

Provision & Promises

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you turn back with me to Isaiah chapter 25 and as I said when we were reading it, this is our second week in this chapter, in the 25th chapter of Isaiah.

And last week, as we approached this chapter, we asked one of the most important questions that can ever be asked. If you look at the world around you and you see that it is full of problems, what is God doing about it?

And as we said, people often ask this question as an accusation rather than as a question, don't they? Because God is blamed for the state of the world and when we see situations or when we experience things ourselves, people can ask, why is God allowing this?

What is God doing about it? And whilst we don't agree with having a sort of accusing approach towards God, this is nevertheless a valid and vital question.

What is God doing about the situation that the world now finds itself in? And to answer that question, we've been studying this marvellous chapter in Isaiah chapter 25.

[1 : 2 2] And we are suggesting that there are four things revealed in this chapter in order to answer our question. And we looked at the first two of these last week and we can just recap briefly as to what we said.

The first thing we said was that God is responding to the world situation with a plan. And that's what we have in verse one, Lord, You are my God, I will exalt You, I will place Your name for You have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

God has a plan. And that is a reminder that God is in control, that He is the sovereign Lord and it is a reminder that He has not abandoned the world.

Although the world is in a sinful state, God has not washed His hands of it. Indeed, He is still in control and we are reminded here of the wonderful truth that although God is not the author of sin, neither is He the casualty of sin.

Sin has not left God helpless. Sin has not left God looking at the word thinking, I can't do anything. And even though sin is our fault and our doing, God remains sovereign and from His position of strength, from His position of power, He is implementing a plan to put right the situation that the world finds itself in.

[2 : 5 2] And as verse one tells us, this plan consists of doing wonderful things. And we saw the first of those wonderful things in verses four and five last week.

And we said that God is providing protection for His people. We have this beautiful imagery in verses four and five. You've been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to 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 against a wall.

The imagery here is of total protection. God is a refuge. He's a stronghold. He is that strong tower into which we can run and be safe.

And not only did we see this beautiful picture of God's protection, we also see the wonderful qualifications that are identified for those who are to get this protection.

It is for the poor and for the needy. And of course that is not simply speaking in terms of our physical condition. It is primarily about our spiritual state.

[4 : 04] God is not looking for those who are super strong, for those who have got everything sorted. God is looking for those who are poor and those who are in need.

And indeed the verses in the first part of this chapter emphasise that all self-reliance will prove futile. It speaks about the palace and the city being reduced to nothing.

And as we said last week, these things are symbolic of man relying on himself and thinking we don't need God. But that kind of self-reliance will only lead to trouble.

On the other hand, those who have nothing and those who desperately need something can come to God and find protection.

And that's always such a wonderful thing to be reminded of. If you feel vulnerable, if you feel weak, if this past week has been hard, God is saying, I will protect you.

[5 : 08] And so that was what we looked at last week, the fact that God responds to that plan and the fact that part of that plan is to provide protection for you, for me. But the amazing thing about Isaiah 25 is that there is even more.

And today I want us to focus on the second two aspects of God's wonderful plan that are revealed in this chapter. And we can do so under two headings, provision and promises.

So the first of these is found in verse 6. 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 the imagery here is of abundant provision. Now, as we said last week, this chapter in Isaiah comes in a section from 24 to 27, which is really looking forward towards eternity, taking an overall view of everything.

And so the description here is pointing us towards the heavenly banquet. It is making us think about the marriage supper of the Lamb as Revelation 19 describes us.

[6 : 21] It is pointing us towards what God provides for his people in heaven. And the words of this verse describe the luxurious abundance of that provision.

It's the feast of rich food, the best food. And it's a feast of well-aged wine that is well refined. And the imagery here is that when wine was left for a long time to mature and basically to become really, really good, you would get a lot of sediment gathering in the bottom.

And you still sometimes get that in a bottle of wine. You can get a little bit of sediment at the end. And the idea was that it was to be strained out, that it would be well refined, that the sediment is removed and all that's left is the finest vintage wine.

The picture here is of the very, very best. And the reason that God describes things in these terms is that God wants to provide his people with the very best.

