

"Behold, This is Our God" (Isaiah 25:1–12)(5.24.20)

Let us Pray:

SETUP:

Please indulge me today as I start with a longer personal story because it gave me a relevant insight. If you have been coming here for years, you know that I very rarely address secular holidays during the sermon. It is much more likely that I will address them during the Pastoral Prayer time, like I did today with the poem Freedom Isn't Free. The fact that this is Memorial Day weekend; the fact that our Drive-in Church is virtually, in our cemetery; and, that our nation has been largely in a lockdown; may all be contributing factors for my exception today.

On August 4th 1974, I was still 17. I took the bus from Connecticut to Boston and the train over to the US Coast Guard Recruiter's Office. They drove me out to CG Station Newburyport, one of the first CG small boat stations. There, along with a dozen other young men, I was sworn in by a CG Rear Admiral. My parents had signed the permission forms because I was still a minor.

Five months later, to the day, I married Carol; and, nine days later I left for the Coast Guard Training Center in Cape May, NJ. Because I was a trumpet player, I was part of the TRACEN Band. When I had been at boot camp for about a month, the Chief Musician's Mate in charge of the band was contacted about a military funeral. One of the Permanent Party trumpet players and myself, were assigned this funeral detail. He would play taps and I would echo taps from a short distance away.

This was my first military funeral. I had seen them on TV, but I had never attended one in person. It was quite the experience. I was a little nervous and because it was cold I was worried that my lips would be too frozen to play properly.

The 21 gun salute certainly would get anyone's attention. Then it was time for the buglers to play taps. The Permanent Party bugler went first and I wasn't sure I would be able to play my part. I started shaky but did a passable job.

The Honor Guard was meticulous and performed flawlessly. When the flag was removed from covering the coffin and folded reverently by the flag detail, my heart was touched. After they presented the folded memorial flag to the family member, I was never able to look at the American Flag in the same way again. No, freedom isn't free.

A young man recently posted on social media what I thought was a flippant remark about Constitutional concerns and protests during our National Anthem. For some reason, maybe because it is Memorial Day weekend, this struck a nerve for me. This man enjoys success and freedom because the sacrifice of others has made this possible. I believe we have at least two generations in our nation that take their freedoms for granted. They don't know what life would be like without those freedoms.

And, this got me to thinking. Is God taken for granted? Is Emmanuel, God with us, taken for granted? Is Jesus' birth only an opportunity to make a profit? Is Jesus' sinless perfect life dismissed? Does the fulfillment of prophecy, the Suffering Servant's crucifixion make a difference? Can a resurrected Christ make any impact on this culture? Why does it matter that Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father? Is the Pentecost Present of God the Holy Spirit evident in the Church today? Do even Christians proclaim? "Behold, this is our God!"

Isaiah 25:1–12 (ESV) God Will Swallow Up Death Forever

25 O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

2 For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the foreigners' palace is a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.

3 Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;

cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

4 For you have been a stronghold to the poor,  
a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from  
the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of  
the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,

5 like heat in a dry place.

You subdue the noise of the foreigners; as heat  
by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is put down.

6 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for  
all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

7 And he will swallow up on this mountain  
the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord  
God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the  
reproach of his people he will take away from all the  
earth, for the Lord has spoken.

9 It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our  
God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.

This is the Lord; we have waited for him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

10 For the hand of the Lord will rest on this  
mountain, and Moab shall be trampled down in his place,  
as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.

11 And he will spread out his hands in the midst of  
it as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim, but the  
Lord will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his hands.

12 And the high fortifications of his walls he will  
bring down, lay low, and cast to the ground, to the dust.

The word of God for the people of God.

INTRODUCTION:

This proclamation of the prophet Isaiah covers the expanse of time. He acknowledges that the LORD God's plan of old will not be thwarted. We know it is a plan conceived before Adam, for Jesus is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. We have the testimony of John the Baptist who announced, "Behold, the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world."

Then the prophet proceeds in time to Israel's current dilemma. From there we see the Lord's short term response at a particular point in history. And finally, the culmination of human history on the mountain of God. Yes, our God had a plan from the beginning. He is omniscient and has divine foreknowledge.

BODY:

This is Ascension Sunday, commemorating Jesus' return to the right hand of the Father. During our weekly Zoom Bible Study, we looked at the scriptural accounts of this portion of God's plan. Near Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus spoke to his disciples one more time and then ascended into the clouds. As the disciples stared intently into the heavens, two angels suddenly appeared with them.

Acts 1:11 (NIV84)

11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Yes, my friends, Jesus' return upon the clouds is part of God's plan from of old. Then God's kingdom will come on his Holy Mountain. A great feast will be prepared. The veil that is covering the peoples of the world will be removed. The Lord's hand will rest on this mountain.

Over and over again, we find Jesus on a mountain. As already noted, he ascended from that Mount of Olives. He preaches the most important sermon of all time on a mountain: it is called the Sermon on the Mount. He feeds the five thousand on the side of a mountain. Jesus is transfigured on Mount Hermon and crucified on a hill called Calvary. Behold, This is the Lord our God.

Isaiah 2:1-5 (ESV) The Mountain of the Lord

2 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the Lord  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be lifted up above the hills;

and all the nations shall flow to it,

3 and many peoples shall come, and say:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us  
his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war anymore.

5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord.

