

Mountain of God 10am

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Date: 07 June 1998

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, we just have your Word to deal with, and the content of your Word takes us so far beyond our understanding or our limited experience, and so far beyond what we know, for we know only in part, and that quite a small part.

We ask for the illuminating power of your Holy Spirit, that the words that are spoken and the words that are heard may enable us to have some vision of your great glory, so that we may sing your praise with all our hearts.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. This passage from Isaiah chapter 25, verse 6 to 12, and chapter 27, verses 12 and 13, you can follow it, but it's a very difficult passage.

And it's only difficult in the sense that the vast panorama of time and history and eternity and life and death covers so much that, you know, to try and say anything to you about it in these few minutes is going to go to work, so I decided I'd speak for Wednesday afternoon.

It may feel like that to some of you. The thing that I want to tell you about it to start with, though, is that in order to understand it, you have to be a believer.

[1 : 57] Sorry about that. But the reason you have to be is simply that, well, let me illustrate it by a story from the Gospels where Jesus goes to the Pool of Siloam and there finds a blind man, and he spits on the ground and makes mud of the dust that is there and takes the mud and spreads it in the man's eyes and then says, go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.

Now, I want just to tell you this, you see, that most people, when they go to church and hear a sermon, feel that the preacher is very Christ-like in that he makes mud and spreads it in their eyes.

And they're not very responsive because they don't go and wash it out so they can see. But the difference is, and the thing that you need to recognize in this story as it goes on, is that there were a lot of people who found out that this had happened, but they didn't want to believe that it happened.

They didn't think it could happen. They asked this man, tell us what he did. He made mud, put it in my eyes, told me to go and wash the pool of Siloam, and I came back seeing.

Well, that wasn't good enough, and so they went to his parents. And then they went back to him. And they kept trying to eliminate from this story the reality of the fact that this man who healed the blind and who, in doing it, violated the laws of the Sabbath, what they didn't see was that this is the man who makes the laws, not the one who keeps them.

[4 : 07] And this is the man who does the miraculous, simply because he is who he is. Unless Jesus is who he claims to be, then stories of miracles must be fatuous nonsense.

But if he is, in fact, who he claims to be, and you believe that, then you recognize the fact that, inevitably, he must heal the blind.

Well, that's the difference with this story. This story puts a picture before you which will make you squirm unless, in fact, you believe it to be true.

And you will believe it to be true only if God, in his grace, has conscripted you into that belief. Look at the story.

A story taken from Isaiah 25, and it talks about a mountain. And this is one of the great symbols all the way through Isaiah.

[5 : 12] The mountain, the mountain, the mountain. It represents the mountain where Moses went up to receive the law. It represents the mountain which Dan read about in Isaiah 2, where the nations will gather at the mountain.

It represents the mountain where the wolf and the lamb will lie down together. It represents the mountain on which Jesus stood to preach the Beatitudes.

Blessed is the man. So, this is the mountain. And that's the setting for the story. There is a mountain.

Now, on this mountain, at this mountain, you see, what this mountain is, it's the place where God's chosen leader will reveal himself and take the authority which is given to him, and he will exercise that authority over the people who have come to the mountain looking for the people whom God has called and God has selected.

That's the mountain. And on this mountain, it says that God has prepared a banquet. It says, the Lord Almighty, the Lord of hosts, the God of gods, he has gone to the mountain and he has prepared a banquet.

[6 : 43] Read about it. The banquet consists of rich food. The authorized version says fat things, but in our low-fat society, that's a bad word.

He has provided rich food. He's provided good wine, the very best of food and the very best of wine carefully strained, and he has this there to provide for the guests who come to the banquet.

And they come because they come in their deepest hunger, the thing for which they have always hungered, and human beings, you know, are very hungry, always looking for something that will satisfy them and never finding it and always looking and never finding it and always looking and never being satisfied.

When you come to this banquet, you are going to be satisfied, completely and deeply satisfied in a way that you can hardly imagine. And the wine that will be there for you to drink, though you have thirsted and your thirst has never been quenched, though you have never, ever had that for which you long to quench your thirst, at this banquet, your thirst will be quenched.

That's what it says. The Lord is throwing a party, and who is invited? The answer is right there in the text. Everybody's invited. Everybody from every country and from every culture and from every nation, everybody is invited.

[8 : 30] Nobody is excluded from the invitation. Now, this party then, and it goes on, it's not just the food and the wine.

It's the magnificent, gracious hospitality which will be shown to all those who come to the mountain to join in the banquet. And it says of these people that on this mountain, when they come for this banquet, the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations, will be destroyed.

Well, you know what happens at our parties? I mean, we have parties too. And there's lots of food and there's lots of drinks. And you go to the party in your best clothes.

You look your wealthiest. You look your healthiest. You pretend to be your happiest. You're there to make the scene. at the party. And all your attributes you try and bring up.

