

Many people have observed that one of the greatest joys in life is shared meals. For example, the best part of my day is 5 pm, because that's the time when I eat dinner with my family. Can you think of a meal that has given you great joy? Maybe it was a Thanksgiving when everybody was together. Maybe you went out to eat on a date with your spouse. Maybe it was a lunch with an old friend. FOOD + LOVED ONES = JOY.

That's why it is such a powerful image when God's Word today pictures the blessings of God as a banquet. It says, **"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich foods for all peoples" (Isaiah 25:6)**. Notice that the LORD is Host of this banquet. Do you like to host dinner parties? Maybe you like cooking and you like having people over for dinner. That's an excellent quality to have. It's called having the gift of hospitality. But if we look at our lives as a banquet, it's important that we let God be the host. It's important that we don't look at God as just an add on to our life. Instead we should look at him as the host of our lives. What I mean by looking at God as an add-on to our lives is that we look to God for blessings, but we also want to be able to live our lives our own way apart from his will. If we look at God that way then we are kind of like the person in Jesus' parable who tried to get into the banquet without wedding clothes. He tried to get into the banquet on his terms, not the terms of the host. When we see God as not just an add on to our lives but as the Host of our lives, then we want to approach him on his terms.

And God wants us to approach him in repentant faith. It says, **"In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him and he saved us.'" (Isaiah 25:9)**. In Hebrew it literally says, *"We waited for him and he saved us"* (Isaiah 25:9). There were times when things looked bleak, but they waited for God to come and save them. Can you think of some times in your life when things looked bleak? Maybe you lost your job. Or maybe you or a loved one got a terrible diagnosis. At times like those, trust in the LORD. He will come and save you. He might do that in this life. Maybe another job opportunity comes up. Or maybe the medication works. And you can say, "I trusted in God and he saved me!" It's sometimes even harder to wait for God when he doesn't save you in this life. I'm thinking of times when the medication doesn't work. Even then, wait for the LORD. He will come and save you. On the last day Jesus is going to come back and he going to transform your lowly body to be like his glorious body. And in that day you will say, "This is the LORD we waited for him and he saved us."

That's how the Host wants us to approach him, with repentant faith. And when we approach the host with repentant faith, then he bestows on us great blessings. It says, **"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" (Isaiah 25:6)**. Can you think of the best food that you have ever eaten? Maybe as a gift someone took you to a restaurant that would be way beyond what you would be able to eat at otherwise. Or maybe you or your spouse is a very good cook and there was one recipe that worked perfectly. What are the best blessings that God could possibly give us? Maybe the best blessing he could give us is lots of money so that we could regularly buy the best food. Or maybe the best blessing God could give us is a good paying job so that our family can be financially stable. Those would certainly be wonderful blessings. But wouldn't the greatest blessing God could give us be his forgiveness. Would the greatest blessing be that the hug load of guilt would be taken off of our shoulders? His forgiveness means a life free from guilt and an eternity in heaven. When you put it that way, his forgiveness seems like the best of meats and the finest of wines, and all material blessings pale in comparison. And through Jesus, forgiveness is exactly what God has given us. Through his death on the cross, Jesus has taken all your sins away and to our soul that is like the best of meats and the finest of wines.

But there's one thing that especially puts a damper on our human existence and that's death. This doesn't happen to me all the time but it has happened to me before that I have thought about my own frailty and my

own mortality after I have a picture-perfect day. Isn't that strange? Why would I think about my own weakness and mortality after a really great day? Well, like I said this doesn't happen to me all the time but it has happened before that I have a really good day. Maybe it's a day off. The weather is really nice. I get to spend time with my family. We enjoy really good food together and spend time outside. Everything is almost perfect. But then there's a little voice in the back of my head that says, "This isn't going to last forever."

What are the things that make you think about your own frailty or your own mortality? Maybe you realize you're getting older and that causes you to think about it more. Maybe the pandemic has caused you to think about your own frailty. Or maybe you hear about a relatively young person that gets cancer and it causes you to think, "That could be me." Death puts a damper on the joy of this life.

And sometimes our response is either to try not to think about it or to just enjoy life while we can. But God's Word today gives us a much better answer. Our human feasts can't last forever because we are mortal. But God is immortal. And he bestows on us immortality. It says, **"God will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8)**. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine if death were just gone? It's hard for us to imagine life without death but that's exactly what this says God is going to do.

But someone might say, "God could never do that. God could never take away death." Well, Christ was raised from the dead. And it caused Paul to say, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54). But you might say, "Well, that was just Christ." But Paul spent a whole chapter of the Bible saying that because we are connected to Christ, the resurrection to glory is going to happen to us too. When you read passages of the Bible like this, you are reading about your future, something that you will experience.

Death has caused so much hurt in all of our lives. But God says that he is going to take all of our mourning and crying away. It says, **"The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isaiah 25:8)**. If you are a parent you can remember times when you have comforted your child when they are crying. You have told your child, "It's going to be OK." In the same way God is going to comfort his believers because he is going to take away death. In the Book of Revelation, it says, **"God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4)**.

Instead of mourning, there will be joyful feasting and great songs of praise to God. We'll say something like Isaiah said, **"Surely this is our God; we trusted in him and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9)**.

And because we know that this is our future, it affects our attitude in the present. When we have joy in this life, we don't have to think to ourselves, "This is someday going to end." Instead, because of Christ, our joys in this life are just a faint pointer to what we will experience at God's banquet. Amen.