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Sermon Notes

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God Will Swallow Up Death Forever

Isaiah 25:1-12

Three awesome things are celebrated in this incredible chapter: 1) God's sovereign plan, formed in the mind of God before the foundation of the world; 2) God's astonishing power to convert, to transform ruthless nations, conquerors and oppressors, to praise Him and worship Him in glory; 3) Jesus' marvelous victory over death... swallowing up death forever

God does all of these things to bring us to our knees in praise and worship for His glory!!

I. Praise God for Converting Ruthless Nations! (vs. 1-5)

Isaiah 25:1-5 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago. ² You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt. ³ Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you. ⁴ You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall ⁵ and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

A. God Does Everything for the Praise of His Glory

1. John Piper's marvelous statement in "Let the Nations Be Glad"

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever."

2. Ephesians 1 makes this plain:

Ephesians 1:4-6 In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace

Ephesians 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:14 to the praise of his glory.

3. So Isaiah 25 has a marvelous tone of praise for Almighty God

B. Our PERSONAL God

Isaiah 25:1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.

1. Isaiah 13-39 exalts the God of the nations... God who rules over the ends of the earth... the greatness and majesty of God is proclaimed
2. In the preceding chapters, we have celebrated the sovereign power of God over each nation... the Babylonians, Assyrians, Moabites, Syrians, Philistines, Edomites, Egyptians, etc.
3. But we should never lose sight of the fact that God does this that He might be known INDIVIDUALLY and worshipped INDIVIDUALLY by each of His chosen people
4. So Isaiah makes his love for God very intense and personal in verse 1:
 - a. O Lord... You are MY God...
 - b. This eternal God, who sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, for whom all nations are like tiny weak grasshoppers and like drops from a bucket of water... this mighty God who holds the mountains in His hands, and weighs the dust of the earth on a set of merchant's scales; who cups His hands and scoops all the waters of the seven seas like tea in a teacup... this mighty God is still MY GOD... YOU ARE MY GOD
 - c. So it was with David in Psalm 139:

Psalm 139:1-3 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

- d. So it is for us as Christians... as we look at the mighty work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we can say with the Apostle Paul

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

5. Isaiah begins this marvelous chapter very intensely and personally... I will praise You... You are my God... I live to exalt and praise Your name

6. God does everything for the praise of His glory... evidence of His saving work in our lives personally is when we can and do make these kinds of statements:

Isaiah 25:1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name

C. Why Isaiah Praises God: His Faithful Execution of His Perfect Plan

Isaiah 25:1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.

1. God has made a sovereign plan before the foundation of the world...
 - a. In His wisdom, before God even said “Let there be light”, God determined what should surely come to pass
 - b. God weighed all options, and chose the path of human history that would most accomplish His ends, His ultimate purpose in creating all things: the PRAISE OF HIS GLORY
2. That sovereign plan extends to great things and small things alike

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

3. The centerpiece of that detailed plan is the salvation of the ELECT:

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

4. Here, Isaiah is astonished at the MARVELOUS things God’s plan includes... they are like miracles... in this case, the destruction of mighty empires, while at the same time saving a godly elect remnant from those same empires... former conquerors who have now been humbled and who come in faith to serve the living God
5. Done in “perfect faithfulness”... what God has purposed, that He will do

Isaiah 14:24 The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.

- a. Faithfulness = commitment to do for His people what He has promised
- b. God has expressed His plans to us, and He is bringing about His good purposes for each of us
- c. This is a measure of God’s character... of His perfect faithfulness to His word; it would be a dishonor to Him not to bring about His plans

6. MARVELOUS!!! A MIRACLE of salvation!!! Former enemies, Gentile nations whose bloody boots of conquest trampled the world, are stripped of their power but allowed to live so they can turn and be converted and worship the mighty God

D. The Crushing of the City of Rebellion... the City of Man

Isaiah 25:2 You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.

