

Feasting and Giving Thanks

A year or so ago, I was talking with another pastor, and he was telling me how he was going on sabbatical. And for his sabbatical, he was taking that time to study and to travel. His traveling was for the express purpose to study a certain biblical topic. He told me he was studying the biblical view of the alien, or stranger, in Old Testament Israel. In doing so, he wanted to see if there are still implications for us today. When I heard his topic, I felt almost dumb when I responded to him and said, "If I were going to take a sabbatical and study a topic, it would be the topic of food and feasting in the Bible."

I mean, his topic seemed so great and so important, with personal, political, communal implications. But, mine. . . food. Really? But, think about it a little more, how necessary is food in all of our lives? I actually think that because food is so common in our culture, and because we eat food every day, multiple times a day, we have probably lost immense biblical significance that God gives to food in the Bible. One of my all-time favorite verses in the entire Bible is "So then, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." That verse hits me almost every time because that verse reminds me that while I'm swirling my spaghetti on a fork or partaking of a delicious beverage, I can actually do that for the praise and glory of God. Because of Jesus, and what he has done for us in reconciling us to God, even our eating can please the Lord, praise the Lord and give us even greater joy in God.

I actually believe that if we praise God with food and feasting, then we might actually grow in praising God in other areas. I mean, after all, wasn't it Jesus who said that if we're faithful in the little, we'll be faithful in the big? So, how can we praise God with food?

Some of you might immediately think. You might quickly think of diet strategies. "Well, I need to eat less sugar," or, "I should switch to the paleo diet." But I think that misses so much. God's goal for our lives is *not* that we would fit the American ideal for weight. God's goal is not that you are *so healthy* that you'd live until you are 120. God's goal is that you would glorify him in *everything*. But what does that mean? My definition of "**glorify**" is "**to declare in attitude, words and actions that God is your supreme treasure.**" We were created to revel in God as our supreme treasure, and to declare all things that he is our choicest delight. If all you're thinking about is counting calories, that might help you lose weight, but the question remains as to whether or not you're glorifying God. If you simply proved you're disciplined enough to kick sugar out of your life, and then you discover that you're not as droopy or depressed, the question still remains as to whether or not you're actively glorifying God.

God's goal in all of life is that we would rejoice in, love, seek after and display that God is our supreme treasure. This is tremendously practical because we eat food every day. But it's amazingly practical for us because we just came off of Thanksgiving. And now we're entering into a food-laden season of Christmas! A few years ago, a study came out saying the average American gains 7 pounds between Thanksgiving and New Years. Clearly, there's a lot of food going around.

But the question I'm asking is not, "How can you keep from gaining 7 pounds." My question is, in eating food and in feasting, how can we glorify God? And right now you're thinking, "I don't know. You tell me. You're the one preaching the sermon!" And, you're right. This is what I want to expound on. And, maybe this sermon is just a pamphlet of the future book I may be able to write in God's glory and food.

I believe that **we glorify God when we remember and give thanks to God as the good Creator and Savior**. If we allowed every meal-time, every snack, every feast, every bite of broccoli or chocolate to remind us of our good Creator and Savior, we would glory in God more and more in eating – and in all of life.

So, I say these things this morning, but the proof's in the pudding, right? I need to give biblical evidence that this is true. This morning, we are going to journey through the Old and New Testaments, starting in Genesis and ending in Revelation, proving that God gave us food to remind us of his goodness so that we would glory in him. I hope this sermon not only encourages you this morning, but throughout this season and into the year to come.

Before I say anything more, I want to pray for us and ask for God's mercy and wisdom. [Pray for Nate Birkholz at Lakeshore Baptist.]

