

Week 5

Isaiah 25:6-9 “Gather at the Table”

Begin with prayer

Loving God,

We often struggle to love those that are different than we are. People who look, talk, and think differently than we do. People whose lives and experiences are so foreign to us. It's often difficult to understand them, and even more challenging to love them. But Lord, we know that this is what you've called us to. So we ask for eyes to see the beauty and humanity in everyone. To love the diverse people that you've created.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Read the text for today. (Suggestion: Go around and read it out loud, each person taking a verse.)

Ask: What stood out to you about this text? What, if anything, doesn't make sense? What caught your attention and sparked curiosity?

C.S. Lewis famously claimed that the deepest longings of the human heart are hints and echoes of the same things God desires for us. Our longings are often reflections of what our Creator desires for his creation. Our longings often reveal what we were made for.

Could it be that the near-universal hunger for good food and drink indicate that these are gifts that God wants us to enjoy? Across the range of human experience, in nearly every culture and society, there are celebrations of feasting and delight. If a better day were to arrive for people in difficult circumstances, one of the first places they'd hope to see evidence of improvement would be on their kitchen table. You know you've moved up in life when you go from eating ramen noodles to Chipotle. Isaiah repeatedly invites us to envision the shalom of God's coming kingdom as a feast, a glorious banquet.

The vision that we get in Isaiah 25 is one of a creation that teems with life, which abounds with fruitfulness, which cannot be exhausted. All peoples from all nations will come together. We will be drawn together by the aroma of good food and by the promise of delightful drinks. When we gather on God's holy mountain, around that holy banquet table, we will discover that the veils and shrouds that have kept us from really seeing one another as co-image-bearers of God are gone. Now we can look each other in the eye and recognize our common humanity. We can take joy in one another. Now we can see the differences in skin color, speech accents, and socio-economic backgrounds—all those things that caused division—will be cause for celebration and wonder.

We will see that this is a result of God's great salvation—a work of creation and then of redemption and then of re-creation, so grand that only a really big and great God could have pulled it off.

Let's talk about it:

Isaiah 25 is a shining example of how themes of creation and redemption weave in and out of one another so much that finally you're not completely sure what is what. In the end, though, you have the distinct impression that not only is God's salvation a whole lot like a table with an awesome spread of just-picked fruit, bread straight from the oven, and freshly-squeezed lemonade, it looks like salvation actually includes such a feast. In other words, it's hard to see where simile and metaphor leave off and literal description begins.

- Is the experience of God's forgiving grace *like* a banquet or *is it* a banquet? The witness of Scripture indicates that although the shalom of God's kingdom will mean much more than a well-set banquet table, it may not mean less. Talk about this idea.
- Isaiah repeatedly invites us to envision the shalom (the deep peace and realization that everything is right) of God's coming kingdom as a feast, a glorious banquet. How do you picture this in your own life?
- If salvation and deliverance from oppression looks like a feast, who will be sitting around the table with you? Can you begin to imagine your roommates, co-workers, or neighbors? What about people you once disliked? Can you see each other as co-image-bearers of Christ?
- Do you imagine a particular kind of food at this feast? Care to share the recipe? What if we started preparing the feast already by compiling a list of recipes and shared them with this group? Grow your menu!