You try and get a supercharge of adrenaline to carry you through the party and all those miserable strangers you have to meet. And you go to the party in that way.

[9 : 51] But this host for this party, who is described as our sovereign Lord, what he's going to do for the guests is he's going to destroy everything that divides people.

All the inhibitions and all the fears and all the jealousies and all the anxieties. All those things which divide people and make them separate from one another, all those are going to be removed.

and people are spontaneously going to be able to enter into a profound relationship with one another at this party because the shroud will be removed.

Now the thing that separates people is death. Death creates fear. Death creates loneliness. Death creates separation.

Death creates longing. death is not in this sense. It's not just the termination of our biological life.

[10 : 57] Death is the evidence among us of the curse of our disobedience of God. Death is the thing that separates man and wife, that separates brother and brother, that separates friend and friend, that separates and separates and separates.

And this pervasive reality of the separating power of death goes on and on and on until you end up in the world feeling a lonely old man or woman who has no friends anymore because the work of death has gone on and separated and separated and separated.

But at this party, do you know what's going to happen? That's what it says. At this party, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people and the sheet that covers all the nations.

The shroud is a good word. It's well chosen. But then it says there's something else he will destroy or swallow up. He will swallow up death forever.

That kind of interaction will come finally to an end and the results of the curse will be eliminated and the process of separation will stop because death will be swallowed up.

[12 : 16] The sting of death will be taken away. The victory of death will be defied and death will be no more. It just won't happen anymore.

That's the nature of the one who has invited us to this party. That death will be no more. And then you see it says this that the sovereign Lord who has invited us to the party who has prepared the party for us will go among us and individually he will go to each of us and he will wipe away all the tears from your faces.

That's what we rehearse every, you know, on Sunday morning. We, in a sense, rehearse the party because we recognize that our sovereign Lord comes among us and wipes away the tears and shows us that he has power over death.

We anticipate this when we gather together. We gather together with all the things that bring tears to our eyes. We join together recognizing recognizing that there are so many things that separate and divide us and frustrate us in our attempts to be who the people of God are meant to be and to have the relationship that God intended us to make.

So he goes among the guests and he removes and he wipes the tears from their eyes and he removes the disgrace of his people. You know, I mean, it's a disgrace to believe in God.

[14 : 04] It means that you're not prepared to take the challenge and meet it in your own strength. And that's a disgraceful thing to do because it means that you're less than a full person.

That's the kind of disgrace of people who are so mealy-mouthed and weak-kneed that they depend on God when they should be able to do it themselves. And that disgrace is poured out upon the believers century after century.

You worship a crucified man nailed on a cross. That's why we pray for the children being baptized this morning saying that you may not be ashamed of Jesus Christ.

But in this world you're going to suffer from that and that disgrace is going to be removed from all his people. Well, that's the host at the party.

He's the almighty God. He's the one who invites. He prepares the meat and the wine to meet our deepest hunger and thirst. He moves among his guests.

[15 : 16] He removes the shroud and the sheet that separate them by which they hide from one another. He destroys death and its power and he takes away its sting.

And then he takes away that which is our disgrace, humanly speaking. all that is because he is the Lord and he has spoken.

Now, the difficulty with this lovely story is that there are some people who don't want to come to the party. And Jesus explains this in, when he's talking about, when he's talking to a man at a dinner party that he was at in the home of a Pharisee and someone to make conversation went to Jesus and said to him, blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

What a great thing that will be, he says. Yeah, wonderful thing. And Jesus says, well, I want you to know the reality of the situation and I want you to listen to this story in order that you will understand the reality of the situation.

He said, there was once, and he tells them this parable. There was once a great king and he prepared a great feast and when the feast was ready, he sent out among all the people to bid them to come to the feast.

[16 : 51] All the people of his kingdom. They were invited to come. And, as you know, his servants went out in the story and invited all these people to come.

And they all began with one accord to make excuse. I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come. I have bought five yoke of oxen and therefore I cannot come.

I have bought a piece of land and therefore I cannot come. And so they all with one excuse began to make, to make excuses for not coming to the party so that it ends up, Jesus says, the only people who actually turn up at the party are in a sense God's conscripts.

He's gone out into the highways and the byways and the poor and the destitute and the forsaken people who desperately are looking for such a banquet and he brings them in.

You're one of those if you belong to the church. That's it. I mean, I'm telling you that for sure. For sure. That we need to recognize that.

[18 : 08] Because he says what happens to the people who refuse to come to the banquet, who aren't going to be there. And unfortunately, the Bible is very clear about the fact that there are wheat and there are tares.

There is being blind and there is seeing. There is life and there is death. There is those who come to the banquet and those who don't come to the banquet. And those who don't come to the banquet, he explains in verses 10 and 12.

And he says they are like straw. Straw is one of the products of harvesting grain. And he describes it in language which may be too lurid for your sensitive ears.