1. We glorify God when we remember he is the good Creator.

Genesis 1:29-31. Take your Bibles and go to the beginning in Genesis, and then go to chapter 1, and look at verses 29-31: ²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. ¹

Genesis 2:8-9. Now, let's read Genesis 2:8-9 together: ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden²

God is the One who has created, and as a result, he has created everything for a purpose. In chapter 1, God speaks to our need to eat and then how God fulfills that necessity. God had plants to give fruit, which would be our food. Amazingly, God, as the Creator, created things so that this world in which we live, would actual sustain us!

But, you could say, "Ok, there's food here, but it was all vegetables and fruits." For some of you, you might think that's gross, but look at chapter 2, verse 9. The food from the trees was pleasant to the sight and good for food. This is an important point to notice here. Food is for fueling our bodies. But that's not all God did. If God was only concerned about fueling our bodies, he could have made everything taste like cardboard and who cares what it looks like. But God created food to be pleasant to the sight and actually good.

This is a very important point to understand because sometimes people seem to talk about food like it's only fuel. So, in essence, who cares what it tastes like. People who live in that camp, have a different aim. Maybe their highest aim is to have bigger muscles or a slimmer waist. Well, if that's your goal, you might have to say sorry to your tastebuds. But God seems to want his creation to not only live in his

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:29–31.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 2:7–9.

creation. He wants his creation to enjoy him and his creation. So, food speaks to his goodness. He is a good Creator!

Now, I also have to add that when we see God as the Creator, what does that mean we are? We are part of creation. That means we are completely dependent on God ultimately. The food does come from within his Creation, but ultimately, the food is there because God put it there. We, as human beings, as part of creation, should then view food as a gift of kindness from our good God.

This is how the Scriptures speak about how we should view food. First and foremost, we should have an attitude of thankfulness. I know this is difficult for some. Some people here might be afraid of food. Maybe because of certain health issues – which are understandable. Others of you might have certain weaknesses in eating and so for you, you pendulum swing. You go from being extremely disciplined to extremely undisciplined. Your relationship with food is tenuous. You love it, but you also hate it. Others of you idolize food. None of these responses are right. The right response is to see food as a gift of a good Creator, and therefore we should be thankful to God.

Sadly, humanity has abused the gift of food. When we get to Genesis 3, what is the temptation of the serpent? Eat the fruit from the tree God forbid them to eat from. God had given all the trees except for one. But they were tempted with the one from which they were commanded not to eat. Eve wants to be at the level of deity, and she eats the fruit (which God created). But she ate it in defiance of God as the Creator. She didn't give thanks to God. She spurned God when she sunk her teeth into that fruit. The same was true when the fruit was handed to Adam. In that moment, humanity (and all of creation) fell under sin and God's punishment.

And one thing you might think, in that moment, would be that God would now make food unpleasant for the body. Or maybe tasteless? But he doesn't. Instead of taking away all of his blessings, he clothes Adam and Eve with the skin's of a slain animal. And then continues to feed them. When we get to Genesis 9:3, we read, ³“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.”³

After the fall, God allows for both animals and plants to be eaten. But get this. When you eat meat, the Scripture's seem to indicate that a *life* was taken so that you could life. There's a respect for the moving thing that lives. While it can be eaten, there's a remembrance of death for life. This should lead to humility, but also again to gratitude to our Creator.

This also points us to gratitude to God as our Savior. We don't deserve even tasteless food. We don't deserve to *taste*. We don't deserve flavors like vanilla or seasonings like thyme. Leaves that can add flavor, like mint! Add to this, we don't deserve food. Yet God has provided food for humanity. Don't take for granted every meal or snack. It's a gift of our good Creator who is also the Savior.

So, hopefully you can see how Genesis shows us that food teaches us to remember that God is the good Creator and Savior. But that's only half of what food compels us to.

2. Food compels us to give thanks to our good Creator.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 9:3.

Many of us, in our daily lives, have the habit of praying before meals. I remember praying in pre-school, “God is great. God is good. Let us thank him for our food. Amen.” In my childhood years, I can recall how my dad began every dinner prayer, “Dear gracious Heavenly Father.” Today, I still pray with our children before meals, and I want to encourage them to incorporate that habit.