That's why we use the term paradise for heaven. It is a place where we will enjoy abundant, abundant blessings.

[7 : 35] Now the word paradise comes from the word, a word that means a garden. And so when you think of heaven, we can think and we can imagine the perfect garden.

You imagine the most amazing garden that you have ever seen. It is a place of astonishing beauty. When you look and you see the flowers and the colors and the life and everything that is there, it is stunning.

And a garden is also a place of abundant provision. Now we don't always get this impression here because nothing grows in our climate. But if you are in the Mediterranean, you go into a garden and it will be full of ripe fruit, delicious fruit, amazing provision.

And you have an abundance of provision available to you in the perfect garden. And then you imagine walking through this garden and it is just a place of constant and utter wonder.

When you go to a beautiful garden, you just keep discovering new things. You look and you see something and then you see something else and you see something else and you never stop discovering amazing, amazing things.

[8 : 48] It's a place of absolute wonder. And that is what heaven is like. A place of astounding beauty, a place of abundant provision, a place of utter wonder.

When God created the world at the beginning, it was very good and the new creation will be the same. Indeed, it will be paradise.

Absolute paradise. And it stands in wonderful contrast to the world because in the world today we see two extremes, don't we? We see awful poverty in so many parts of the world where people are desperately lacking the things that they need and it's horrible.

And yet on the other hand, we see a hideous level of greed where you see people who have everything and yet they just want more and they just want more and they just want more.

And very often the poverty is a result of the greed and these two extremes leave the world at a desperate state. Neither of these things will be found in heaven.

[10 : 02] And there are two things that I want to highlight in particular in regard to this provision. The first is that this is what God wants to give you.

Now that's a very simple point but it's an incredibly important point. In the English translations we tend to put the words on this mountain at the start of the version and that's a very helpful way of ordering the sentence.

But in the Hebrew the sentence actually begins with the phrase, the Lord will make. And so the emphasis, because very often in Hebrew what's at the beginning has been emphasised is the fact that this is something that God is doing.

This provision is made by God. Now think of everything involved in making a banquet. Those of you who perhaps cater for friends and family, you think of all that's involved in putting a big, big lovely meal on.

You've got to buy the food, you've got to prepare it, you've got to cook it, you've got to serve it, you've got to welcome the people, you've got to clean up, you've got to pay for the cost, you've got to do all these different things.

[11 : 12] There's a huge amount in preparing for a banquet. And we are being reminded by this verse that all of this is taken care of by God.

The imagery that we have of heaven is of abundant blessing, but it is all provided by God.

And that's because he wants to bless us abundantly. And this is a vital, vital truth of the Gospel message. God wants to give to his people.

That's why we say that grace, G-R-A-C-E, stands for God's riches at Christ's expense. Christ went to the cross so that God might bless us.

And when God blesses us, he doesn't do it in half measure. He does it abundantly. And we will enjoy heaven's riches through faith in Jesus Christ.

[12 : 09] And there we will have an eternity of joy and peace and wonder, because that's what God wants to give you and me.

And that's what Paul is talking about in Romans 8.32, when he says, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

God wants to bless us with an immeasurable amount of blessing. And this is where it's really important and really interesting to note that heaven is described as a place prepared for God's people.

That's what Jesus speaks about in John chapter 14. Now, this is really significant because notice what it's saying. It's not just saying that God is allowing us to have a place in heaven.

Now, that would be amazing enough if God was just saying, yes, you can have a place in heaven. But it is saying that God is doing more than that. He is not simply allowing us to have a place.

[13 : 13] He is making a place ready for us. He is preparing. He is getting ready to welcome you into his eternal home, where every detail is perfectly prepared so that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ can enjoy being in God's household forever and ever.

Now, we can relate to this because when somebody special is coming home, say a family member is always studying or they're away at work for a long time or whatever, when they come home we often prepare a special meal for them, don't we?

We get ready to celebrate the fact that they are coming home. And the reason we do that is because we are excited that someone we love is going to be back where they belong.

