

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Isaiah 25:1-10

Sermon Title: "The End of Pain and the Beginning of Eating" (World Communion Sunday)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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{SLIDE 1} 722 BC. The nation of Israel no longer exists. This is the purple area on the screen also known as the Northern Kingdom. Judah is the Southern Kingdom below. They will exist up until 586 BC. But in 722 BC Israel in the north will no longer survive.

The Assyrians will have come in to take over everything. They will destroy cities and towns and families. They will take over the government and establish their own. They will take over the economy and force the Israelites to tolerate it. People will be ripped from their homes and made to live somewhere else. They will have to learn a new language, new customs, and a new religion.

It is difficult for us to understand what it would be like to have someone come in and force us out of our homes. We can come and go as we please. We can buy a house or sell a house, if we so choose. We could move to an apartment and make the smaller space a comfortable space. But for someone to come in and force us out... for someone to come and tell us we have to change everything about ourselves whether we like

it or not. {SLIDE 2} Maybe the modern-day example for us would be the Syrian Christians who have been forced from their homes, after ISIS soldiers have taken over their towns. When ISIS came in, they told the Christians to convert to their brand of religion or be killed. They had only so many days to comply. The Christians in Syria would not deny the Lord Jesus, so they had to move out. They had to search somewhere else to lay their heads. The infantile yet dangerous ISIS soldiers didn't care –they wanted the land to make their own. They want space to spread their terror.

{SLIDE 3} Isaiah, in verse 2, acknowledges that a city is a ruin. If one city is a ruin then the others must be in ruin, too. A fortified city with thick, tall walls is completely destroyed. A grand palace of foreigners has taken the place of a palace for the king of God's choosing. Everything is gone.

But which city in ruin is Isaiah talking about? Is he saying that Israel is in complete ruin, never to be rebuilt again, or that the foreign nation that took over will be in complete ruin soon enough? The destroyer becomes the destroyed. The invader is invaded. The nation of Assyria will pay for what it did to God's nation. The capital of Assyria will be in ruin, totally crumbled to the ground, never to be rebuilt. A palace of foreigners will be no more, for God will come in and

restore his people. A government of leaders who make up rules as they fit their whims will fall apart, for God will take away their power and give it to his people. Whether we like the current president in the White house or not, whether we like the current Congress in DC or not, whether we like a certain candidate running for president or not, they are not the ones who are in charge, for God will come in and create a space where all will bend a knee to God and worship.

{SLIDE 4} Strength is given to the needy and poor. There is a refuge for all who need protection from storms. The sun will not overheat and burn, for God provides a shade for relief.¹ Isaiah even says the noise of aliens is like heat in a dry place.² The words that they use to torment the weak. Phrases such as “You aren’t good enough,” “you aren’t smart enough,” and “Nobody cares about you,” they can feel like heat that drain our enthusiasm. We are baked under such brutal ideas, and we begin to believe that we are not good enough. God reduces the noise. We cannot hear the insults anymore. The “victorious songs,” as Isaiah put it, that try to wear us down are stilled. Their words do not get to us anymore with God supplying us confidence. Their cutting remarks do not touch us with God telling us how much we are loved.

¹ Cf. Isaiah 25:4.

² Cf. Isaiah 25:5.

The enemy is gone. Those who would try to put us down no longer exist. God is now in charge, Isaiah says, giving hope to the oppressed Israelites and giving us hope in our struggles. God is now present and in charge, and is ready to provide for us all we need.

{SLIDE 5} And what do we find set before us in verse 6? A feast. We Presbyterians do love food. We have Family Night Suppers and Luncheons and Thanksgiving celebrations and Renewal Service, which are all excuses for eating food. We love food.

But why a feast? After God takes control and begin to offer peace to all peoples, why is the next step to prepare a large banquet for everyone?

Which is the best way to gather people together? If we wanted people to come to our house, how do we convince them to do so? We offer food. Nobody says no to a free meal. If we are serving food and drink, people will show up on our doorstep. God prepares a great feast for all as a way of welcoming everybody close to him. God is now present, God is establishing a space where no problems can harm us, and so God invites us to him and to his space with refreshment. with nourishment. And God knows we will come if food is offered. We will not say no to God's free meal, full of all the fun and exciting food we could eat.

Notice the food that God prepares for us. Rich

food, well-aged wines, fatty food with the marrow inside the bone, and drinks that have been matures for years. It doesn't sounds like God's feast is fit for people dealing with diabetes. People who have cholesterol problems might not want to go and indulge in fatty foods. People who refrain from alcohol might not want to be tempted by the drinks offered.

