

## Sermon for October 15, 2023 – The 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

### Isaiah 25:6–9 (EHV)

Theme: **Look forward to the LORD’S Salvation!**

- 1) Salvation that the Lord himself prepares for us.
- 2) Salvation that we receive only through faith.

*<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of aged wines, with the best cuts of meat, and with the finest wines. <sup>7</sup> On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations. <sup>8</sup> He has swallowed up death forever! The LORD God will wipe away the tears from every face. He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth. For the LORD has spoken. <sup>9</sup> On that day it will be said, “Look, here is our God! We waited for him, and he saved us! This is the LORD! We waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!”*

Have you ever wanted to give up? Maybe it happened during a new exercise program. Things began well, but then, on top of your sore muscles and post-workout tiredness, life kept throwing stuff in your way, making it difficult to keep it up. Still worse, your weight is still the same as before!

How do you overcome the desire to give up? How can you continue to persevere? Ask a winning athlete, musician, or any other person who has accomplished what they set out to do, and they will tell you that success comes from constantly renewing your focus on the goal. A good coach always tells his players, “Stay focused!”

As Christians, our sinful doubts and desires can often seem too much to handle - making us want to stop fighting the good fight of faith and giving in. Especially during times like that, we need to stay focused on our ultimate goal by reminding ourselves of that goal. Let us do that today, under the theme: **Look forward to the LORD’S Salvation.** 1) that the Lord himself prepares for us. 2) that we receive only through faith.

Part One: The salvation that the Lord himself prepares for us.

Our sermon text begins: *<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of aged wines, with the best cuts of meat, and with the finest wines.*

The LORD compares the wonder of His salvation with a kingly banquet. Why? Because he knows our finite human brains cannot comprehend the glories of his everlasting paradise any more than an amoeba can understand advanced calculus. That is why God uses relatable things to describe the indescribable. But why does he choose a grand banquet to illustrate His coming glory? Who does not enjoy being at a well-catered party with their best friends? The salvation he has prepared for us in Christ is so fantastic; it will be like being at a gathering with your most beloved family

and friends: laughing, loving, and enjoying the best food. And that feeling of joy will never get old but will last forever.

Notice that this banquet is not just for Israel and Judah but for *all peoples*. The LORD wants his everlasting paradise filled with believers from every corner of the globe united in faith and praise of Christ. That is precisely how St. John describes heaven in the book of Revelation, where he writes: *After these things I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing in front of the throne and of the Lamb. . . They called out with a loud voice and said: Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb.*"<sup>i</sup>

Isaiah emphasizes that the LORD is preparing this everlasting feast. Why is he doing it himself? Because our salvation is not like a "potluck" in which we can offer some of our works or merits for the party. No, our human "goodness" offers nothing to God because, outside of Christ, even our most righteous acts are tainted with sin; as the Scriptures say: "*all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth.*"<sup>ii</sup>

Because of our sins, we can offer God nothing and we deserve nothing from God except his everlasting wrath and punishment in hell. God is 100 % righteous and holy. He cannot tolerate any sin in his presence. We, however, are anything but holy with our impure and selfish thoughts, words, and actions. Our sinfulness is the reason death exists, as the Scriptures say: *the wages of sin is death.*<sup>iii</sup> That's the bad news.

But here is the good news: God does not want us lost forever in hell. He loves us – even though we do not deserve it. That is why he took it upon himself to give us a special gift: *the wages of sin is death, but the undeserved gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*<sup>iv</sup> Forgiveness, life, and salvation – this is the feast God is preparing for us in Christ Jesus, which we will fully enjoy when He comes again on the Last Day.

*On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever! The LORD God will wipe away the tears from every face. He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth.*

Why do we cover people up after they die? It's because the living do not like looking at the dead. Similarly, our sins separated us from God to such a degree that he does not like looking at us. As I mentioned, God's holiness prevents him from tolerating the slightest sin in his presence. Sin separates us from God, and death is our shame because it proves we are sinful.

But God promises to remove the shroud that covers all people. Why? Because that shroud will not be needed anymore! God promises to make us alive: to take away humanity's shame and destroy the death that consumes us. How? The only way he could: by taking away our sins.

