



# Sermon Growth Guide

**December 11, 2022**

**The Great Rescue - The Promise**

**Isaiah 25:1-9**

**Key Verse:** Isaiah 25:6 “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.”

**Big Idea:** Because Jesus has swallowed up death, we can celebrate life with great joy.

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## Foundations

Isaiah, like all the prophets, describes the idolatry of the people of God. Instead of worshiping the God of glory, they have turned to worshiping human endeavors and abilities. They have put their trust in created things rather than in the Creator. The result is that God’s beautiful and abundant world has been turned into a wasteland.

Believing the promises of humanity is risky. There are limits to human vision, to human capabilities and, most especially, to human care for those to whom promises are made. Expecting human promises to be kept often leads to disappointment and even despair.

According to Isaiah, though, God’s people did expect the promise of human ambition and power to give good results. That did not happen. It would be understandable if God had just washed His hands of His creation, but He did not...He does not. In soaring poetry, Isaiah describes a God who is faithful and trustworthy.

The promise of God is that in God’s New Creation, all the devastating effects of trusting the wrong things will be wiped away. That would be enough. But it is not enough for God. He also invites us to a magnificent feast so that we may celebrate His faithful goodness to us.

## Understanding God’s Word

We often feel deeply the disconnect between what God has promised and the daily reality of our lives. Isaiah is clear that this is because of our misplaced trust. But he is equally clear that proper trust in the God of Promise leads to celebratory joy. He says in Isaiah 25:9: *Surely this is our God; we trusted Him, and He saved us. This is the Lord. We trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in our salvation.*

In this verse, we also see the role of worship in pointing us to our trustworthy God. In what ways have you experienced worship that leads you to trust God in the particulars of your life?

## Applying God’s Word

In 1968, Dionne Warwick sang, “...Their kind of promises can just destroy a life; those kind of promises take all the joy from life...”

How have you seen trust in things that are not of God that take away life and joy? Describe a time when trusting God led to great joy.

## Witnessing God’s Word

Because the God of Promise has intervened in our lives, we can tell the “nations”—the world, our neighbors—that God is worthy of trust. In what ways can the conduct of our lives reveal the defeat of death and invite others to the feast?

Where are we all headed anyway? Where is this all going? During COVID restrictions in 2020, some frequent fliers in Australia were getting antsy. They were used to being on a plane every week. What should appear in their inbox, but an invitation from Qantas Airlines, “Take a flight to nowhere.” Qantas filled up planes with people willing to pay just to go up, fly around, take in the view, and land again after a few hours. A flight to nowhere. Do you know, sadly, that’s how a lot of people see life?

We are studying *The Great Rescue* in Isaiah. It’s a whole plan, a long history, the unfolding plan of salvation from God. It began with **The Peril**. Our situation is dire. Sin is rampant in us and around us, and it is doing so much damage. What a mess we are in. But there is a God in heaven who answers us when we call. So, last week we talked about **The Plant**. There’s a plant emerging, a shoot from the stump of Jesse. The seed of hope comes down from above and settles into our muddy mess. Plant can have another meaning too, besides a growing plant. A plant can be like a spy or an infiltrator, when someone is there, but they’re really on another team, someone among us whose allegiance is really from somewhere else. There’s a Plant out there—it’s Jesus, you see. He’s slipping into our situation from heaven. Today, I want to talk to you about **The Promise**. What kind of end game does God have in mind? What’s the plan? We’re in Peril, there is a Plant, but what’s the Promise? What in the world is God doing in the end? Where are we headed? It is not a plane to nowhere.

The passage today is just part of the great plan of salvation that God unwraps for us, and it’s just part of a unique section of Isaiah that runs from chapter 24–27. If I were responsible, I’d read that whole thing to you. In fact, that’s your homework assignment. (I don’t see anyone writing that down). Isaiah 24–27 is a vision of the end of times. It’s like the book of Revelation. From time

to time in Scripture, God is gracious to give us a glimpse of the future, a little glimpse of how it all turns out. These glimpses have enormous power. They are like lightning flashes across a darkened field—one burst and all of a sudden you see it all, then back into darkness. This is the Promise, the direction everything is headed. To know where we are going changes how we live today. And the picture we see is of a new world, a new creation, a redeemed, repaired, reset world.

When you read Isaiah 24, you see how God destroys the world. I didn’t say Isaiah was always cheery! God is going to reset this world. Wrong things are getting set right. Things built on false foundations will not stand. Just like when you read Revelation, there is a lot of tearing down and pulling up that needs to happen. But the world is still there in the end. This is the wrinkle. We get to thinking, even as Christians, that the whole project is about getting us extracted from this world. The world is dying, the material world is coming to an end, the point is to get your soul saved and get out of here, spiritually, into some ethereal, spiritual place called heaven, where we float on clouds and drift around like mist. That is not actually a biblical view of where this plane is headed. There will be a world, and it will be set right. There is, it seems, a life after death—meaning when we die, we are spiritually present to Jesus even though separated from our bodies—but that is an intermediate state. Even more important is the life after life after death when our bodies are resurrected, and we are restored to full and perfected human beings just like Jesus is now in his resurrected body.