But for some of you, you might think that praying for a meal is simply legalistic. God doesn’t require it, right? Or, you could just be thinking, “Why do it?” Well, praying before meals is actually a habit that goes all the way back into the Old Testament times.

We can go to 1 Chronicles 29. In this text, we have the completion of the temple and the preparation for anointing Solomon as king for the second time. After great rejoicing in the immensely sacrificial gifts Israel had given to the building of the Temple, they eat. But before eating, there is a prayer and sacrifices. Hear some of David’s prayer: ¹⁰ **Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ¹¹ Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. ⁴**

When we get to the New Testament, we continue to see a habit of praying before meals. In Acts 27:35, we’re told that Paul took bread and gave thanks to God in front of all, broke the bread and they ate. In First Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy that we are to receive all types of food with thanksgiving. And while you could say that “thanksgiving” is just an internal feeling. The practice in the New Testament was verbal gratitude that sprung from a heart of gratitude. So, even before Jesus’ miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, he gives thanks. And then, in the greatest meal yet, when Jesus eats his last supper with the disciples, we’re told he gives thanks. This was a habit. And, I believe it ought to be a habit in our lives.

Why? Because gratitude reminds us that God is the One who gives us our sustenance. That God cares for us. Think about it. What all had to take place for the food to get on our plates? Think about the fruit that had to grow on the plants, and the people who had to tend to the plants, and the tools that had to be purchased to care for the plants. Think about how you had to have a job to pay for the fruit. God, in his love and providence provided that fruit that you’ve eaten! Giving thanks remembers who God is. God has cared for our most basic necessity. Now, if God has given us our most basic necessity, then will God cares for us in all other things in life?

Think about it. Jesus once said that if you’re faithful in the little, then you’ll be faithful in the big. If God cares about feeding us, will he not care about my worries for tomorrow? Will he not want to listen to my prayers – whatever they may be? Yes! So, we give thanks to remember that God is the One who has blessed us and that God loves us enough to care for us. He is the good Creator.

But he’s not only a good Creator. God is the good Savior!

3. Food compels us to give thanks to our good Savior.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ch 29:10–13.

In Old Testament feasts, the people were taught that God was a God of grace. He was not only the Creator, but he was One who made promises to people – promises of grace. Because God gave extravagant grace, God commanded extravagant feasts.

Feasting emphasized God’s unconditional, secure grace! So, think of a few feasts with me (and only a few. I can’t get into every one this morning). The three feasts that I’m emphasizing here take place in a similar timeframe of the year. First, the greatest Old Testament feast: **Passover**. Exodus 12 gives explanations of this feast. There was a certain rhythm to it. There were habits incorporated in the meal. They had to eat with belt fastened, sandals on their feet, staff in the hand, and then eating with haste. Why? Verse 27 says, **“It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.** ⁵

Passover was that time when God sent the angel of death, before Israel was sent out of Egypt by Pharaoh and the Israelites plundered Egypt. This angel took the life of every firstborn child in Egypt. But the Israelites were told to trust God and place the blood of a lamb on the doorpost. If the blood was there, the angel would pass over that house, and the firstborn would remain alive.

What God said came true. The Israelites trusted and obeyed, and they were set free from enslavement to Egypt. As a testimony for the centuries, God commanded the Passover Feast as a continual reminder of this grace that he had given to them: freeing them from slavery and giving future generations to Israel. Which, by the way, would further his greater promise to Abraham that there would be one to come who would rescue the world!

This Passover feast was celebrated in remembrance of God’s rescuing grace. And so, we read that once the Israelites heard what the feast was about, they “bowed their heads and worshiped.” Do you see this? Passover was to remind them of God’s grace, which would lead to greater worship of God. The feast would cause them to grow in being in awe of God.

