

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

ISAIAH 25

⁶On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples a feast of choice food, a feast of the best wines, with the best cuts of meat, and the finest of wines. ⁷On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations. ⁸He has swallowed up death forever! The LORD God will wipe away the tears from every face. He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth. For the Lord has spoken. ⁹On that day it will be said, “Surely, this is our God! We waited for him, and he saved us! This is the LORD! We waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!”



The Lord is risen; He is risen indeed! This is the glorious tidings which Easter-morn brings. The One who went forth from the gate of Jerusalem carrying the stick of timber on which He was crucified; the One whose heart was pierced with a Roman spear and who was laid in the sepulchre of Joseph cold and dead ... that same One has burst the bands of death, has triumphed over the grave, and has brought life and immortality to light.

Do you want words dense and heavy with grace? Would you like words rich with comfort? Look how the Lord acts in our lesson! We have such a feast of spiritual food and drink before us. No human activity occurs. No human could achieve it or even conceive it. We are so relegated to the final answer of our lives being death that sinners could never devise this plan for death's defeat. But our Lord God has with all His might.

ONE SMALL SWALLOW FOR DEATH, ONE BIG GULP FOR GOD

A woman in New York was at her parents' graveside when she reached down to adjust a bouquet. Suddenly, it was as if she was being sucked into the grave. It was as if a sinkhole was opening up. She bumped her head on the tombstone as she sank, desperately grabbing the sides of the tombstone, she called for help, but there was no one to hear. In the end, she sank to her waist before the soil fully settled. What horror! How awful!

It may seem as though death surrounds us and draws us in. We see it happening all around. A school teacher, only a couple years into retirement, is diagnosed with cancer and not three months later is dead. A pastor goes delirious one Sunday morning and is dead the next day. A wife is alive and well, caring for her fading husband, when she is afflicted with a terminal disease and falls asleep in Jesus faster than her ailing spouse.

There is a reason that we sink into destruction and death. It is because we have also fallen into sin. We have slipped in temptations and we sunk into sin's death trap. Worse, if we believe the lies that Jesus was NOT true, Jesus does NOT love, or Jesus does NOT save, a sinner's death becomes eternal.

But consider with me the trap that death finds itself in on Easter. It depended on sin to hold the soul. But in the case of Jesus, there was no sin to hold, no sin for death to rely upon. Sin didn't know which direction to turn in Jesus' overflowing righteousness. Sin could not pin down Jesus, so death came along without a death stroke. You might say death had no teeth in the matter of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ's perfection, death simply could not chew on Him, so when death attempted to swallow, it was a disaster.

The Scripture is very vivid in how this conundrum for death is described. There is Mount Zion, God serving His people, His believers, His Church. There is a meal with the best cuts of meat and vintage, choice wine. As soon as this meal on a mountain is provided in the words of Isaiah, God provides a metaphor for death, the burial cloth and veil and shroud that we might wear. God promises to swallow it up. He engulfs it and digests it. What appears to be mysterious and curious goes deeper when Isaiah switches verbal tense. Not only will He, but He has, swallowed more than that. He has swallowed up death. In the pattern of time, it had not happened for Isaiah. But the prophet says it in past tense because, from his perspective, God's swallowing up death was so sure and so predictably certain that it might as well have happened.

On Good Friday, death seemed to win. It hoped to win so completely. But instead death itself was consumed. It was swallowed up in the perfect human, the perfect Savior, the Lord our Righteousness. The virgin's Son broke the system and set a new pattern for all who might believe. Death has given way to life. We are not consigned to darkness in eternity. We have not waited this long to be disappointed. We have not waited this long to be ashamed. Jesus Christ has already been shamed for our sin. He has already burst the grave.

"Surely, this is our God!" our Scripture says. *"We waited for Him, and He saved us!"* There are false gods, other gods by human design. When you lay a plate of food before them they do not chew, they do not swallow. You can wait, and wait, and wait, but nothing happens before a block of wood or stone. But, *"Surely, this is our God!"* the One who swallows death, the only One who stands beside an empty tomb, the only One who shows His wounds in death, the only One who lives to tell the story. *"Surely, this is our God!"* We waited three days for Him, and He saved us. We waited through our loved one's death, and He saved us. We waited for Him to wipe away our tears like He wiped away our sins, and He saved us. THIS is our GOD.

... Right now, there is woman in a lawsuit with Resurrection Cemetery. We however have won our lawsuit against death. He that was delivered for our offenses is raised again for our justification. He has made it clear as day that the highway to heaven is finished. The Substitute is dismissed from His prison, so the sins of the sinner are atoned for and there is forgiveness with God. Now where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.