Now, this means that when you read about the heavenly banquet as described in Isaiah 25, it is surely telling you that if you are a Christian, God is excited at the thought of your arrival in heaven.

God is excited and is preparing your place. Now, that is an amazing thought. And so God wants to give us this provision, but then we have to ask, well, who is it for?

[14 : 37] Who is this feast for? And the answer is in this verse, for all peoples. And this is wonderful because here is one of the many places where we are reminded of the free offer of the gospel.

But it's not simply for certain people, it's not just for the Old Testament people of God, the Jewish race. It is not just for important people, not just for successful people, it is for all people.

And I absolutely love the word all because we can take it ourselves and we can put whatever we are after that word all.

All means all. And that applies ethnically, it applies economically. It applies whatever our situation is. And this is wonderful because whatever you are, you can put your circumstances after that word.

For example, are you a warrior? Do you worry about things? Well, if you are, then the gospel is offered to all warriors.

[15 : 43] Are you a doubter? Do you question things? Do you struggle in terms of trusting God? Then you must realize that this provision is offered to all doubters.

Are you a mistake maker? Are you somebody who gets things wrong and can look back even at the last week or maybe even the last day and think, I wish I didn't do that?

Then you must know that the gospel is offered to all mistake makers. Are you a let down to yourself or to others?

Well the gospel is offered to all let downs. Whatever you feel you are, I can promise you this, that you are not excluded from that or that.

And that's what Jesus emphasized in the wonderful parable of the great banquet that we can read here. Jesus said, a man once gave a great banquet and invited many and at that time for the banquet he sent a servant to say to those who had been invited, come, for everything's now ready.

[16 : 56] But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, I've bought a field and I must go out and see it, please have me excused. Another said, I've bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them, please have me excused.

And another said, I've married a wife and therefore I can't come. So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, go out quickly to the streets and the lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.

And the servant said, sir what you've commanded has been done and still there is room. And the master said to the servant, go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be full, may be filled.

For I tell you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. All people are invited. All people are compelled to come in.

Indeed the only way that you can be excluded is if you refuse the invitation. You have the invitation.

[18 : 00] God is calling you to him. And so we see from verse six that not only will God protect you, God will provide for you with blessings that go beyond words.

When you think of the imagery of running into the strong tower that God's name is for protection, when you get into that strong tower you will find a feast of abundant provision.

That's why Psalm 23 speaks about our cup overflowing. God provides for his people.

But Isaiah 25 is not finished yet and in fact I think we can say that the best is yet to come.

And our final heading in this chapter is the heading promises. But in many ways this heading is a bit of an adequate title because really there are no words that can describe the wonder of what is presented to us in Isaiah 25 verses 7 and 8.

[19 : 11] Let's turn to these together. 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.

These are utterly amazing words and I want us to spend just a short while thinking about them together. If you look at these verses you'll see that they tell us that God is going to deal with three things.

He is going to deal with death, he is going to deal with tears and he is going to deal with reproach. And if we return to our original question which is what is God doing about the state of the world then the ultimate answer is found here in these two verses.

And so if you listen to anything over the past two Sundays please do listen to what we are about to say here. Verse 7 vividly and with incredible accuracy describes the reality of our situation in this world.

[20 : 24] It says there is a veil, a covering, a shadow that is spread over every person and over every nation.

And that is the veil of death. And that's such a good description because that is exactly what death is like. It is just this veil that is over us. Sometimes we don't realise it's there, sometimes we forget about it, sometimes we pretend that it doesn't exist but all the time it's there.

It's there for every one of us. As we sing in Psalm 22 none of us can keep ourselves alive. And that is the root of the problem that we face in this world.

When we look around we despair at disease that people suffer. We are horrified by the suffering that is so prevalent in our world. We are dismayed when we see the violence that people extend towards one another and we are heartbroken when we see the poverty and the hardship that many people face.

And all of these things are a means by which the veil of death, this covering that is over us all is manifested and revealed.

[21 : 42] Every problem in this world can be traced back to the fact that we now exist in a sinful world of death. We see that on a global level and we see that as individuals ourselves.

It's the hardest thing that we face. And so what is God doing about it?