Before we start examining the good news, let's get the bad news out of the way. There are many Moabites in the world. Moab was a small nation that refused to help God's Chosen People. They constantly resisted Yahweh's plan and purposes. The Moab name became synonymous with evil and the enemies of God. All of our God's enemies will be dealt with under the Hand of God. In contrast to the Mountain of God, they will be trampled down in a dunghill. What a remarkable contrast. Instead of the glorious feast in the presence of our glorious Lord, Moab will be miserably mired in a muddy mess of manure. We are given this image of swimming in a cesspool.

Pride is one of the great downfalls of the human race. It is a constant refrain of scripture that God lifts up the humble but brings down the proud. Moabites don't think they need God. Like the governor of New York, they claim God's glory for themselves. Their plans, their skills, their hands are responsible for their wellbeing, not God they claim. They depend on human means, human fortifications, human walls, upon which they build their worldly kingdoms. With the swipe of his hand, Our God will bring them down; to lay them low; to cast them to the ground; and, to grind them to dust. Thus sayeth the Lord our God.

Those that have dealt dastardly with Israel will be brought down. It doesn't matter how many palaces; it doesn't matter the strength of their fortifications; it doesn't matter how many cities they have. They are no match for our God. When the Almighty is done with them, they will have no recourse. The oppressors will

be defeated.

Behold, this our God hears the cry of His people. He has been and will be a stronghold for the poor. The Lord has a most tender spot in his heart for the poor. For those that need the Lord, for those that are in distress, our God is a stronghold. The name of the Lord is a strong tower and the righteous will run to it and be saved. Whether it is in the storms of this life or in the sweltering sun of a desert wasteland, our God is with His people.

Those that are ruthless, who plot and plan and connive, they will be found out. They will be exposed.

Today, there is a cacophony of chaos. We are so engulfed in noise that it seems impossible to hear that small still voice within us. Behold, this is our God who is our rock and refuge. My spirit longs for justice to come and my habitation on the hill of the Lord.

Isaiah tells us that there is a covering cast over all people. There is a veil over all the nations. This is a darkness. It is a darkness that blinds. It is a darkness of the understanding. We call it sin. It is the realm of the Devil and his demons who delights in the stumbling that prevents us from finding the light of Jesus. On God's mountain, the Devil has been completely defeated. He and his demons are spending the rest of eternity in the burning lake of Sulphur that never goes out. On that mountain there is no more crying. On that mountain, there is no more dying. In our New Testament, Paul echoes Isaiah, death and the grave have been defeated; completely and absolutely. Again the tenderness of God is demonstrated by his personal wiping away of our tears. For those in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation. There is no guilt. This our Lord has spoken and I believe it with all my heart.

There is a dominant theme in scripture for our heavenly reward. Heaven is depicted as a great feast. For us in this place and time and affluence, we don't appreciate this promise as we should. We have been to the bounteous breakfast buffet at the Smithville Inn. We have huge Thanksgiving dinners. Too much delicious food is more of a problem than a lack of food. This is not true for much of the world. This is not true for most people throughout human history.

Some have lost their taste for such a heavenly banquet table. They refuse to taste and see that the Lord is good. They refuse to sample the goodness of Jesus Christ. They are like children that have spoiled their appetites by consuming candy. There is no substance in it. There is no sustaining in it. The teeth will rot. The sugar dependence will grow. There is a spiritual diabetes. It leads to disease, destruction, and death. No, do not be deceived by the dainties of this day.

Imagine that you are giving a huge party. You have bought the absolutely best of the best. The most succulent meats; the freshest fruits and vegetables; everything is seasoned to perfection. The best of beverages have been stocked. The wine is literally out of this world. You want your guests to enjoy your generosity. It gives you pleasure to provide such great bounty for your loved ones. This is the heart of our God.

For whom did Jesus die? When the Lord called Abraham to be the father of God's Chosen People, it was so that all people would be blessed through Abraham. Right before Jesus ascended, he commanded his disciples to go into all the world to all the peoples of the world to share the good news of the Christ.

And here, Isaiah shares God's heart. The banquet is available for ALL PEOPLE. The message is for ALL the nations. Tears will be wiped away from ALL faces. Reproach will be taken away from ALL the earth. Death has been conquered on behalf of every soul that receives Jesus as Savior and makes Him master of their lives.

**CONCLUSION:**

Behold, this is our God who reveals himself in these wondrous words of His holy inspired word. God's heart shines through like a laser to penetrate the clouds of gloom. For who did Jesus die? Who is invited to the wedding supper of the lamb?

Behold, this is our God. He is eternal which means not only that he will always be, but that the Lord has always existed. Our God is outside of the human construct of time. Our God has done wonderful things, miraculous things, and unimaginable things. The Lord has done things seen and unseen.

There is nothing more faithful than our God. WE have been promised that he will always be with us; will never forsake us; will be with us beside the still waters and through the valley of the shadow of death.

Hundreds of times we are told that God is our rock. There is no surer foundation than this our God.

Behold, this is our God. The one who is worthy to be glorified. The one who is worthy to be exalted. He is mighty and majestic. Our God is worthy of ALL our praise. Where will our help come from? Look to the hills; it comes from the Lord.

Behold, this is our God. He is the Lord of Hosts. It is not just this planet that is under our God's dominion. All the heavens belong to Him. All the heavenly creatures must submit. Remember that the Lord Jesus has made this place His footstool. He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

Behold, this is our God. In our God we rejoice, and move, and live, and have our being. The Lord Jesus is our Savior but more than that, he is our salvation. We have our freedom and life in him. We know the Truth with a capital T and it has set us free indeed.

Behold, this is our God. We wait for you Lord. We have waited, we are waiting, and we will continue to wait on you Lord. Until the return of the Lord Jesus, let us worship the only thing worth worshiping: Our God, the lover of our souls.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.