Now, let me comment on another one: the **feast of firstfruits**. These feasts actually happen during the same timeframe of the year as Passover. Deuteronomy 14 records the firstfruits (or tithe) feast like this: ²² **“You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. ²³ And before the Lord your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.** ⁶ Then God adds that if the place for feasting is too far away to take all of this with you, then convert your tithe into money, and once you have the money, God commands the people to **“spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household. ²⁷ And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you.”**⁷

This feast took place in the midst of the Passover week. Actually, it took place the first day after the Sabbath. And that’s important to note because this means that the feast takes place in the context of God’s covenant. This is given to God’s people, the Israelites. And God is saying that not only has he

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 12:27.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 14:22–23.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 14:26–27.

saved them from slavery, but he will provide for them, and feed them, wherever they go, now that they are free! So, again, this feast is a gratitude for God as the Savior who rescues and provides.

But what takes place here requires great trust, doesn't it? A few years ago when this passage hit me, I thought to myself that here we have an agrarian culture, and God says, "Give me 10% of *everything* that comes from your field." Take away 10% of the property and yield. How were they going to make it without 10% of their stuff? I'm sure they could justify and say, "Well, if I give 10%, I'm not going to make it. But God won't allow them. Why? Because contextually, God is saying to the people, don't trust in your stuff. Don't even trust in the things that give you your resources and food! Israel was to trust in God for *everything*. So, because they can trust God, God then commands the people to have a great celebration once a year with the fruit of the field! He promises to do so for the Israelites! Now, some could think that if God promises to care for them, they shouldn't be foolish. But God says here that because their trust is in God, the expression of the trust is in a feast! The feast signifies they trust God and they are *thankful* to him.

Then you have the **feast of weeks**. The feast of weeks took place 50 days after the Sabbath in the firstfruit/tithe celebration. The feast of weeks was the culmination of the celebration of the firstfruit feast. It involved more food, and God required other sacrifices at this feast, but the celebration was so great because God has showed himself great through the harvest and through giving them the necessary food. In addition, the celebration continued to anticipate a greater harvest to come!

So, in all of this, the people feast to praise. Now, keep with me before I start to wrap things up here. These feasts, and all other Old Testament feasts actually point to a greater spiritual reality. Colossians 2:16-17 says, "¹⁶**Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.** ¹⁷**These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**"⁸ The substance, the weight of meaning in these feasts, are found where? Paul says in Christ! Jesus and what he has done and will do, fulfills the Old Testament feasts!

So, I want to take these three feasts, and see how Christ fulfills them. Of course, we should be familiar with what the Passover feast points to. One lamb slain so that people could be rescued from slavery. And, Jesus, the Firstborn (not meaning he was the first creation of God, but that he is the premier and most Blessed in his humanity that he took on), he died so that we, who were dead, could be made alive. How can that be? Because on the cross, which was Passover week, Jesus was crucified. And while being crucified, he took the wrath, the shame, the judgment that all our sinfulness deserved. Then, in being cursed, he died in the flesh. Now, all who trust in Jesus are made part of a new and better covenant than found in Moses. The covenant in Jesus promises eternal life and forgiveness to anyone who turns from their sin and trusts in Jesus as their Savior! This covenant is *forever!* How do we know this?

Well, we know what happened three days later, right? Three days later was the day after the Sabbath. What celebration was that? The firstfruit festival. And on that day, Jesus rose from the dead. Therefore, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:20 says of Jesus: ²⁰**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**⁹ Jesus is the firstfruits of resurrection!

So, the Passover feast spoke of rescue from wrath, leading to freedom. Firstfruits were intended to look forward to a greater harvest to come. And Paul shows us that Jesus' resurrection points to a greater

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 2:16–17.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:20.

harvest to come, too. Many, someday, when Jesus returns, will be resurrected from the dead! What a harvest that will be!!! Look at this new life in a new and greater covenant that God makes with all who trust Jesus! Now, what about the feast of weeks?