The verse tells us that He will swallow up this veil that is covering our existence. He will swallow up death forever.

And the picture here is of the absolute abolition of death for the people of God, for everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ. The imagery of swallowing something up is a graphic and vivid way of saying that it is gone, completely gone.

It's a picture of total defeat. If something is swallowed up then it has no chance of escape. It is a picture of the total and permanent removal of death.

[22 : 49] And all that is emphasised by the beautiful word forever. For the believer, for anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ which we can all do right now, death is gone.

The grave is defeated, the power of sin is obliterated and it will never ever return. That's why the life that we have in Jesus Christ is eternal life because it is life that will never be subjected to death.

Because the day we pass away from this earth is simply the day we enter the security of God's house and the blessing of the heavenly banquet.

And we see that the culmination of God's wonderful plans that we read about in verse 1 is that death will be permanently and utterly abolished. That's why Revelation 21.4 says that death shall be no more and that means that everything that is wrong with this world, that shadow, that veil, that spoils everything will be gone.

And as a result of that we see the second thing that these verses promise, the fact that God will wipe away every tear from every face.

[24 : 17] Now there's two vital truths in that small statement. The first is that we come to God without tears.

And the picture we have in this verse is of the deepest, personal compassion from God towards you, towards your situation.

And that means that we come to God just as we are and God meets our needs, compassion infinitely, just as we are. We don't have to come to God as those who are strong or as those who are capable or as those who are brave.

We come to God weeping. We come to God without tears.

And why is it that we cry? Well why do we cry? Why do you cry in your life? Well you cry when you're sad. You cry when you are scared.

[25 : 20] You cry when you are hurt. You cry when you are devastated. And that's what that veil of death does to us.

That's where the veil of death leaves us. Nothing brings as many tears as death.

And God is calling you to come to Him and to find hope and comfort and protection. God is not saying stop crying and come to me.

God is saying come to me and I will wipe away your tears. So no matter what pain and sorrow you have, God is calling you to come to Him.

Just as you are. We come to God with our tears. And the second vital truth that comes from this beautiful statement is that God does not simply wipe away tears that keep on flowing.

[26 : 27] Sometimes you can wipe tears, maybe a child comes to you and they're crying and you wipe their tears and yet more come and more come and more come. God does not just wipe away tears that keep flowing.

God takes away the very thing that causes us to weep. And so these words are not just an expression of sympathy, they are a promise of healing.

Now you imagine the situation where somebody maybe, maybe a family might be at the hospital where they're there with a family member who may be gravely ill. And I say this sensitively because I know that that's a very real experience for so many of us.

If you imagine a doctor in that situation with a family who is in tears, what's he going to do about the tears in this family? Well the doctor if he's a skilled counsellor might be able to go up to that family and he might be able to give a measure of sympathetic counsel.

He might say to them that he feels sorry for them and he might empathize and encourage and maybe to an extent their tears may be taken away a little bit.

[27 : 45] But far, far better it would be if the doctor could walk into that room and he could say I have removed every trace of the disease that is in your loved one and they will never, ever be threatened by it again.

And that is what we are talking about when we speak about God wiping away our tears. God has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through Jesus Christ.

Therefore God can wipe away your tears because in heaven there will never, ever, ever be a reason to cry.

God promises to wipe away your tears. But the third thing we see is that God promises to take away our reproach.

The reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth. And what does reproach mean? Well it basically means to cast blame on somebody. It's a very harsh word, it's the idea of accusing or scarring or blaming somebody for something.

[28 : 53] And that's a characteristic of the sinful world that we live in. We are so conscious of people blaming other people. Very often you see a debate in parliament and it's just the casting of blame from one side to the other.

We all do it. From the top of government, right the way down through our society. And in reality we only have ourselves to blame. You think of the parable of the prodigal son, there was nobody to blame except himself.

And I know when I look back on my life the things that I regret the most are things that I have done. Now this is incredibly significant when we think about this because when we ask the question what is God doing about the state of the world, which is the question we've been considering over the past couple of weeks, we are reproaching God, aren't we?

