

Homiletics Analysis: Isaiah 25

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Isaiah 25 stands within the so-called “Isaiah Apocalypse” (chapters 24–27), a visionary section that draws the curtain back on the ultimate horizon of God’s redemptive purposes for creation. Chapter 25 itself is a psalm of praise and a prophetic declaration: it opens with a personal hymn of thanksgiving (vv. 1–5), moves to a universal promise of divine hospitality and the abolition of death (vv. 6–8), and closes with an affirmation of salvation for God’s people and judgment on Moab as a representative of all who oppose God (vv. 9–12). The movement is from praise that God has acted, to promise that God will act completely, to contrast between those who receive His salvation and those who face His hand. Yahweh has overthrown the city of proud enemies — reducing their fortress to rubble, humiliating the ruthless nations — and He now prepares a lavish feast for all peoples on His holy mountain, swallows up death forever, and wipes away every tear. The chapter’s argument is not merely predictive but doxological: it moves the reader from memory of God’s past faithfulness to confidence in His future completion of all He has promised.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking, through this passage, to produce in His people a settled, worshipful confidence that His redemptive purposes will be brought to full and irreversible completion — a confidence strong enough to sustain faithful endurance in a world still groaning under death, shame, and the apparent triumph of the ruthless. The vision of the feast, the abolition of death, and the removal of disgrace is not theological furniture but a governing reality meant to reshape how the reader orients to suffering, mortality, and the apparent delay of justice. God intends to recalibrate His people’s emotional and theological center of gravity away from present conditions and toward the guaranteed consummation of His covenant purposes.

Subject Sentence: Yahweh promises the ultimate defeat of death and the universal feast of His salvation.

Primary Claim: God is calling His people to present, sustained praise and confidence on the grounds that He has already demonstrated His power over every human stronghold and has sworn to complete His purposes by abolishing death, removing shame, and gathering all peoples to His table — and nothing in heaven or earth can stop Him.

Interpretive Evaluation

The identity of “the city” (vv. 2–3)

A recurring question in Isaiah 24–27 concerns the referent of the destroyed city (cf. 24:10; 25:2; 26:5; 27:10). Proposals have included Babylon (most common among critical scholars), Samaria, Nineveh, Carthage, and a purely eschatological “city of chaos.” No single historical identification is fully satisfying, which suggests the text intends a *representative* referent — the city functions as the paradigmatic stronghold of human pride and organized rebellion against God, of which any particular historical city is an instance. Dispensational interpreters sometimes press for a literal end-times city (often identified with Babylon in Revelation 17–18). The Reformed reading is preferable: the “city” functions typologically and eschatologically. Its specific historical referent is deliberately left underdetermined so that the principle — God brings down every human fortress — remains universally applicable. The destruction of any proud city vindicates the pattern; the consummation vindicates it finally and fully. This reading should be neither over-specified (one particular city only) nor over-spiritualized (the city means nothing concrete at all) — it is both historically grounded and eschatologically ultimate.

The feast in verse 6 — universal salvation or covenantal richness?

The vision of “a feast of rich food for all peoples” (v. 6) on the LORD’s mountain raises the question of its scope. Universalist interpreters treat “all peoples” as teaching the ultimate salvation of every human being. Dispensational interpreters sometimes restrict the feast to national Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. Neither reading does full justice to the text. The Reformed reading is that “all peoples” reflects the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12:3; 22:18) finding its eschatological fulfillment: all nations, not just Israel, are gathered to Zion — but this is a gathering of those who come in faith to the God who swallows up death, not a guarantee of universal final salvation. The nations who honor Yahweh (v. 3) are gathered to His table; Moab (vv. 10–12) — the representative of those who refuse — faces His hand. The feast is universal in *invitation and scope* but received only by those who trust the God who hosts it. New Testament fulfillment is visible in Revelation 19:9 (the wedding supper of the Lamb) and in Jesus’s own use of banquet imagery (Luke 14:15–24; Matthew 8:11).

“He will swallow up death forever” (v. 8) — metaphor or ontological claim?

Some interpreters treat verse 8 as poetic hyperbole for prolonged national restoration (e.g., the return from exile, read through the lens of Ezekiel 37’s valley of dry bones). The New Testament, however, quotes this verse explicitly in the context of bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54), and this is not an imposition on the text — it is the text’s own logic realized. Isaiah 25:8 is making an ontological claim, not merely a political one: the last enemy is death itself, and God is declaring its abolition. Treatments that reduce this to national-political renewal domesticate the text’s eschatological reach. The Reformed reading affirms the literal-eschatological force: this is a promise of the resurrection and the

final destruction of death as a power. The exile-and-return dimension may be an initial, partial fulfillment, but the claim cannot be exhausted by it.