The feast of weeks took place 50 days later. After Jesus' resurrection, he met with his disciples. He spoke with about 500 people. Then, he ascended on the 40th day. Before ascending, he called his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Then on the 50th day was Pentecost. The word simply means "fifty." And, you know what happened on that day, right? The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples and empowered them to proclaim the gospel to people from various regions, and then Peter preached. In that day, 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Scriptures also refer to the Holy Spirit as the firstfruits. In Romans 8:23, we read, **"²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."¹⁰**

We have the Spirit. The Spirit is the firstfruit – meaning that the Spirit is a gift we have today, a glorious gift. Jesus himself said it is better we have the Spirit here right now than having him continue to stay in the flesh without having ascended! So, the firstfruit of the Spirit is wondrous. However, the firstfruit also signifies there is a greater harvest to come! So, we groan in this world that is fallen! We await for redemption. We await, along with creation, a new Heaven and new Earth. We await seeing Jesus when we will be changed and have new bodies that no longer groan. We await the day when we will see our Savior face-to-face!

And in that day, when we see him, Revelation 19:6-9 says this: **⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."¹¹**

This marriage supper, this feast, is looked forward to at the Lord's Supper with his disciples, and every time we remember it. Remember when Jesus says he won't drink the fruit of the vine until he drinks it new with us in the Father's Kingdom? That's what Revelation 19 is saying! Gathering together around food is a God-given grace! And God decides to use food to speak of his amazing power and his amazing grace. He is the glorious Creator and Savior! In addition, Revelation also tells us that *everyone* who trusted Jesus and followed him will also eat of the Tree of Life. That tree Adam and Eve were refused because they sinned in their eating, now we can eat from! Praise God that he is a glorious Savior!

Until that day, our corporate celebration of the Lord's table, and even our daily meals give us longing for eternity. Now, I know that in saying all of this, you could then say, "What does this all have to do with my daily eating?" After Passover, God spoke to Peter about the eating rules. It challenged Peter to the core. But in the new covenant, we're told now all foods are open to us to be able to eat. There's nothing *unclean*. Then, in 1 Corinthians 10:31, we're told that in whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, we're do it to the glory of God. And in 1 Timothy 4:4-5, Paul writes, **"⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God**

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:23.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 19:6–9.

and prayer.¹² In the Old Covenant, there were holy days and holy feasts. And God, through Paul says, Even our daily eating can be considered a *holy, worshipful act*. Every single meal *if* we receive it with thanksgiving.

So, whether I'm feasting at Christmas or I'm grabbing a small bite to tide me over, every ounce of food is a gift (a reminder) to thank the Lord, pray to Him and trust that even this eating glorifies him – because it shows that he is the good Creator, but he is also the good Savior.

Oh how we've perverted food. How often we can simply worship *it*, but no matter how good it tastes, it never fully satisfies. We can only find greater satisfaction when we know our food is given to us by our eternal, all-satisfying God. We find greater satisfaction when we know that our food points us to a greater feast. We're satisfied when we know that every meal is given to us in love because we are in Christ! **So, Ventura, eat to the glory of God. Thank God for the flavors. Thank God for the meals. But even more, thank God for Christ! And let food remind you of who God is as Creator and Savior. Let food cause you to give thanks and lead you into his presence, until the day you actually will be with him forever.**

And, if there are people here today who haven't turned from their sins and trusted Jesus, I ask you: are you invited to the future feast that Revelation talks about? Jesus taught about it when he was on earth. He even said some will try to fake their way into the feast. You might want your works or your religious behavior to count for your good. You may think that simply being better than others is good enough or you could think that God simply has to take you in no matter what. But listen to Scripture. Apart from trusting in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you will remain in your sins. Don't hear Jesus say to you, "Depart from me." Instead, I hope and pray you will hear Jesus' words, "Enter into the joy of the Lord," and in that day, you will feast in the New Zion – reveling in our good Creator and Savior for all eternity!

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ti 4:4–5.