

## **The Mission in the Middle**

Isaiah 25:1-6

Grace Church / 1-16-11

### **Introduction:**

Thank you John & Linda, Mike and Michele. Thank you for being good examples to us of those who have caught the vision of what God is doing and wanting to do in this world through us. The import of what they are doing is not some side business or hobby but rather it is life worth living as it is a part of God's overall mission of redeeming this world.

We all would like to know if our lives will count for anything. No one really sets out to be a failure. Ted Williams, the velvet voiced homeless man who has been a youtube phenomena this week, I don't think set out to become a homeless man who had abandoned his family. Each of us would like to think that in some way we have made a significant difference in this world.

Some might question if indeed devoting one's life to missions will make a significant difference. Will you own two homes? One in the mountains another on the beach. Possibly if you want to go to Papua New Guinea or India. Will you drive nice cars and wear the latest clothes. Not sure but is that really what life is all about?

Will the years of labor that David and Karen Anderson have put into China come to any fruition? Will the lifetime of translating the bible into the language of the Malayo people in Columbia, South America bring significance into the lives of Bob and Dottie Hoppe? Will the living on a shoestring budget amongst the Muslims in London add meaning and purpose to Gangadin and Julie Hanoë?

According to what God has communicated to us there is no greater profession than that of a missionary. All of creation has been groaning and waiting for the culmination of every missionary effort since sin entered into the human world. Yes, it was shortly after creation that God began the first missions program of redeeming his people and the world.

For my own private devotions I have been reading through the book of Isaiah. It is 66 chapters long, so it is not easily finished in a short period of time. It is a very challenging

book. One which reveals the awesome glory of God and the darkest of mans sin. It is one of calling out people for who they are. It is a pronouncement of judgment on every nation of the world, especially chapters 13-24. It is line after line of the failure of humanity to recognize their creator, God. At times it is very depressing. Words like; waste away, woe is me, utterly broken and emptiness is often repeated. Kind of sucks the life out of you.

Well, right in the middle of this bleak outlook comes a sunbeam from heaven, a ray of hope. It is a promise from God that there is coming a day in which all wrongs will be righted, all hurts will be healed and all tears wiped away. It is in essence a snapshot of the culmination of centuries of missionary effort. You are familiar with movie trailers, right? Well, that is what chapter twenty-five of Isaiah is, it is a trailer of what the eternal kingdom of God is going to be like. I want to direct your attention to verses one through eight of chapter twenty-five for the next twenty minutes or so. I want to make four observations and that particular application to us a congregation.

Would you stand with me please as I read verses 1-8 of Isaiah twenty-five? Thank you.

Here is the title for our worship in the Word, "The Mission in the Middle".

The legislators of the state of Illinois have been in the process of abolishing the death penalty. The discussion and feelings go both ways. It has narrowly passed the two legislative branches in Springfield. Regardless of whether Governor Quinn signs it into law, all of us face a death penalty. Each of us in due time will cease to take in and exhale oxygen. We will assume room temperature at some point. I don't say it that way to be gruesome but to set it in contrast to what God is going to do about the greatest certainty of life, that of expiring and leaving this world. The answer has been given to us in verse eight.

Isaiah 25:8 (ESV)

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.

Let's take a brief look at the content of this passage. It is a breath of fresh air in the midst of much pollution. In some ways it is a victory dance. Here is the first observation I would like to make.

1. God has had a plan for a very long time:

Isaiah 25:1 (ESV)

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.**

This world is not spinning out of control though it certainly would have that appearance. There is a cosmic force which has been working for millennia, bringing to its final destination all of humanity. It is not a plan for which God has gotten the plane in the air and is trying to figure out how to land it. He has logged a flight plan from the very beginning. Part of that plan is seen in Genesis 12:3.

Genesis 12:3 (ESV)

3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you **all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

2. It is a victorious plan.

The vision God has given to Isaiah, which is purposed to encourage us here at Grace Church on January 16, 2011, stretches from the beginning of time until the day when time will not be kept in the manner in which we think of it. This is a comprehensive plan. It is good to have a plan, you know. So many times we go off half cocked and completely miss what it is we are aiming for. That is not so for God, he is absolutely zeroed in on the final target. That is why we call him the Alpha and the Omega, which is the beginning and the end.

Look again at verse one; O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, **for you have done wonderful things,...**

What kind of victory? It says here "**faithful and sure**". We do not know who will claim victory in the upcoming Super Bowl in

February. However we do know and can take great encouragement that God's plan for victory is faithful and sure. It will be a whipping of righteousness of evil like the Packers put on the Falcons last night. You can count on it. To not do so will to have played roulette with a gun. It will be to have taken matters out of God's hands and placed them in yours.

3. The best is yet to come:

Isaiah 25:6-8 (ESV)

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.

Here is a picture of what John speaks of in Revelation 22.

Revelation 22:1-8 (ESV)

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. 6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." 7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." 8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me,

It is not unlike the banquet scene described in Luke 14 of which Christians are to go out into the avenues of life and invite their oikos to the banquet.

It says that God will swallow up the covering that is cast over all people. "swallow up" is another way of saying conquer or overcome. Remember from our study last week that those who confess Christ as savior are those who will overcome because of the seed of God which lives within. Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world. This is what Isaiah is giving us a glimpse of here in verse eight. It is God that will overcome all the evil forces of the world.