The LORD's hand on Moab (vv. 10–12)

Some interpreters find the inclusion of Moab jarring in a passage about universal salvation — a sign of ethnic particularism or editorial clumsiness. This misreads the passage's rhetorical logic. Moab functions as a representative of those who refuse God's salvation — the counterpoint to "all peoples" who are gathered to the feast. The straw-and-dung imagery (v. 10) and the humiliation of Moab's pride (vv. 11–12) are not ethnic hostility but covenantal contrast: the same God who wipes away every tear (v. 8) also judges every uncorrected pride. The judgment section is not a disjunction from the salvation section — it is its necessary counterpart. A God who saves without judging has no authority; a God who judges without saving has no grace. Isaiah 25 requires both.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 12:1–3; 22:17–18** — The Abrahamic promise that all nations will be blessed through Abraham's seed; Isaiah 25:6–8 is this promise in its eschatological fulfillment — the feast on the mountain is the consummation of covenant reaching all peoples.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:54–57** — Paul quotes Isaiah 25:8 directly as the event accomplished in Christ's resurrection and perfected at the last day: "Death is swallowed up in victory." This is the New Testament's authoritative interpretation that verse 8 is an ontological, resurrection-grounded promise.
 - **Revelation 7:9–17; 21:1–4** — John's vision of the great multitude before the throne (every nation, tribe, people, and language) and God wiping every tear from their eyes draws directly on Isaiah 25:6–8; the feast and the abolition of death find their final canonical realization in the new creation.
 - **Psalms 22:27–31; 87:1–7** — The Psalter's vision of all nations coming to worship Yahweh on Zion provides the covenantal framework within which Isaiah 25's universal feast is intelligible — this is not a new idea but the deep current of Israel's covenant doxology.
 - **John 11:25–26** — Jesus's declaration "I am the resurrection and the life" is the incarnate, personal fulfillment of Isaiah 25:8 — the one who abolishes death is not an abstract divine power but a specific Person who enters death and defeats it from within.
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Aim: To establish in the reader a theologically grounded, doxologically active confidence that God’s final purposes — the feast, the resurrection, the end of shame and death — are certain enough to govern present worship, endurance, and hope.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Personal hymn of praise — “O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you” — grounded in God’s faithfulness and wonderful deeds	The “plans formed of old” grounds present praise in eternal divine purpose; this is not reactive praise but covenantally grounded praise
2	God has made the city a heap of rubble — the fortified town of strangers is no more	“City” is deliberately unspecified — functions as paradigm of human pride and organized rebellion against God
3	Therefore strong peoples will glorify God; ruthless nations will fear Him	The destruction of the city produces doxology from the nations — judgment and worship are connected
4	God has been a refuge to the poor, a shelter to the needy in distress	The counterpart to judgment: the one who brings down the proud shelters the lowly — covenant faithfulness is the constant
5	God silences the noise of the ruthless; heat is subdued by the shadow of a cloud	Extended simile: oppressive heat (enemy nations) cooled by God’s protecting shadow; the “song of the ruthless” is stilled
6	On this mountain the LORD will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples — aged wine, rich food, well-aged wine	“All peoples” — universal scope of the feast; “this mountain” — Zion as the eschatological gathering point of God’s redemptive purposes
7	He will swallow up the shroud cast over all peoples,	The “shroud/sheet” = the universal shadow of death

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
8a	the sheet spread over all nations He will swallow up death forever	and mourning; God's action is cosmic in scope The climactic promise — ontological and eschatological; the abolition of death as a power, not merely its postponement
8b	The LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces	Intimate, personal dimension: not just cosmic but face-by-face; grief itself is ended
8c	He will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth	The shame of God's people — exile, suffering, apparent abandonment — is finally and publicly reversed
9	"This is our God; we trusted in him and he saved us" — the cry of the redeemed on that day	The future affirmation shapes present trust; "we waited for him" — the posture of faith is patient expectation
10a	The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain	God's sovereign power dwelling permanently on Zion — the source of its security and the feast's guarantee
10b–12	Moab will be trampled — like straw in a dunghill; pride brought down, fortifications demolished	Moab as representative of the proud and the resistant; the feast's hospitality and the mountain's judgment are the same divine authority expressed in two directions

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–5	Praise for What God Has Already Done: The Fortress Falls, the Faithful Are Sheltered

Division	Verses	Label
2	6–8	Promise of What God Will Do Completely: The Feast, the Abolition of Death, the End of Shame
3	9	The Response of the Redeemed: “This Is Our God — We Waited for Him”
4	10–12	The Counterpart: Judgment on Every Pride That Refuses the Feast

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Yahweh promises the ultimate defeat of death and the universal feast of His salvation.