1. Augustine: "City of God" written at the time of the fall of Rome to the Vandals
2. Some thought that the fall of what pagans called "The Eternal City" spelled the end of human civilization
3. Augustine answered that there are two rival cities: the City of God, which is Christ's eternal Kingdom; and the city of man... which represents temporary human culture and achievement
4. The city of man continues in every generation: Isaiah uses the image of the "city" here to represent human's working together and staying together for maximum prosperity and military protection
5. The walls of the city, they feel, make it secure... safe from all enemies
6. With that security, they have moved out to conquer the world of unwalled villages around them
7. But now, they are themselves destroyed... when they are destroyed, their walls turned into a pile of rubble, the survivors are HUMBLED... made low, they turn now to the God who struck them

Isaiah 25:3 Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.

8. Yes... this is the story of Babylon... the fall of Babylon told in the Book of Daniel
9. But it is a regular pattern throughout human history
10. The ruthless oppressor CAN BE CONVERTED!!!
 - a. Think of Nebuchadnezzar... the mighty empire-builder himself... whose mind was changed from that of an arrogant man to that of a beast... and then changed from a beast to a genuinely HUMBLED man

Daniel 4:34-35 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵ All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

- b. Or again, think of God's power in transforming Saul from a vicious oppressor to a humbled blind man, whose heart now at last sees the glory of Jesus Christ

Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

Acts 9:4-6 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Acts 9:18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized

11. So, here in Isaiah 25, the ruthless oppressors are CONVERTED by the miracles of God's sovereign grace
12. Examples from church history abound:
 - a. The Romans themselves were vicious oppressors, but many of them were converted in the first three centuries of the church
 - b. The barbarian tribes of northern Europe were vicious, terrifying, ruthless oppressors...sometime around A.D.725, Boniface went into the woods of Germania near modern-day town of Fritzlar in northern Hesse, and chopped down a sacred oak tree—"Jupiter's Oak"—while chopping, a supernatural wind blew the tree down!! Boniface then climbed up and preached Christ on the stump; those war-like people, stunned at the display of boldness and power, converted to Christ in large numbers
 - c. The fierce, terrifying Vikings, plunderers of Christian monasteries, fearless blasphemers, were themselves conquered by the gospel of Jesus Christ by the twelfth century

Isaiah 25:3 Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.

E. God Rescues the Poor and Needy from Ruthless Oppressor

Isaiah 25:4-5 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall ⁵ and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

1. While the oppressors were in their heyday, they tormented weak and defenseless people
2. They were utterly merciless... sweeping in from the borders... they were like a violent storm, laying everything low in its path; behind them, a path of utter destruction
3. Verse 4: God was the REFUGE for the poor, and the SHELTER from the storm

Illus. Mountain bike ride in Smokies... powerful electrical storm along with hail came upon me suddenly; I dismounted the bike and ran looking for one thing: SHELTER from the pelting hail and terrifying electrical storm

4. The ruthless are mentioned twice here: the storm is that of the merciless empire builder, whose breath is like a storm beating against a wall, pounding on the city wall to collapse
5. God SILENCES the uproar of foreigners, and STILLS the victory song of the ruthless... in this section, He does it by conversion
6. By the end of the section, He does it by condemnation and overthrow

So, in verses 1-5, Isaiah celebrates the power of God in executing His sovereign and ancient plan... His miraculous plan, even... of concerting powerful, ruthless oppressors so they will HONOR and REVERE God

But there is a more powerful enemy than these human invaders that God must destroy for us to be truly happy eternally... Isaiah next turns to celebrate God's triumph over our FINAL ENEMY: death itself

II. Praise God for Spreading a Feast by Swallowing Up Death Forever! (vs. 6-9)

Isaiah 25:6-9 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. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. ⁹ ¶ In that day

they will say, "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."

A. The Richness of the Banquet

1. Incredibly lush language for this banquet
2. A “feast of rich foods”
3. A “banquet of aged wine”
4. The “best of meats and the finest of wines”
5. Imagine the most exquisite feast your mind is capable of conceiving
 - a. The Bible gives a number of pictures of lavish feasts by great Kings
 - b. King Solomon put on a rich banquet for the Queen of Sheba:

1 Kings 10:4-5 *When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, ⁵ the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.*

- c. So also the richest feast by a King in the Old Testament... the feast of King Xerxes in Esther 1... it was preceded by a festival of 180 days celebrating the greatness of the Persian Kingdom, culminating in seven days of extreme feasting

Esther 1:5-8 *the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa. ⁶ The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. ⁷ Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. ⁸ By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.*