{SLIDE 6} Consider the food and the meaning behind them. Rich food is the food of kings.³ Rich food is served to people who have nothing to worry about, because all their needs are taken care of. They are pampered and nurtured. They struggle for no reason at all. What is the opposite of rich food? Bread and water. Bread and water are eaten by people who struggle, who cannot get enough to eat, who can hardly keep body and soul together. Bread is very common, so everybody will eat it, which means there is no much to go around. Water may or may not be clean. You could find it in a lake or in the gutter, but is it clean enough to drink? People must struggle to gather bread and water for their families. People who eat rich foods do not struggle to gather it. It is simply given to them.

There is a huge contrast here. When the Assyrians took over Israel, the people had to struggle. They had

³ J. Alec Motyer, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Isaiah*, cf. 192.

to fend for themselves, and many died in that struggle. But in Isaiah 25:6, the Assyrians are gone. All the struggles and pains of the people have disappeared. God is now present, in charge, and serving the food that people need for life. God takes care of all their needs with a feast. The people look to God and they know they are saved.

{SLIDE 7} Now what about the meaning behind the wine? Notice that it is well-aged. That means the beverage had to sit for many years in order to mature. When wine matures it tastes so much better. More flavors come out that wake up the taste buds in people's mouths. So, if wine is to be well-aged, it cannot be disturbed. It cannot be touched or moved in any way. Think about the society that surrounds a bottle of wine that is sitting and maturing. The society itself must be at peace. Everything must be in order so that the beverage can mature. Well-aged wine has a better chance aging in times of peace than in times of war. In times of war, a bomb could hit the building in which the wine is aging. Marauders could enter the building and either smash the bottles of wine or drink them all up. If one wants a well-aged wine, nothing is allowed to disturb it. All has to be at peace.

So in the Isaiah passage, the prophet is saying that all will be at peace with God in charge. There will be

no struggles. There will be no fighting or bickering or complaining. For a very long time God's people will only know calm and goodwill. God's people will only know how to love one another and care for each other's needs. God's people will become well-aged in their faith in God, and God will be their companion forever.

{SLIDE 8} Today is World Communion Sunday. The idea of this holiday came from a pastor who wanted to bring churches together in a certain community. That community happened to be outside Pittsburgh, PA. In this service, the message was that “everyone might receive both inspiration and information, and above all, [know] how important the Church of Jesus Christ is, and how each congregation is interconnected one with another.”⁴ This one service expanded and reached the level of the National Council of Churches, and now every church in the world is invited to recognize our unity in and importance to the kingdom of God.

It may make us wonder how Isaiah 25 influenced the creation of World Communion Sunday. We all face troubles in our own countries, some more severe than others. Either we have created our own problems or

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Communion_Sunday.

we are victims to those who want to be in charge. We look to the God who would save us. We look to the God who would lay down his life for us, silence the songs of the ruthless with his own blood, destroy the palaces of the aliens, wicked people who mean to do us harm.⁵

The Lord's Supper points us back to Isaiah 25. It reminds us of where we were once, lost in sin, filled with pain and distress. It tells us of the God who has saved us through Jesus Christ. It shows us that God is now present, and through Christ we are free from sin. Death cannot touch us, the death that separates us from God forever.

We have a place with God, all of us in this world. The shroud that was cast over all believers in every country is lifted. We can see clearly each other and our God. The tears that could fall from the faces of all believers in every country is wiped away. If we cry, it is tears of joy for the One who honors us, who takes us from our disgrace and makes us complete.⁶

It may make us wonder how Isaiah 25 influenced the creation of World Communion Sunday. Today we eat together and remember Christ's sacrifice. Together we eat together, and we get an idea of what that large

⁵ The Hebrew word for *alien* means stranger and foreigner as well as to profane and to turn aside.

⁶ Cf. Isaiah 25:7-8.

feast will look like in heaven. Together we eat and know we are filled to overflowing. There will be no struggles. There will be no fighting or bickering or complaining. We have nothing to worry about, as we look to God to comfort and nurture us. God is now present and in charge – our very lives are secure in God.

Assurance of Pardon:

In Christ, we are offered a new design for living: open hearts, abundant forgiveness, yearning to serve others, desire to be one with God. The old is gone, and a new life has begun. Accept Christ's sacrifice, and be healed of your sin. Through him you and I are forgiven - thanks be to God. Amen.