Primary Claim: God is calling His people to present, sustained praise and confidence on the grounds that He has already demonstrated His power over every human stronghold and has sworn to complete His purposes by abolishing death, removing shame, and gathering all peoples to His table — and nothing in heaven or earth can stop Him.

Applications (Five)

1. Praise God now, on the basis of what He has already done, not only when you see what He will do.

The psalm opens not with eschatological vision but with present praise grounded in past faithfulness: “You have done wonderful things, plans formed of old” (v. 1). The structure of verses 1–5 is deliberate — praise precedes prophecy. The reader who waits to worship until God’s purposes are fully visible has misunderstood what covenant faithfulness warrants. What God has done is sufficient ground for sustained doxology today. The strongholds that seemed permanent have already been brought to rubble. “Wonderful things” is not a vague category — it includes the cross, the resurrection, and every act of preservation and deliverance the reader can name. Rehearse what God has done. Praise is the appropriate response to a track record, not only to a future hope.

2. Let the certainty of the feast reorder your relationship to present suffering and loss.

The feast of verse 6 — lavish, joyful, for all peoples — is not a distant comfort to be applied once suffering becomes unbearable. It is a present governing reality that should reshape how the reader perceives current grief. When death presses close, when shame clings,

when the ruthless seem to be winning, the feast is not suspended — it is more real than what is visible. The reader who loses a spouse to cancer, a child to addiction, a reputation to injustice is not waiting for an uncertain future — they are waiting for the confirmation of a sworn divine promise. The feast is set. The wine is aged. The invitation has gone out to all peoples. Arrange your grief around this table, not around the grave.

3. Stop being embarrassed by the apparent weakness of God's people — His removal of disgrace is sworn and coming.

“He will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth” (v. 8c). The people of God throughout history — Israel in exile, the church under persecution, believers whose faithfulness has cost them standing, safety, and reputation — have borne a specific wound: the disgrace of appearing to have trusted in a God who did not show up. The world reads suffering and defeat as evidence against the faith. The believer is tempted to agree, or at least to feel ashamed. This passage addresses that wound directly. The disgrace is real. God sees it. And He has sworn that it will be publicly, finally, and completely reversed. Not mitigated — removed. Do not let present disgrace become permanent in your own assessment of your situation. God's last word on your condition has not been spoken yet.

4. Examine whether your functional hope is in God's future or in the stability of present structures.

The nations who glorify God in verse 3 do so because He demonstrated His power over the fortified city — the thing they trusted to stand. The “city of chaos” functions in Isaiah's vision as the paradigm of all human structures of security: political power, economic stability, institutional permanence, national strength. Every generation identifies its version of the city that will never fall — and every generation's fortress is eventually reduced to rubble. The question is not whether your functional strongholds will be dismantled but whether your hope is placed in something that cannot be. “We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks” (Isaiah 26:1). Where is your strong city? The reader who depends on national stability, financial security, or institutional continuity for their peace of mind has located their hope beneath the level of the feast. Diagnose the idol; relocate the hope.

5. Receive the resurrection hope of verse 8 as a present orientation, not a future insurance policy.

“He will swallow up death forever” (v. 8a), quoted by Paul as the event accomplished in Christ and perfected at the last day (1 Corinthians 15:54). This is not a comfort reserved for deathbeds. It is a present claim about the nature of reality — death has already been defeated in the resurrection of Jesus, and its final abolition is guaranteed. The reader who lives as though death is the governing power — making decisions, spending energy, arranging priorities primarily in response to the fear of death, the grief of death, or the avoidance of death — is living as though verse 8 has not been written. The resurrection is not primarily a comfort for funerals; it is a governing reality for Tuesdays. Swallowed up.