6. This feast is far greater than either of these, or any there have ever been in history... for it is spread by the Lord Almighty Himself

B. The Location of the Banquet: “On this Mountain”

1. What does this mean? This “mountain” in some way hearkens back to Isaiah

Isaiah 24:23 The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

2. In Isaiah 24, Mount Zion represents both the heavenly and the earthly Jerusalem
3. Throughout the Old Testament, Mt. Zion is focused on Jerusalem, the city of David
4. “On this mountain” God will swallow up death forever? On which mountain? On the same Mountain where Jesus died... the mountain which God had shown to Abraham—Mt. Moriah—where also King David offered sacrifice to end the plague on Israel after his sinful census
5. ON THIS MOUNTAIN... the mountain where Jesus died

C. The Guests at the Feast: All Peoples

1. Five times in these verses, the UNIVERSALITY of the salvation that God is working from death is made plain

Isaiah 25:6 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples

Isaiah 25:7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations

Isaiah 25:8 The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces

Isaiah 25:8 he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth

2. This banquet, this rich lavish banquet, is clearly from people from every tribe and language and people and nation
3. This incredible kingly feast, with the best of meats and the finest of wines, will be spread for the elect of every nation
4. Jesus spoke plainly of the amazingly WIDE REACH of this feast...

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

5. Jesus also spoke of the richness of this banquet at the Last Supper

Matthew 26:29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.

6. aa

D. The Center of the Banquet: The Swallowing Up of Death Forever

1. Death is portrayed as the enemy of all peoples, all nations on earth
2. All of us are descended from Adam, and subject to Adam's death penalty, because in Adam all of us sinned

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned

Romans 5:21 sin reigned in death

3. The most vicious tyrant of all time, the most heartless, the most unfeeling is DEATH... the emperor of the grave
4. Isaiah depicts it as a SHROUD that enfolds all peoples... a burial shroud is pictured, covered over the corpse, waiting for burial... the shroud covers the decaying corpse and is mute testimony to the sorrow and irreversibility of this tyrant's reign... SIN REIGNED IN DEATH
5. These verses also speak of the SORROW and DISGRACE of death

Isaiah 25:8 The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.

Death, with its ability to destroy our bodies through aging and corruption and decay is inherently DISGRACEFUL

1 Corinthians 15:42-43 The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power

The sorrow of death is depicted here as well, as tears stream down the faces of people because death has robbed them of life in this world, or of a loved one

6. But Isaiah 25:6-9 celebrates the greatest victory over a tyrant there has ever been... death itself is destroyed and swallowed up
 - a. Vs. 7 He will SWALLOW UP the shroud... engulf
 - b. The Hebrew word is very strong... death has been overwhelmed in victory
 - c. Same word used for what Moses' staff/serpent did to the serpents conjured by Pharaoh's magicians; same word used for the earth SWALLOWING UP Korah, Dathan, and Abiram when they rebelled against Moses
 - d. It's an OVERWHELMING DEFEAT of death that this banquet celebrates!!

e. Paul uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

f. John has the same image of the final defeat of death

Revelation 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

Image: The climactic scene in the Lord of the Rings, the final movie, when the Ring of Power falls at last into the molten lava in the Cracks of Doom in that mountain in Mordor... the lava surrounds the ring, engulfs it, melts it, and destroys it

So God will throw death itself into the Lake of Fire... the Lake of Fire is the Second Death... so this is nothing less than the death of death

E. The Resurrection Victory of Jesus Christ

1. This can be nothing less than the resurrection victory of Jesus Christ, won for us at the empty tomb
2. Death entered through sin...

Romans 6:23 the wages of sin is death

Ezekiel 18:4 The soul who sins will die

3. Christ took our sins upon Himself, died in our place and on the third day, rose again
4. He has already made this awesome promise

John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

5. Isaiah 25:6-9 is predicting the awesome victory celebration at the end of the world in which immortal people from all over the world, in their resurrection bodies, will sit at table with God Himself

F. This is As Certain as the Word of God

Isaiah 25:8 The LORD has spoken.

G. This Can Result in Nothing Less than Full Worship

Isaiah 25:9 In that day they will say, "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."

