

Waiting for God

God's promises are awesome—but so agonizingly far away. Immersed in a world of grief and pain, it's hard to stay focused on the reward. We must learn to wait.

“He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’” (Isa. 25:8-9).



Commentators are divided about chapters 24-27 of Isaiah. Is this section of the book describing God's judgment on the enemies of Judah and the restoration of His people following the Exile? Or is it a prophecy of the final judgment at the end of time and the beauty that lies beyond? Or—as is often the case in the writings of the prophets—are both themes interwoven in this majestic but cryptic prophecy?

Whatever the larger message, we will restrict our attention to these two verses, aided by a pair of New Testament writers who borrow Isaiah's language to reinforce their own lessons.

The first line of verse 8 is used by Paul in his homily on the resurrection: “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *‘Death is swallowed up in victory’*” (1 Cor.

15:54). For Paul, Isaiah's description of God “swallowing up” death is a fitting image of the final abolition of humanity's arch enemy. In the resurrection at the last day, death will be abolished.

John echoes the second line of verse 8 in his portrait of the final reward of the saints: “And *God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). In that heavenly home, all the tears we have shed during our earthly sojourn will be forgotten, and the very concept of grief will be swept away. No more crying, no more tears, forever.

Together these two statements summarize the hope of the believer: a future where all the hurts of the past will be forgotten, and there will be no death to disrupt our bliss.

But in our present life that hope is a dim and distant vision. Pain and hardship still afflict us. Our hearts ache under the burden of overwhelming grief. Even if we can manage to secure a quiet and pleasant life for a while, we wrestle with the nagging thought that a day is coming when it will all be snatched away. Deep inside, we *know* that death is coming, and will rob us of whatever fleeting earthly joy we've managed to attain.

What can we do? Some people cannot see beyond the brokenness of this world and are engulfed by despair. Others dwell on the existential futility of life and sink into depression—even as they experience a comfortable standard of living. Life without God sounds fun at first, but soon becomes a crushing burden.

Isaiah shows us the path to a brighter outlook: “*We have waited for Him*, and He will save us. This is the Lord; *we have waited for Him*; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (25:9). God has promised us a future home far exceeding our wildest dreams, but we must wait for Him to deliver it. If we are convinced of the reality of that promise, we have something to be excited about. Like children looking forward to Christmas Day, we cannot change the calendar, but we can look forward with eager anticipation to that day when sorrow and death will give way to a glorious new life.

Once our hearts are captured by that hope of future salvation, the life we experience *now* will be transformed into something beautiful—and the waiting will become a “joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:6-8). So let us wait . . . wait . . . wait . . .

— David King