

*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. 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 the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. 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 25:6-9)*

### **What does Jesus’ Resurrection Promise Us?**

How big a deal is a promise? Does it seem to you like we live in an age in which promises are easy to make and easy to forget? Politicians make promises and nobody even expects them to live up to them – in fact if you point out that they didn’t keep them, people will ridicule you. And sadly, we live in an age in which even ordinary people sometimes forget how big a deal it is to give someone their word. Do you realize the effect the words, “I promise” have on people who hear them? Those words invite trust. Trust is something that you never want to betray because trust is easy to lose and very difficult to regain. Even those of us who consider promises to be very important have to admit that our record at keeping them is uneven. Sometimes we can’t. We try but the promise is beyond our power. Sometimes we didn’t realize what it would take to keep the promise or even what we were really promising. Sometimes we’re just too selfish or too lazy to do what we said that we would. God never has that problem. Today, we’ve gathered to celebrate the greatest promise of all time, the promise of Easter. Because it is God’s promise, we want to understand exactly what it means. **What does Jesus’ resurrection promise us?**

#### **I.**

**Victory over death.** That’s not a small promise, is it? Over the years, I’ve made little promises – I’ve promised people that I would call them or I promised my kids that they could rent a movie. And I’ve made some pretty big ones, too. I promised my wife that I would be faithful to her for as long as we both shall live. I promised you that I would proclaim the gospel to you in its truth and purity. But I can’t promise you what Jesus promised when he rose from the dead. He promised that you will conquer death itself through him.

Of course, that is very much a promise now, right? What I mean is that you can’t see the fulfillment yet. You don’t have to drive very far to see that death is alive and well on planet earth. How many funeral homes are there within a five mile radius of this building? How many hospitals? If these bodies weren’t dying, we wouldn’t need those funeral homes or hospitals to say nothing of the cemeteries that go with them. But all those businesses are thriving because people die every day. All human beings are on the road to death. Now, we Americans are singularly blessed in this regard. All over this planet, countries are fighting wars and we’ve deployed troops overseas for ten years. Yet, the street outside our church doesn’t have any bomb craters in it. If there are any bullet holes in your home it’s probably because you didn’t unload your hunting rifle. The average life expectancy for us Americans is about 78 years right now. That’s about four years less than the rate in Japan, which has the longest life expectancy, but it’s decades longer than the lowest rates in third world countries. But all that blessing doesn’t change the fact that every single one of us will die, unless the world ends first. Almost certainly, some of us who are here today will not be here to celebrate Easter next year. No matter how hard we fight and how many hours we exercise and how carefully we observe our diet, in the end, death will win and we will lose.

Death hurts. It hurts as we go through the process of dying. I was looking for something in my office this week and I was struck by how many books I have that deal with comforting people who have lost someone or who are dying themselves. Every illness that we feel reminds us that these bodies are dying, slowly or quickly. And every time we lose someone, it leaves a hole in our lives that cannot be filled. We can heal from the sharpness of the hurt. We can reach a point when we accept that the person is gone and go on with the new normal in our lives. But nothing can ever erase the hole that they leave.

God knew that. It was never a part of his plan that death should rule our lives. He created us to live forever in joy with him. Death is a horrible intrusion into the world he gave us. Death is the result of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they introduced death to every one of us, their descendants. And St. Paul reminds

us that death came to all people because all people sin. Think about those promises that we fail to keep. Every time our laziness or our selfishness keeps us from doing what we said we would, we lie and sin. Every time we promise more than we can possibly keep, we lie and sin. Death is God's punishment for sin. I deserve to die and I will. It's just a matter of time until death wins.

But Jesus came into this world to beat death. When those women went to his tomb on the first Easter and they found that angel inside, he asked them, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" He was telling them that everything has now changed. Jesus was dead, make no mistake about it. But he broke the hold that death had on him. He rose. When he rose he broke the power that death has over us and God made us a promise, a promise that Isaiah pictures for us this morning. **"On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever."** You know what a shroud is right? It's a sheet that you cover a body with. We've all seen it on TV. When there's a dead body there, they cover the face with a sheet so that we don't have to look that dead person in the eye. They really do that in hospitals and morgues. So God pictures our whole world under that sheet, dead in sin and separated from him forever, just waiting until the right moment for our bodies to die.