N. T. Wright is the very best on all this. Pick up any of his books or articles. It really is his favorite theme. As long as we think this whole plan is about us getting out of here to go to heaven, we have it upside down. “It is not we who go to heaven, it is heaven that comes to earth; indeed, it is the church

itself, the heavenly Jerusalem, that comes down to earth...It is the final answer to the Lord's Prayer, that God's kingdom will come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven...So far from sitting on clouds and playing harps, as people often imagine, the redeemed people of God in the new world will be agents of his love going out in new ways, to accomplish new creative tasks, to celebrate and extend the glory of his love." (N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*) We are headed to a new world, new creation. That's where the plane lands. Wright's point is that this changes how we act now. We are not just oiling the gears on a machine that is about to be tossed out or painting the deck on a sinking ship. This world will pass into the next, with God's corrections and renewing fire, and we will serve God there in joy. That means we shouldn't discard this world thoughtlessly, and the people and systems in it. We are taking care of this garden until the Gardener returns and keeps and tosses what He will.

At any rate, here is a picture of that world. Isaiah 24 shows God scraping and restarting. Judgment Day. A day we need, by the way. We need things set right. Unless we are willing to swallow the idea that nothing much is wrong around here, or the heresy that a good God doesn't mind these horrors and can whistle past them with a shrug, we need Judgment Day. So, Judgment Day happens and the elders are gathered around the Lord on Mount Zion (see Isaiah 24:23). and it's those elders who are now speaking to God about what is next. "Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago. 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" (Isaiah 25:1-2). Now you see why that is a cause for celebration. In short, you set things right that were wrong, and no power could oppose you. "You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the

needy in their 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 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" (Isaiah 25:4-5). OK, you judged the unjust, you straightened out the crimes, the ruthless are finished. What now? What comes next? Where is this plane going to land?

Let me take you back to the end of the last chapter. Isaiah 24:23 shows the Lord seated in glory on Mount Zion: "the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders—with great glory" (Isaiah 24:23). This is an "I see the Lord" moment. I see the Lord high and lifted up, seated on the throne, established in total rule, total authority, complete power and reign. What now? Well, it's the Promise. It's an authoritative announcement, a royal proclamation from God on high. What is it? "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). There will be a feast! The mighty King, with all His authority and glory on display, in the most authoritative, commanding way possible makes the solemn declaration: "On my word there will be joy!" Rich food for all peoples. The best of meats, the finest of wines. That's the mighty promise. The Lord will do it Himself. And whatever we have tasted here of goodness, beauty, truth—when we taste life as God wants it, the feast of God's own making, we will know we have only had a glimpse of life. How do we miss that? Christianity is a dour life and bitter drink, suffering and self-abasement and humiliation, and all so that one day we are pinned down behind glass in some holy museum called "heaven." No. God's promise is a party. Until then we struggle, we struggle in the pain and travails of this world. And we are tempted to lose track of the promise. But the party is on the way.

The vision reveals the heart of the vision caster. Here is God's heart. God's character. And He will do it—although it won't be easy. In the Great Rescue plan there must be a great Rescuer, a heroic victory. "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 25:7-8). How do you swallow death? Who can drink the cup of wrath and swallow death forever? Who will weep so that we can have our tears wiped away? Who will take our disgrace so that we can have our disgrace removed? The Lord will do it. The Lord has spoken. The Word of the Lord came down and took on flesh. The night before He died on the cross, He knelt down in the Garden of Gethsemane, in such agony that His sweat became blood, and He prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). He can drink it. He can do it. It's the only way. God will do it.

The vision tells you a little about the vision caster. This is the character of God. There will be a feast. We have suffered a thousand false ideas of who God is. Look here and see the Lord who declares the feast. I have said it before, but one of my favorite Christmas characters who comes around this time of year is Old Mr. Fezziwig. Remember him? From Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. I have made my family sit through at least three Christmas Carol productions over the years. I love it. "Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands, adjusted his capacious waistcoat, laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence, and called out, in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice... 'Yo ho, my boys!' said Fezziwig. 'No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer!'" In came the musicians, up came

the dances, out came the maidens, the cold roast, the boiled port, the mince-pies, the cakes. The angel says to Scrooge, no big deal. Probably didn't cost him much. Do you remember? And Ebenezer Scrooge gets absolutely livid. No small thing! He made us happy! The feast of Fezziwig, it made room in Ebenezer's cold and sin-gripped heart. Room for conversion. There's something of the character of God in Fezziwig. God declares the feast, and the promise of joy is enough to make a little room in our souls for us to turn, to begin to help our hearts believe.

There is so much more to say, but do you see where this plane is landing? We are not on a plane to nowhere. **The Great Rescue**, God's plan of salvation, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end—but the end, as it turns out, is only the greater beginning. As C. S. Lewis penned as the last lines of his great *Narnia* series, "All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at least they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

One day, we will not be bodiless spirits roaming some ethereal cloudscape. One day, we will stand on the mountain of the feast of Almighty God. We will stand in our bodies made right, in a world made right, with the soil of Mount Zion under our feet. What will we say then? "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'" (Isaiah 25:9). That, church, is a vision worth struggling for; a hope worth waiting for; a great rescue and a salvation and a promise we can believe.