Forever. Let that reorient every department of your life in which the fear of death currently holds authority.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Isaiah 25 teaches that Yahweh is not merely the God of Israel's national history but the sovereign Lord of the entire cosmos whose redemptive purposes are inexorably moving toward a universal, eschatological completion. He is the God who shelters the poor and brings down the proud — not occasionally or incidentally but as the consistent expression of His character. Most crucially, He is the God who abolishes death — not by helping people cope with it but by swallowing it up, destroying it as a power from the inside. His covenant purposes are not merely rehabilitative (restoring what was lost) but consummative (bringing creation to a fullness beyond what existed before). The wiping away of every tear and the removal of all disgrace reveal that God's purposes include not only the forgiveness of sin but the final healing of every wound it has caused.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Isaiah 25 is a pillar text for the Reformed understanding that God's redemptive purposes are driven entirely by His own sovereign initiative and covenant faithfulness, not by human response or merit. The feast is prepared by God, on God's mountain, for all peoples — including those who were strangers to the covenant — and it is received by waiting and trusting, not by achieving or earning. The phrase “we waited for him” (v. 9) captures the posture of faith that the Reformed tradition insists upon: not passive indifference but active trust in a God who is already acting and will certainly complete what He has begun. The abolition of death is not accomplished by human courage or spiritual discipline but by divine power alone — a unilateral act of God that Paul identifies with the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54). This grounds the Reformed insistence that salvation, in all its dimensions, is *solus Christus* and *sola gratia* from first to last — beginning in the Abrahamic promise, accomplished at Calvary and the empty tomb, and completed at the consummation Isaiah sees from afar.

Main Takeaway

The feast is already prepared, death's defeat is already secured, and your disgrace is already being reversed — because the God who swallowed up the proud city is the God who will swallow up death itself, and He does not leave His plans unfinished. Stop living at the mercy of what you can see. The LORD is your God. You waited for Him. He has come, and He is coming. That is enough to praise Him now and to endure everything between now and the feast.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the feast as universalist.** The sweep of “all peoples” in verse 6 is genuine and must not be muted — the feast is not restricted to ethnic Israel or to a narrow elect. But the presence of Moab’s judgment in verses 10–12 immediately following the feast passage is the text’s own correction of universalism. The feast is universally offered and eschatologically vast, but it is received by those who trust the God who hosts it and refused by those who do not. Preaching the feast without preaching Moab produces a gospel without consequences and a God without holiness.
- **Reducing “swallow up death forever” to mere metaphor for national restoration.** This is the most common failure in scholarly treatments of the passage and occasionally infects pulpit readings as well. The text will not support a purely political-historical reading of verse 8. The New Testament’s explicit quotation of this verse in a resurrection context (1 Corinthians 15:54) is not an imposition — it is the text’s own logic fulfilled. Preach the ontological force: death itself is destroyed. Anything less domesticates the claim and robs the passage of its power.
- **Omitting the praise structure of verses 1–5 in favor of going straight to the feast.** The eschatological vision of verses 6–8 regularly attracts more homiletical attention, but the praise section of verses 1–5 is exegetically and homiletically essential. It establishes that the confidence animating the future vision is grounded in past demonstrated faithfulness — God has already brought the city down. Skipping to the feast without establishing the praise renders the vision emotionally compelling but theologically ungrounded.
- **Preaching the passage as comfort only, without its confrontational dimension.** The text comforts the poor, the needy, and the waiting (vv. 4, 9) and confronts the proud, the ruthless, and the resistant (vv. 2–3, 10–12). Preaching only the comfort produces a God without judgment and a gospel that makes no demands on the structures of pride the hearer may be trusting. The same divine power that shelters the lowly dismantles the proud city. Both are part of the single claim the passage makes.
- **Applying “remove the disgrace” sentimentally rather than eschatologically.** The promise to remove the disgrace of God’s people (v. 8c) addresses a real wound — the shame of appearing abandoned, of suffering while the ruthless prosper, of belonging to a community that the world reads as deluded. Preaching this promise as mere emotional comfort (“God knows you feel shame”) falls short of the text’s force. The disgrace is *removed* — publicly, finally, and comprehensively — at the eschatological moment. Preach it as a sworn reversal of verdict, not as a therapeutic observation.

- **Neglecting the “we waited for him” posture as a call to active, patient faith.**
Verse 9 is the hinge between vision and response. “We waited for him” is not passivity — in the context of Isaiah’s sustained call to trust rather than to seek alliance with Egypt or Assyria, waiting is costly, countercultural, and active. The preacher who rushes past verse 9 to reach the application section has skipped the passage’s own statement of how its promises are received.