But Jesus changed all that. He defeated death when he rose from the dead. He defeated death by defeating our sin, the cause of death. He paid for all that we were guilty of on the cross. He paid for all the promises we've made but never intended to keep. He paid for all the times we tried but failed to keep our promises. He paid for our laziness and our unreal expectations about what we can do. He paid for the sin in our hearts and the sin in our lives. When he rose, he told us that our sin and guilt are gone forever. Jesus stood where we have to stand in a world where death rules. During his life, Jesus knew what death was like. Several times during his ministry, he raised people from the dead. At least once, Jesus wept because of the sorrow that death brings on us. During the decades before he revealed himself as our Savior, we have to assume that people he knew and loved died. Most likely his adopted father, Joseph, died before he began his ministry. He knew how much death hurt. And he knew what it was like to face his own death. He saw it coming in the Garden of Gethsemane. When he died, he went where we have to go.

But then he blazed a trail out of death to life. When he died, he paid for all the sins of all the world. He died and he paid for what kills us. Because he rose, we, too will rise. The day will come when God will swallow up death forever. The day will come when the whole human race comes out from under the shroud of death and we will live forever. That's what Easter promises us: victory over death.

## II.

700 years before Jesus came, God promised to destroy the shroud of death. When the time was right, Jesus lived and died and rose to keep that promise. Now, we live in hope, waiting for the day to dawn when we will see that promise kept. When that day comes, we will live in a world that is so totally different from the world we know right now that God doesn't ever really give us a detailed description of it. Instead he focuses on what it's going to feel like. **What does Jesus' resurrection promise us? Eternal joy with God.**

Isaiah uses a picture that God uses many times in the Scriptures to convey that joy. Sometimes, I worry that I'm repeating myself with the illustrations I use. If you listen to a pastor long enough, you'll know what his favorites are. God has favorite illustrations, too. One of his most favorite is a banquet. Usually, it's described as a wedding banquet. The wedding idea is not here in this text, but the banquet most certainly is. God pictures choice meats and aged wines. He pictures a table overflowing with all the best food a person could want. I suppose if Isaiah had lived today, he might have pictured filet mignon and sea bass and some really expensive champagne with a French name that I can't pronounce. What would you picture on that table as the best banquet ever? Whatever it is, God uses that picture to teach us about heaven.

Now, it is a picture. Heaven is not a perpetual Thanksgiving dinner where we all eat until we fall asleep and then wake up and eat some more. God's point here is the celebration. Food is almost always a part of our biggest celebrations. God wants us to picture heaven as the place where we leave behind all the cares and sorrows of this life, where we escape from the rat race and the disappointments, where we don't have to worry if we have enough or how we'll pay for things. We will be with him. We will have all that we need and more.

Isaiah says, **"The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth."** Wiping the tears from our eyes is another picture God uses several times in the Bible. I always picture a mother scooping up a toddler who's fallen and hurt himself. She hushes him and brushes the tears from his eyes and makes him feel better. But it wouldn't have to be a toddler. A

husband could do the same for his wife, when sorrow or hardship have come. But the picture does imply someone very close to us, like Jesus. Tears flow in this life because there is so much hurt in this life. But when Jesus returns, all our tears will be done forever because all that causes our tears will be done forever. All hurt and sorrow will be over.

Then Isaiah says that God will remove the disgrace of his people from the earth. What does that mean? He's talking about sin. He's talking about guilt. Isaiah lived in a time when God's people were being warned of punishment to come because they were unfaithful. They worshipped false gods and ignored the true God. Their idols and their punishment were a disgrace. The same could be said for us. Every time we do something God tells us not to and every time we don't do something God tells us to do, we worship an idol – our own lusts or selfishness or greed or laziness. Every one of those sins is a disgrace. But Jesus paid for those sins. He rose and declared that we are totally forgiven. And the promise of Easter is that a day will dawn when our hearts will be pure and holy. Never again will we lust. Never again will we feel pride or selfishness or laziness. The disgrace that marks every sinner will be gone and we will live as God's holy people in joy forever.

That's what is coming. And the last verse of our text today pictures the celebration when that promise is fulfilled. We 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.”** God made us a promise when Jesus rose from the dead. He promised eternal life with him in heaven. He promised freedom from death and sorrow and pain. Right now, we live by faith in that promise of God. Death reigns all around us. Young people die. People with children die and leave them behind. People who don't appreciate the gift of love and family and life destroy their lives with drinking and sex and selfishness. But that is all going to change. When that day dawns and we are free from all that sin, we will rejoice. And our joy will never end. A promise is a promise. God gave us his word. Easter assures us that he will never lack the power or the will to keep his word. Trust in that promise and live. Amen.