

Something to look forward to * Isaiah 25
November 8, 2020 * Langford Church * Graham Gladstone

A few weeks ago, I saw this image online that I thought captured the way things are right now. It started with one picture of a person juggling one ball that says 'normal stress' and they seemed to be doing ok. And then it showed a second picture of a person juggling 'normal stress' and 'COVID stress' and 'election stress' and 'financial stress' and 'what's going to happen with Christmas?' stress and well, you get the picture. There's a lot going on right now, isn't there? And it's all too easy to get weighed down by it all.

So what I want to do this morning is lift your eyes off of the here and now and focus them on what is to come. I want to give you something to look forward to, to help you persevere in the here and now. I famously dislike going through airports, but I just keep telling myself 'five more hours and I'll be in Florida' and that helps to get me through. So I want to give you something even better than Florida to look forward to, in the hopes that it will help you through whatever you've got going on right now.

And this thing to look forward to is actually rooted in a vision of the future that God gave to the Israelites in Exile. As you know, they had turned from God and rejected His faithful love and so He sent them into Exile to refine them. But even then, He was with them, protecting them and sustaining them. And on more than one occasion, He actually sent prophets to them in Exile to say 'hold on, persevere, be faithful to me, because I will set things right.'

One of the most famous of these visions is in Isaiah 25, starting at verse 6. Isaiah 25 God says to His people in Exile – 'Look, I know you're struggling right now. You're far from home. You're probably feeling alienated and alone. I understand. But hold on, because a day is coming when I will put things right. When I will triumph over the forces of evil (25:10-12) and gather up all of my faithful people and bring them back for the party to end all parties. And we read about it in verse 6 –

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."
(Isa 25:6-9 NIV).

He says 'Look. I know what you are going through right now is tough, but there is coming a day when I will set all things right. When I myself will set the table with the richest of foods and the best of wines. No more hunger, no more famine, no more hungry mouths scraping by with whatever scraps they can find. There is a day coming when all my people have all that they need.

There is coming a day – says the LORD - when I will 'remove the disgrace' of my people from all the earth – that is, I will make it so that godly people are no longer the butt of jokes. So that they no longer face persecution and opposition for following me faithfully. When people made in the image of God will no longer jockey for power and influence; where conflict and oppression and racism and exploitation are gone. When people live in harmony together.

There is coming a day – God says - when I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. The pain of grief and of loss will be no more because I will swallow up the great shroud that covers all mankind. I will swallow up death forever.

This is the future that God holds out to His people and says ‘press on because this day is coming.’

And there’s a sense in which this happened when the Exiles returned to Jerusalem in Ezra and Nehemiah but clearly, it hasn’t happened in its fullness yet. And so that means that this promise is for us too.

And I know that because John picks it up in the book of Revelation and says ‘this is for us, the Church, too.’

Revelation 19:9 – God sets the table for the wedding supper of the Lamb – and then Revelation 21:3 –
3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:3-4 NIV).

That day is coming.

Jesus died to make sure it would and to secure for us a seat at the wedding feast.

The day is coming when God will set things right; draw strength from that and live with confidence and faithfulness now.

That’s the big idea for this message – ‘knowing that God will soon set things right, live and act with confidence now.’

I know the pain that many of you carry. I know the injustices that you have suffered. I know that many of you feel like you’re in a kind of social exile, disconnected from other people. I’ve officiated enough funerals to know what an enemy death is. And so I want to say to you today – ‘there is a day coming when God will put things right.’

Don’t let hardships or pain weigh you down, because God will soon make things right. Live with the confidence that comes from the future now. That’s why God has given us these passages in Isaiah and Revelation. He tells us how it’s going to turn out so that we can live and act with confidence now. When it comes to eternity, God loves spoilers, because they carry us through.

There will come a day when God will set things right; let that pull you on through the trials of life now.

You know, I wish I could show you this picture – it really was a ‘you had to be there’ moment. But a few years ago, Julie was looking for fun things to do for my birthday and she decided that we should do what I’m sure you’d all love to do for your birthday – a 5k run. (It was fun. I enjoyed it). It was a nice, sunny day; not too hot, just the right temperature, the race started with this nice long, downhill slope – almost a kilometer downhill. It was awesome. But here’s the thing about race courses – some of them are loop courses – you go around and never cover the same ground twice – and some are out and back courses – so you go out, hit the halfway point and come back.

And it was just as that nice long downhill slope leveled out that it hit me – I'm going to have to do that in reverse now on the way back, when I've already run 4km. So, I kept at it. Watched twelve year old kids pass me left and right – hit the halfway point, turned around, headed for home. And was getting tired. But when I approached the slope back up, I caught sight of this big yellow balloon inflatable gate thing that they had marking the finish line off in the distance. And I'll tell you – it was like a breath of fresh air. All of a sudden, my flagging energy got a jolt and I was ready to press on because I could see the finish. Sure, the final uphill jog was a slog but my eyes were not on the run but on the finish line – it pulled me on when I had nothing left.

And that's why God has given us these visions of eternity in Isaiah and Revelation. To revive our failing spirits, to reinvigorate our tired will, to give us something to look forward to. There will come a day when hunger and famine and poverty is no more, when exploitation and oppression are a thing of the past, when God Himself will wipe our tears away but death itself will die –

Knowing that God will set things right, live and act with confidence now.

BENEDICTION

1 Th. 3:12-13 - May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all... so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.