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Proper 23 • Isaiah 25:6–9 • October 12, 2014

David Lewis

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, lewisd@csl.edu

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Today's OT text is found in the section of Isaiah known as "the Isaiah Apocalypse" (Is 24–27). This "apocalypse" follows upon the oracles against the nations (Is 13–23) and offers a vision of Yahweh's plans of judgment and grace for the entire world. Isaiah 24 depicts the judgment that will come upon the earth. Isaiah 25:1–5 then describes the results of this judgment, which includes "a strong people" glorifying Yahweh and "cities of terrifying nations" fearing him (25:3).

Of particular interest for today's text is 24:9. Here it states that as a result of Yahweh's judgment people will not drink wine (יַיִן) and strong drink (שִׁכָּר) will become bitter to them; there will be no joy and celebration. This judgment will be reversed in the eschatological feast described in 25:6 where Yahweh will provide all peoples with "aged wine" (שְׂמֵרִים) to drink. Isaiah 25:6 describes the feast. Yahweh of the armies will make the feast "on this mountain" (בְּהַר הַיְהוָה) probably referring to Zion. Yahweh is the host. The guests will include not just Israel, but all peoples (כָּל-הָעַמִּים). And the food and drink will be of the best kind—literally "fat," "dregs" (aged or potent wine?), "wiped fat" (sometimes translated as "fat of the marrow"), and "refined dregs/wine." Where wine is not consumed with joy in 24:9 in the midst of judgment, Yahweh will now provide the best food to eat and the best wine to drink.

Isaiah 25:7–8 then go on to describe how Yahweh will remove the covering/veil that covers all peoples (כָּל-הָעַמִּים) and all nations (כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם). This covering/veil appears to be figurative for death. In 25:8 it then says specifically that Yahweh will swallow up death forever. With this Yahweh will also wipe away the tears from all faces. The language of the vision then focuses upon Israel specifically as it says Yahweh will remove the reproach of his people (עֲבוֹרָה) from the earth. And so on this future day when Yahweh redeems his people Israel, there will also be a blessing for all peoples,

all nations, and all individuals (“faces”) when the curse of Genesis 3:19 is reversed and Yahweh hosts his eschatological banquet.

The Masoretic Text indicates a paragraph break after 25:8, yet the referent of “that day” in 25:9 may be understood to be the time described in 25:6–8. The proper response to all that Yahweh will do on that future day is to offer this joyous declaration of faith—“Look, this is our God! We waited for him and he delivered us! This is Yahweh! We waited for him, so let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation!”

Considerations for Preaching

Given the eschatological nature of the context, it may be likely that the hearer/reader is to understand that this prophecy/vision does reference a final day and not just some singular deliverance of Israel in the past. The imagery of an eschatological banquet is used by Jesus as well to describe the consummation of the age (see, for instance, the gospel reading assigned for today). The concordance in Nestle Aland 28 indicates that Isaiah 25:8 is referenced in 1 Corinthians 15:54 (“death is swallowed up in victory”) and Revelation 7:17 (“and God will wipe every tear from their eyes”). This indicates that Yahweh’s final judgment upon death (and then the feast that follows!) is still yet to come.

Jesus’s own resurrection, however, is a first fruits and so a foreshadowing of that day. In his Son Jesus, Yahweh has initiated his eschatological reign of salvation on earth. In the resurrection of his Son Yahweh has judged death itself. The salvation Jesus has brought to Israel has since spilled out to all peoples, all nations. So now we too have new life since we have been baptized into Jesus’s death and resurrection. And so we too are now invited to await the great banquet that Yahweh will provide on that day when death will be swallowed up forever. We too can now rejoice in the salvation provided by Yahweh, our God.

The preacher can thus focus on both the now and the not-yet aspects of Isaiah 25 to comfort his hearers today.