

Sermon for August 21, 2016 – 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 25:6–9 (NIV84)

Theme: Look forward to the LORD’S Salvation!

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

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.* 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.”*

Have you ever felt like giving up? Maybe it was during a new diet you started. Things started off well, but then you saw that double-layered chocolate fudge cake, oozing with a dark, creamy frosting; and a friend says: “Do you want a piece?” How about that exercise program you started, and even enjoyed, but the results are so slow in coming that you just want to give up?

How do you overcome the desire of giving up? Ask a winning athlete, musician, or any other person who has succeed in what they put their mind to, 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 we may also feel like giving up. Sometimes our sinful doubts and desires just seem too great for us and we want to give in to them. It is during times like these that we need to stay focused on our ultimate goal in life by reminding ourselves what that goal is. Let us do just that with today’s sermon text, under the theme: **Look forward to the LORD’S Salvation.** 1) *Salvation that the Lord himself prepares for us.* 2) *Salvation that we only receive through faith.*

Part One: Salvation that the Lord himself prepares for us.

Our sermon text begins: 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.*

The LORD compares the wonders of eternal salvation with a kingly banquet. Why? Because he knows that our finite human brains can’t comprehend the glories of his everlasting paradise any more than an amoeba can understand advanced calculus. This is why God uses pictures to represent His coming glory; and the picture he uses is that of a feast. Why a feast? Because good food and drink combined with good company makes the heart merry! Who doesn’t enjoy being at a well catered party with your best friends – laughing and enjoying yourself? The point is this:

God wants us to be with him - enjoying his presence and living in perfect harmony with each other forever.

And notice whom this banquet is for: not just Israel and Judah, but for *all people* from every tribe, nation, language and culture. The LORD of heaven wants his paradise filled with believers from every corner of the globe – united in faith and praise of Christ. This is exactly how St. John describes heaven in his book of Revelation, where he writes: ⁹ *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. . . . And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*ⁱ

Isaiah tells us the LORD himself 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 of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”*ⁱⁱ

Because of our sins, we not only can offer God nothing, we deserve nothing from God except his eternal wrath and punishment in hell. God is 100 % righteous and holy. He cannot tolerate any sin in his presence. We are anything but holy with our impure and selfish thoughts, words and actions. It’s because of our sins that there is death in the world, as the Scriptures say: *the wages of sin is death.*ⁱⁱⁱ 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 don’t deserve it. This is why he took it upon himself to give us a special gift – as the Scripture passage I quoted earlier continues: *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*^{iv} Forgiveness life and salvation – this is the feast God himself is preparing for us in Christ Jesus , which we will fully enjoy when He comes again on the Last Day, as our sermon text continues:

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.*

You’ve probably seen it on TV shows: whenever someone dies, they are covered up. Why? Because the living do not like looking at the dead. In a similar way our sins separated us from God to such a degree that he does not like looking at us. As I mentioned before: God’s holiness prevents him from even tolerating the slightest sin in his presence. Sin kills. It separated us from God. Death is our disgrace because it proves we are sinful.

But God promises to remove the shroud that covers the nations. Why? Because that shroud won’t be needed anymore! God promises to make us alive. He promises to take away mankind’s shame and destroy the death that consumes us. How? The only way he could: by taking away our sins.

And this is why He sent his one and only Son into the world. Even though Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, 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. And, do you know what the best part is? He rose victoriously from the grave – thereby 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.*^v

And this is why we can smile when a Christian dies and defiantly say: "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" . . . *thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"^{vi} We can say this 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, death or pain. There will only be joy and peace forevermore.

And how can we be certain of this? Because: "*the LORD has spoken.*" This statement is like God's signature on a contract. Whatever God promises, that He must do. His name bears witness to this 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? Those who get paid once a month know about the struggle there is a week or two before your paycheck when all the bills come 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 in the evening. Keeping focused on "payday" can help you go forward in 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, sorrow, pain, and death! As we struggle through these last days, look forward and rejoice in the salvation the LORD is preparing for us. He will give us the strength to press on, because we know that *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*^{vii}

Part Two: Salvation that we only receive through faith.

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

Well, let's look at how the people in our text got there: *In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.* With one voice they confessed that it was the LORD who saved them. In other words, they didn't do anything to get there, God did it all.

But they also said that they trusted in God. In other words, they received the salvation God prepared for them by believing His promise. Without that faith, they would have never received God's gift because they wouldn't have believed that it was true. But because they believed God, they, with the Holy Spirit's help, persevered in their goal of receiving what God promised. Like Abraham of old, they followed God's direction and guidance – not letting any worldly worries or

troubles detract them from trusting the LORD. And their God came through, as they themselves confess: *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.*"

Imagine that your boss came to you this week and told you that he is going to give you a \$2000 Christmas bonus because he values you as an employee. What would you do? Most likely you would thank him now and tell your family the good news about the coming Christmas bonus. Your boss's promise would give you joy in the present and encourage you to work all the harder for him.

But what if an employee said to his boss, "Ya, right. I don't believe you." Would that worker have the same joy you had? Would he look forward to Christmas as much as you? Would he love his boss as much as you? Finally, would he attempt to cash his boss's bonus check once it came – if he didn't believe it was real? No he wouldn't. His unbelief would prevent him from enjoying the gift.

In the same way if a person does not believe God's promise of salvation, the promise will do him no good. His life will not be joyous but laborious. He will not look to the end of his life with hope, but despair. He will not receive salvation because He refuses to have it.

But the opposite is true for the person in whom the Holy Spirit has awakened faith. He will believe God's promise, and that belief will give him hope. His faith in God's salvation will sustain him through every difficult day of life – as he happily lives for his LORD. He will stay focused on the salvation God has prepared for him, ever reminding himself of God's promise, and look forward to receiving it with joy. And, when Christ does return, the LORD will fulfill his promise – giving him eternal salvation for Christ's sake.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: our daily life is a struggle. Many times we feel like giving in to the temptation to give up our faith. When the devil, the world, and our sinful natures press us hard, let us focus on the promises God gave us and **look forward to the LORD'S Salvation: Salvation that the Lord himself is preparing for us, and salvation we that we only receive through faith.** Let the thought of this eternal salvation move you to press on - knowing that God will most certainly fulfill what he promised because Jesus has already paid for your sin. Amen.

ⁱ Revelation 7:9-10 NIV84

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 64:6 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 6:23a NIV84

^{iv} Romans 6:23 NIV84

^v John 3:16 NIV84

^{vi} 1 Corinthians 15:55, 57 NIV84

^{vii} Romans 8:18 NIV84