory. And it was a gift. And he came out on the other side of it, so that we will too, and so that when we come to the Lord's Supper together, it's not simply a moment of thinking about our own shortcomings and need for God's grace, but it's also a moment of being together as a group of people celebrating the rich delicacy of Christ that God has put on offer to us.

So that means it's okay to look around at who's sitting next to you during communion. You don't have to stare at your knees. It's okay to enjoy the taste of the sweet wine, because it reminds you of the sweetness of God's grace, and to the taste of the bread that nourishes you.

It's a moment of holding attention between right sadness over our sin, but a celebration of God's goodness. And I would urge us to keep that in mind as we come to the Lord's table next week.

For those of you in the room who might not be Christians, and actually this is true for those of us that are, part of the message here too is that this feast of God's goodness that is on offer is what you really want out of life, whether you know it or not.

All the yearnings you have for either power, or success, or relationship, or for food, as lunchtime gets closer, all of those things are satisfied in a most ultimate way by Christ, and it's when we try to satisfy them with lesser things that our lives go wrong.

[25 : 33] C.S. Lewis wrote, "We are half-hearted creatures, "fulling about with drink and sex and ambition, "when infinite joy is offered to us, "like an ignorant child who wants to go on "making mud pies and a slum, "because he cannot imagine what is meant by a holiday at sea.

"We are far too easily pleased." So the challenge is don't settle for the slim pickings of life, of money and ambition and sex and power and reputation, whatever it is for you personally, whatever it is for me, don't settle for that, hold out for the real thing, hold out for the fulfillment of the ever-present hope, realize that all those yearnings are there to point you toward the God who made you, and that in Christ, only there will they be satisfied.

The prophet Isaiah actually says later in his book, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, "and your labor for that which does not satisfy? "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, "and delight yourselves in rich food." That's the invitation to all of this.

The difficult thing about all of this though, is that most of it lies in the future. I've spoken about foretaste, appetizers, if you'll accept a crude image of this, but most of the fulfillment of this feast lies in the future and it's hard to wait.

It's really hard to wait. I have a three-year-old who can't wait, and he's just like me. I'm not very good at waiting either. And so what is it that will actually sustain us to that moment?

[27 : 11] And the answer is that I've saved the best for last, and that's knowing the Lord of the feast himself. Look at what it says in verses seven through eight. "And he will swallow up on this mountain "the covering that is cast over all peoples, "the veil that is spread over all nations.

"He will swallow up death forever." The imagery of God swallowing is no mistake. The person who wrote this poetry knew what they were doing and they had a way with words.

And the great feast that we have described is possible because the host, the Lord of the Feasts, has actually taken death into himself. And so do you see how this goes?

Don't you see that Christ is the one who ate death as it were so that we could feast upon life? Christ is the one who consumed our shame so that we could be honored guests at his Father's table.

Christ is the one who drank the cup of God's wrath so that we can enjoy the wine of new life. That's why in John two, he is the true master of the Feasts at the wedding of Cana, who supplies the new wine of new creation.

[28 : 23] In John six, he is the true manna in the desert, sustaining God's people on their way to the Promised Land. In Luke 15, he is the true elder brother at the prodigal son's feast who does not stand sulking in the corner because he resents his Father's grace, but he is the one who gives of himself to lay out the Feasts because the lost children have come home.

In Revelation five, he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by giving his own flesh and blood. Christ is the Lord of the Feasts and really Christ is the Feast.

So do you see what the rich food and the fine wine on Isaiah 25 really is? Remember in John six that Jesus said of himself, my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

The real Feast, the real delight, the real thing that satisfies, that takes away death, that takes away shame, that makes the renewal of all creation possible, is Jesus himself.

And knowing that is the thing that will enable us to wait, the thing that will keep us going until the day when God brings these things to fulfillment because he is the one who loves us and gave himself for us.

[29 : 45] And it is knowing that love that is the real nourishment and delight of life, the real thing that satisfies. And when this goes in and when this moves us at a heart level, not just information that we know or not just an interesting way of pulling a lot of threads into the Bible, but something that actually sinks in so that you realize how much Christ has given up to host you and me at his father's table.

That is the thing that will be all the cure for all of our false feasting, the cure for our scrooge-like bowls of gruel that don't really get us there.

And knowing this and being reminded of this over and over, this is why Derek says the gospel is not, you know, the ABCs of Christianity, it's the whole thing.

So every day, this is why we read the Bible, it's why we pray, it's why there's city group, it's why there's church on Sunday, not because we can go through motions, but so that we're reminded of the gospel and so that Christ has lifted up over and over again so that we can be sustained until that day when God makes all things new and until that day when we will join with all the guests of the feast and say, as it says at the end of this text, behold, this is our God, we have waited for him that he might save us, this is the Lord, we have waited for him, let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Let's pray together. Father, we pray that you would take the feeble human ramblings about your word and make them alive and make them go in by your spirit that you would change us, that Christ would be lifted up and that we would find that in him our ever-present hope is fulfilled.

[31 : 48] And Father, we pray that you would nudge us to accept the invitation, whether that's for the first time or whether it's being reminded of it for the millionth time, that we would find our delight in you and that in that we would be changed, not just individually, but as a community of people who are honored guests at a feast where we have no right and where we aren't worthy.

But because of your great love, we have been made worthy and we are welcome because of you. Let me pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.