We are blaming God. We are saying what is God going to do about it? And yet the reality of the situation is that blame lies at my door and at your door.

And God has every right and every justification to turn to us and say the state of the world is your fault. God has every right to reproach us but he doesn't.

[30 : 15] In fact he does the opposite. He takes away our reproach. And instead of God blaming you and blaming me for the state of the world even though he has every right to do so, he removes our blame and he carries our guilt and he places it on Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul quotes from Psalm 69 in Romans chapter 15 a really, really significant verse. It says, Christ did not please himself but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

Now you see the significance of what that is saying. There's people in this verse who reproach God, blaming God and yet they are the ones who are really to blame.

But the reproaches of those who are reproaching God, those who really deserve the blame, even though they are blaming God, their reproaches fell on Christ.

Not only does he take away our reproach, he places it on his own son. And so we see that these verses are saying that God will remove death.

[31 : 33] They're saying that God will take away the effect of death, our tears and all the sorrow it brings and he will take away the blame for death. The fact that we are the ones who caused it and yet he is the one who takes it away.

It's no wonder that Isaiah says that God has planned wonderful things. And all of these things can be ours because as verse 8 says, God has spoken.

God has spoken and he promises us these things. That's why we're using the heading promise that we can have these things through trusting in the risen Lord Jesus.

And so you might ask, well, how do we respond to God? How do we do that? The answer is in verse 9, where it says, behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us. This is our Lord.

We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. The key word there is that we are to wait on the Lord. But that's a very, very easy word to misunderstand because it's so easy to look at God and to look at salvation and to think, well, I have to wait for God to do something.

[32 : 42] I have to wait for God. I have to wait. I have to wait because what can I do? Maybe you think like that. A lot of people think like that.

That's not what this word means. Lying is something that we do in terms of depending, in terms of leaning, in terms of relying.

When you say you are waiting for God, you are not lying back in inactivity. You are saying, I am trusting and I am leaning on God alone.

So we can see over the past two weeks and over this big chapter, this great chapter, God has implemented a plan. Through that plan, he offers you protection.

And in accordance with this plan, he will make abundant provision. And the ultimate promise of this plan is that death itself will be swallowed up.

[33 : 41] But as we conclude our studies on Isaiah 25, I want us to notice that these things, the protection, the provision, the promise all come at a cost to God.

We said that last week, you cannot protect something unless you are exposing yourself. If you shelter your child from the rain, it was absolutely bucketing when we came to church this morning.

If you shelter your child from the rain, you are going to get covered in the rain yourself. You can only protect someone by exposing yourself. Likewise, you can only make provision for someone if you are willing to bear the cost.

If you want to provide for somebody, you must be willing to pay that price. But perhaps most significantly of all, Isaiah 25 says that God will swallow up death.

Now I want us to push that imagery of swallowing a little bit further because what happens when you swallow something?

[34 : 47] You don't make it disappear. You are taking it into yourself. You are bearing all the consequences of the thing that you are consuming.

And so when God says that he will swallow up death, he's not saying that he will click his finger to make it disappear. He is saying that he will taste death for us.

And that's exactly what Jesus did on the cross. And so when we ask this question, what is God doing about the state of the world?

It has led us to Isaiah 25 and it has shown us that God has made an amazing plan, a wonderful provision, secure protection and glorious promises.

These are what God is offering to you and to me in response to the situation that the world is now in. God has done something amazing in order to deal with the state of the world.

[35 : 58] And we have only scratched the surface of this chapter and these chapters are simply pointing to the marvellous, wonderful message of salvation that runs through the whole of Scripture that God offers to you and to me as a way of hope, as a way of healing, as a way of escape from everything that is wrong with the world.

And when we think about it, we realise that the vital question is not what is God doing about it because God has done something utterly amazing.

The vital question is not what is God doing about it. The vital question is this. What are you doing about it?

Because God is offering this to you and all he asks is that you put your trust in him. It's not complicated. You don't have to wait for anything dramatic to happen.

You just have to say, Lord, I want to follow you and I am trusting you. It's as simple as that. Amen. Let us pray.

[37 : 08] Amen. Let us pray. Thank you.