This is one of the most wonderful prophecies in the entire bible. Death will be no more. Victory will have been accomplished. It is pictured as a great banquet. At a banquet all the guests are satisfied. There will be no one left hungry. It seems to me banquet is used as a metaphor for all of what life will be like in the coming eternal kingdom.

There is no need at the moment to get distracted by trying to decide when this will take place. At what point in God's eschatological calendar will it take place. Is it the millennium or is it the kingdom after the millennium? We will save that for another time. But for right now let's concentrate on the culmination of God's plan formed in eternity past. It is a plan which will swallow up death itself. It says here it will wipe away every tear.

Do you hear shades of what the Apostle Paul exclaimed?

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 (ESV)

54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

We should notice that it includes all peoples of the world. That is a missional statement. It is our missions manifesto. It is the fulfilling of the great commission found in Matthew twenty-eight. It is the bringing in of members of our oikos.

This brings us to our next observation. I have called it;

#### 4. The mission in the middle:

Isaiah 25:4-5 (ESV)

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.

It seems to me we can relate this to Matthew twenty-eight.

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Until that final culmination hour in which the great eternal banquet will begin at which God's glory will overwhelm and encompass all who have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ, there is a mission to be completed. I call it the "mission in the middle".

What is happening in the "mission in the middle"?

Jesus calls out to all people everywhere;

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Sound familiar to verses four and five here in Isaiah? Let me read them again for 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.

Jesus is saying to you this morning, "come to me you who are weary and loaded to the point of breaking. I am rest for you. I am life for you. I desire to bring you under my care and swallow up all your troubles according to the power God has given me. It really is a call to place saving faith in what Christ has done to remove the penalty of sin and grant forgiveness and eternal life to those who trust.

It sounds familiar again to a section of Revelation.

Revelation 22:17 (ESV)

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

How is that message to be delivered? It is through believers just like you and me. Through people like the Berger's and Klunke's and many others who are associated with Grace Church.

The "mission in the middle" is our **So What** for the morning.

It seems to me this "mission in the middle" is best accomplished through acts of service to those within your oikos. Oikos is that group of people you come in contact with on a regular basis. It is your family, friends and associates. God has strategically placed them in your life so that you may be the "mission in the middle" which points them to Jesus Christ.

While it says here that all peoples of the world will eventually worship God it does not say every person will come to that place. Only those who have responded to God's call of faith in Christ will be part of this banquet where death is swallowed up for all time. Your mission is one of great importance; it has urgency written all over it. It is a very challenging mission.

I was reminded of that challenge on Thursday morning. About 6:00 there was a knock at our door. When I opened there stood a young man shivering in the cold. His vehicle had stopped and he managed to get it into our drive way before it completely died. For those of you who may not know we live out in the county about four miles west of town. Our son Brad said "right in the middle of a corn field". The point is this young man was

fortunate to have stopped close to a house for they are far apart. After trying to restart his vehicle he decided to call a wrecker. I invited him in for a cup of hot coffee while he waited. During that time our conversation turned to spiritual matters. It was his presumptions about Christianity that caught my attention and raised my concern.

What ought our response be this morning? Let me exhort you towards what should and can be done.

Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia.

Acts 16:9-10 (ESV)

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

What is God saying to you this morning? Where is He indicating that you need to be involved in the "mission in the middle"?

Is it the 20 thousand plus college students in our city? The Berger's and Klunke's are calling out "come over to campus and help us".

Going back to Isaiah for a moment, because this theme of mission and sending and going has always been part of God's plan.

Isaiah 6:8 (ESV)

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

I am thankful to God for the number of young adults at Grace who have in the recent past said "here I am send me". Kali Martin, Caleb Beaty, Anna Schwenk, Dave Rawlins, Kasey Darst, Ashley Schippert, Nate McClintick, Brian Farber, Aaron Zapota, Julie Myers, Laura Livesay and others whom I am sure I have missed. Not all of these have identified a specific location but they have all said "Lord here I am, send me". The day will come when it will be departure day and then they will need the rest of us to help them as they go. It may not be they go to Oolaboolabongo. That is not the important thing. What is essential is that each of us say "here I am Lord, use me".

For those who are not going then God has designated us as "rope-holders". What do "rope-holders" do? They pray, they encourage, they give so that those who are going may actually leave and live elsewhere.

2 Corinthians 8:1-2 (ESV)

1 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

This is the same group of people who called out to Paul to "come over here and help us". It is the church at Philippi. Paul says of them in Philippians 4:14-18

Philippians 4:14-18 (ESV)

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

The way we send missionaries to whatever corner of the world God has called them is through your prayers and financial gifts. I am asking you to join with others and me as we seek to be faithful to God through this "mission in the middle" he has given to us.

Grace Church is not content to merely sustain a local ministry. Soon after opening its doors in 1961 the leadership of the church had identified a missionary to send to "Macedonia". Her name was Mary Ellen Gudeman. Since that time we have been involved in helping send fifty plus missionaries around the world. God has blessed us much through that effort however there is more to be done.

We currently have a budget of approximately \$115K annually. While that is a good amount it seems to me with God's help we can do more. \$115k represents 13% of our total annual receipts

here at Grace. It seems to me the percent should be higher. So I want to challenge us as a group of believers to do some serious thinking and praying as to how God wants us individually to support missions.

I think a good goal would be to get to the place where our mission's budget would be 30% of our total budget each year. We can do that, with God's help.