1. This is OUR GOD... the one who created us, who knit us together in our mothers' wombs, who fed us and clothed us, who caused the sun to rise and the rain to fall, who kept us alive every moment of our lives... more than that, who gave us His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, for our Savior
2. SURELY THIS IS OUR GOD!!!
3. "We trusted in Him"... = literally "we have waited for Him" = wait for look to eagerly, by faith, in hope"
 - a. Death is the FINAL ENEMY, and all over the world, God's beloved people still die and their loved ones still go to funerals... so also many earthly oppressors DO RULE OVER GOD'S PEOPLE, and they long for deliverance
 - b. They cry out to Him day and night for deliverance... and God will not put them off, but will rescue Him...

Luke 18:7-8 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

- c. BUT, as Revelation says:

Revelation 14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

H. All This Pictured Exactly in the New Heaven and New Earth

Revelation 21:4 He 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."

III. Praise God for Condemning Arrogant Nations! (vs. 10-12)

Isaiah 25:10-12 The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain; but Moab will be trampled under him as straw is trampled down in the manure. ¹¹ They will spread out their hands in it, as a swimmer spreads out his hands to swim. God will bring down their pride despite the cleverness of their hands. ¹² He will bring down your high fortified walls and lay them low; he will bring them down to the ground, to the very dust.

A. God's Wrath Against Arrogant Unbelievers

1. God's hand is AGAINST the wicked... and with that image Isaiah 25 ends

2. It says on this mountain, God's hand will REST... but only after He has stretched out His hand to bring judgment on wicked people
3. The Bible does not teach universal salvation... it is not true that everyone will be saved
4. God's hand also rests heavily on the wicked of the world, to bring them down to destruction
5. Here, they are represented by Moab... but I think Moab is just a picture of arrogant nations that refuse the grace of God in Christ

B. A Disgusting Picture of Total Rejection

1. Moab is pictured as being trampled under as straw is trampled down in excrement... as in a latrine
2. They are rejected as less than worthless... pushed down in the most repulsive manner imaginable

C. No Escape

1. In verse 11, they are pictured are trying to swim up in the filthy mess, straining to reach the surface to escape...
2. But they are TRAMPLED DOWN by the wrath of God
3. Multiple images, all tend DOWNWARD... trampled down, pride brought down, walls come tumbling down
4. God is throwing these wicked people down
5. AND despite the cleverness of their hands, they will sink under the wrath of God
 - a. The word "cleverness" refers to SKILL, especially of a magician or street performer or juggler... someone who is able to do remarkable things with his hands
 - b. But despite their most clever efforts at self-salvation, they will be cast down
 - c. The final image is of high, lofty city walls that are cast down to the very dust

D. Jesus' Warning

Luke 12:5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

IV. Applications

A. Come to the Banquet!!

Matthew 22:2-5 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business.

1. God is spreading a banquet of eternal life in heaven
2. At the center of that banquet feast is the victory of Jesus Christ over death
3. Death has been swallowed up in victory!!!
4. So the Lord is sending out messengers all over the earth to invite people to the lavish banquet... a banquet of life, eternal life, for all who trust in Him

B. Marvel at the Triumph of Jesus Christ over Death

1. Celebrate it!! Sing to Jesus a victory song
2. Praise Him for swallowing up death forever!!
3. Praise Him that, because He lives, you also will live forever

C. Praise God for His Ability to Convert the Most Ruthless Oppressors to Christian Faith

1. Consider how God converted over seven years the wicked tyrant, Nebuchadnezzar
2. Consider how God converted in one day the murderous religious persecutor and blasphemer, Saul of Tarsus
3. Pray for God to convert His elect... pray for Kings and Governors and Emperors and Presidents... pray for persecutors... pray for God to WIN THEM

D. Wait for the Lord: In Perfect Faithfulness He Will Complete His Ancient Plan

1. In many places on earth, violent oppressors are attacking God's poor, weak people... it doesn't mean that God's plan has gone awry
2. In every place on earth, death still tramples on us, humiliates us, crushes our hopes, brings intense grief to our hearts...

3. But verse 9 speaks of WAITING for the Lord... we WAITED for Him in faith, trusting in His promises... knowing that IN PERFECT FAITHFULNESS God will complete the plan He made before the foundation of the world