I'm going to try and be easy on your sensitive ears. But talking to yourself, you can say it like it is. In verses 10 and 12, it says, Moab, who is taken to be the representative of those people who refuse the Lord's invitation, he says, Moab won't be there.

And he goes on to say that Moab will be like straw trampled into the manure. That's where it gets graphic, you see.

[19 : 28] You have to picture that. You've had to work in rubber boots and a cow pen in order to really fully understand this. But there's the picture that they are like straw trampled in to the manure.

And the manure finally gets so deep and so thick that they end up swimming in it. That's what Isaiah says. Don't blame me for that picture.

They will spread out their hands in it as a swimmer spreads out his hand to swim. And by that process, so that you see, what he does is he divides, what Isaiah tells us is the world is divided into those who accept the invitation and are headed for the banquet and those who in their pride have other things that are more important to them and they end up in a world which is comparable to the straw that is trapped into the manure and the people who are struggling through it to try and keep their head above it.

And I've heard lots of people describe life in those terms. So he says, God will bring down their pride despite the cleverness of their hands.

He will bring down their high fortified walls and lay them low. He will bring them down to the ground and to the dust. You won't be able to build walls high enough to protect yourself.

[21 : 03] Your pride will not be able to sustain you. And ultimately all the edifice of your pride and arrogance will be hammered down.

God says that's inevitably what's going to happen. Well, when that has happened, go back a few verses and we'll pick up the party again.

And if you look back a few verses like in verse 25, 25, 9, you see that people have eaten well and so they begin to sing a song not unlike the one you sang as we began this sermon.

This is their song. The text of it is, 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. So, the people who are at the banquet are overcome by the amazing grace of God, the undeniable love of God, the wonderful and joyful purpose of God and they are completely carried away.

[22 : 23] and you have to, I think, read this into it. Read it this way. Be careful to read it as we trusted in him and he saved us.

You know, it's not what we've done. We've done the minimum that we've trusted in him because we had nothing else. We trusted in him and he saved us.

This is the Lord. This isn't just the concept of God we're talking about. This is the Lord who has made himself known to his people.

This is the I am that I am. We trusted in him and we are to rejoice and be glad in his salvation. So that this is the festivity that takes place at the banquet as people rejoice in what God has done.

Well, then we're asked to look at Isaiah 27 and the last two verses of the chapter 12 and 13 and it gives you a kind of completing picture not only for what we've looked at this morning but for the whole of Isaiah 13 to 27 he brings the thing to the story the apocalyptic story to a conclusion by saying in that day the Lord will thrash from the Euphrates to Egypt and the Israelites the children of Israel will be gathered up.

[24 : 05] you know the thrashing is the harvest time the harvest time is the time you separate the straw from the wheat and each head of grain is going to be collected one by one and brought to the mountain brought back to be the people of God that's why we have baptism this morning and one by one we have children saying the purpose of my life is to be present at the party and one by one they are to be brought to that place and then it says in the last verse the trumpet will sound and the trumpet as used all the way through Isaiah and you hear the trumpet sounding when you are summoned to the banquet the summons to the banquet begins with the sounding of the trumpet and that sounding of the trumpet will not be something that creates fear in your hearts but it will be the sound that you have been waiting for because it's the invitation to come and join in the banquet which the

Lord God Almighty has prepared so you are invited to come and to the mountain and then the party is to begin and those who have been lost perishing in the world those who are in exile will come to worship and this is the Old Testament picture of the gathering of the people of God and the Old Testament picture says that the children of God the children of Israel will be gathered one by one and brought to the mountain but then in the New Testament you have a new concept of the children of God and they don't belong to any ethnic group or any cultural group or any language group or any national group they are the people whose primary identity is that they are those who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ and having believed it they are brought to be among the people of God they are brought as it were to the mountain so that this is this is this is really what what your faith is about this is what it means to you if you have the faith to which

Isaiah calls us and which has been fulfilled in the invitation of Jesus Christ when he says behold I stand at the door and knock I want you to come to the party and come unto me Jesus says so that the consciousness of faith in the life of the believer as he reads the 12th chapter of Isaiah is I am going to be at that party because I've trusted in God and he has made the arrangements prepared the banquet provided the meat and the wine removed the tears broken the power of death taken away the derision that we've suffered and so you see that's that's what it means to be a believer it means and if you think in terms of what you've seen this morning in the service of baptism it means that you are signed with the sign of the cross as a token that you will not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified to fight under his banner even though you are still perishing under the Assyrians or in exile among the Babylonians or in Egypt you will not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified nor to fight under his banner against sin the world and the devil but to continue

Christ's faithful and soldier and servant until you hear the trumpet and when you hear the trumpet you'll know that the time has come the banquet is prepared and you are invited it's a it's a magnificent story of huge proportions and yet it has its application in terms of one by one that's how we come and we come as that faith is echoed in our hearts and we acknowledge our God that in whom we have trust and who has in Jesus Christ saved us from the power of death Amen