For that purpose, He sent his only begotten Son into the world. Even though Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are,<sup>v</sup> he kept his Father's law perfectly in our place. He took all our sins upon himself and suffered the death we deserved because of them. Do you know what the best part

is? He rose victoriously from the grave, showing that all sin has been paid for in full. He conquered death so that *whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*<sup>vi vii</sup>

That is why we can smile when a Christian dies and defiantly say: *Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory? . . . thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*<sup>viii</sup> We say that with all confidence - looking forward to Christ's return when He will raise the dead, wipe every tear from our eyes, and allow us to enjoy his perfect paradise where there will be no more sin, sorrow, or death. There will only be joy and peace forever.

How can we be sure we will experience such things? *For the LORD has spoken.* This statement is like God's signature on a contract. God must do whatever He promises. His name bears witness to that fact – for if the LORD ever went back on his promises, he would cease to be who He is.

How often do you get paid? Many who get paid once a month know about the struggle a week or two before the paycheck comes, when all the bills are due and cash is running low. This struggle makes you look forward to “payday” when there will be no more bills, and you can celebrate with a nice dinner. Focusing on “payday” can help you continue your work and not give up.

If our attitude is such for a measly paycheck, how much more shouldn't we look forward to Christ's return? Look at what he is giving us! Joy, peace, life, and a place at God's table! Look at what he is taking away from us: ignorance, sin, sorrow, and death! As we struggle through these last days – and they genuinely are a struggle – keep your heart looking forward and rejoicing in the salvation the LORD is preparing for us. He will give us the strength to press on because we trust his promise that *our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.*<sup>ix</sup>

## Part Two: Salvation that we receive only through faith.

Hearing about the wonderful things God will do and the bad things he will take away from us makes us want to be on God's holy mountain, right? But how do we get there?

Well, let us look at how the people in our text got there: *On that day it will be said, “Look, here is our God! We waited for him, and he saved us! With one voice, they confessed that the LORD saved them. In other words, they did nothing to get there - God did it all!*

But they also say that they waited for God. In other words, they received the salvation God prepared for them by believing His promises and applying them to their lives. The Holy Spirit led them to repent: to turn away from their sins and turn to Jesus in trust to receive the forgiveness he won for them. With the Holy Spirit's power, they persevered through every temptation like Abraham of old – not letting worldly worries or troubles distract them from waiting for God in faith to fulfill his promise. And the LORD delivered what he promised, as they confessed: *This is the LORD! We waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!*”

Imagine your boss telling you tomorrow that he will give you an incredible Christmas bonus because his business had an exceptional year, so he decided to distribute all the extra profits among

all his employees. What would you do? You would most likely thank him and tell your family the good news about the coming Christmas bonus. Your boss's promise would give you joy and encourage you to work all the harder for him until Christmas.

But what if an employee who didn't respect his boss, told him, "I don't believe you, so whatever!" Do you think that worker would look forward to Christmas as much as you? Would he consider his job a blessing -working hard to thank his boss; or would he consider his job a pain - using any and every reason to slack off and complain? Do you think the promise of a bonus would benefit such an employee in any way? Probably not, because his attitude would get him fired.

Similarly, if a person does not believe God's promise of salvation, the promise will do him no good. His life will be laborious, not joyous. He will not look to the end of his life with hope but despair. He will not receive salvation because he rejected the LORD who offered it. Therefore, God will reject him.

But the opposite is true for the person in whom the Holy Spirit has awakened faith. He will believe God's promise, and that trust will give him hope. His faith in God's salvation will sustain him through every difficult day – as he happily lives for his LORD. He will stay focused on the salvation God has prepared for him, constantly reminding himself of God's promise and looking forward to receiving it with joy. And, when the Last day comes, he will receive what the LORD promised him for Christ's sake: everlasting peace, blessing, and bliss with God and all the saints in paradise.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: our daily life is a struggle. We often feel like giving in to temptation or giving up our faith. When the devil, the world, and our sinful natures press us hard, keep focused on the promises God gave you in Christ and **look forward to the LORD's Salvation: *Salvation that the Lord himself is preparing for us, and salvation that we only receive through faith.*** Let the thought of this eternal salvation move you to press on - knowing that God will most certainly do what he promised – as demonstrated by the fact that he allowed his only Son to die for all your sins and raised him from the grave to prove they are forgiven.<sup>x</sup> Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Revelation 7:9-10 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 64:6 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 6:23a EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Romans 6:23 EHV

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Hebrews 4:15

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. John 3:16

<sup>vii</sup> John 3:16 EHV

<sup>viii</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55, 57 EHV

<sup>ix</sup> Romans 8:18 EHV

<sup>x</sup> Cf. Romans 4:25, 8:32