



Psalm 23:4-5 say the following: **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**¹

Part of the point of Psalm 23 is that where you sit matters. And, God nourishes us in the midst of pain. Here we are, in whatever problems, discouragements, pains, difficulties, challenges we face. And our enemies sit at other tables. But we sit with God! That means we are taken care of. We are comforted. We are nourished. We're given fellowship with the Lord.

Now, why does Psalm 23 fit so well with the sermon today? You may have noticed the title of the sermon is "The Already-Not-Yet of Food." What does that even mean? Many Christians have referred to the time period between Jesus' ascension into Heaven and his return as the already-not-yet. This is a time period where we're reconciled with God. We're declared righteous. We're set apart to God. But we have not yet experienced the fullness of all the blessings. There's still trial and brokenness. Yes, we're righteous, but we still battle against sin. We're set apart unto God, but we also experiencing the brokenness of this world. Do you feel that tension? Maybe you feel that tension with food and feasting, too. God has given us food to nourish us, provide fellowship and for enjoyment. But in this broken world, you've experienced other things from food. When I announced on Facebook that I was going to be preaching through this series, I had a childhood friend say this, "My food allergies make me interested in this topic. It won't be till the next life in which I can fully enjoy feasting. I'm mentally annoyed that I can't fully enjoy the fullness of the New Covenant because for me, eating with abandon is suicidal. Eating to stay alive always has a little risk that doing so could kill me (it's amazing what things people sneak tree nuts and related seeds into). Eating is also about fellowshiping, yet I must appear rude at times and not eat peoples' home-cooked pride and sacrifices." She went on to add what has happened to her due to her food allergies: 4 ER visits, a handful of times which weren't severe enough for an ER visit, but I still felt poisoned for weeks afterwards... then the panic attacks began, and I was underweight for a year due to being afraid of eating....

Not only do we Christians still experience the effects of living in a fallen world, but many of us, in our sinfulness, use and abuse food. How do we live in this already-not-yet time period? The main idea of the sermon today is simply this: **Christians ought to give thanks for God's gift of food even 1) in a fallen world, and 2) although they have competing sinful desires.** We're going to first highlight how to live in a world where we still aren't able to fully or freely enjoy God's gifts to the full. How do we respond when we live under the brokenness? In the second point of the sermon, we'll highlight God's intentions with food and feasting, and how we settle for less when we sinfully use or abuse food. With this understanding, let's move into the first point.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 23:4–5.

1. Christians ought to give thanks for God's gift of food even in a fallen world.

We know that God speaks about food through the apostle Paul by saying that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”² So, we're supposed to give thanks for the food. But what if you have **food allergies, poison, heartburn, gout, flavor/texture preferences, food anxieties, unable to taste, burning tongue syndrome, Crohn's disease, metabolism issues, diverticulitis, residual issues from not be able to heal from past eating disorders?** This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it shows the reality of what people face in this world infected with the effects of sin. I personally deal daily with side effects of heart burn. As many of you know, I had gout and never want it to return. I also deal with recurrences of burning tongue syndrome. I only state this about myself to say that if you have certain problems related to food, I can relate to some degree.

I've personally been upset on various occasions that I couldn't eat a certain type of food or enjoy a meal with friends because of the pain I was experiencing. God knows I love food, right? He made it, didn't he? He wants me to enjoy it and to fellowship, doesn't he? Then why do I have these hindrances? Maybe you've felt the same way.

So, how ought we to think? I want to go all the way back to Israel wandering in the wilderness. We know that their wilderness wanderings are to be understood as a type of parallel for Christians today. As they left Egypt, that's like our being saved from bondage from our sins when we trusted Jesus. Then, the wilderness wanderings is like living in this fallen world. Like Israel anticipated a land flowing with milk and honey, we too anticipate a New Heaven and New Earth where we will feast with our Savior.

But the wilderness wandering wasn't fun and games, was it? They were provided for. They had food. They had daily manna and animals from which they could eat. God miraculously provided water. But we're told that at one point in time, the Israelites longed to go back to Egypt to enjoy the delicacies of food they had there. I can imagine that if I was an Israelite in the wilderness, I probably would have complained. Egypt seemed to give more than God. Then I'd hear Moses saying, “There's a land flowing with milk and honey,” and I might impatiently say, “Good. Let's go now!”

I say this because I think that's sometimes how I can act in my life now. This already-not-yet life of brokenness. But that's not helpful thinking. It misses God's greater intentions with food. It diminishes my joy and hope in the Lord. And, since it doesn't glory in God, it's sinful. So, how ought we to think if we experience the effects of the fall as it relates to food?

- **Don't treat it as no big deal.** While some people may look at their issues and make that their identity, other people try to feel better by sweeping the problems under the rug (imagining they don't exist) or they ignore them and say, “no big deal.” I'm thinking about conversations I've had with some people who lost their taste for months due to COVID. I honestly can't imagine. I feel so bad for them. God only gave us so many senses, and they lost an entire one! When they say, “no big deal,” I actually haven't viewed that as a positive statement. They may think they're being grateful or strong, but I think I can argue from the Bible that this is actually ignoring something important. The same can be true if someone has any myriad of other health issues. It's not no big deal.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ti 4:4.

You may be thinking, “But it’s just food and flavor. At least it’s not something else.” I understand that mentality. You’re trying to be thankful something’s not worse. That’s great. But that doesn’t mean it’s no big deal. The reality that we should keep in mind is this: **If God is going to redeem it, then we shouldn’t minimize it.** Instead, I think the biblical answer is to have a godly, righteous lament. Biblical lament gets our hearts in the right place. We realize what is broken and then we go to the Lord with the laments. And, 99% of laments in the Scripture end with patient trust in the Lord and also anticipation of what’s to come.

There is healing that can happen when we don’t ignore or minimize brokenness. There’s also greater anticipation and hope in God’s promises when we don’t ignore problems. When this brokenness is experienced we are reminded that this world is not our home, and there is a greater Day coming. So, if you’re experiencing the effects of the fall as it relates to food, lament. (If you’re experiencing anything as a result of the fall, lament.) And, if you don’t know what that looks, I’d recommend finding some Psalms of lament and using them as a pattern for your prayer to God.

- **Beware of bitterness (embrace hope).** That’s real easy to say, isn’t it? But how can you not be bitter if you can die from certain common foods? Why would God ordain this in your life? You may not have all the answers, but here are a couple promises from the Creator who has welcomed you to his table in the midst of pain and suffering. In Romans 8, Paul speaks of the groans of this world. He says that not only does creation groan in pain, but we do, too. We feel it. But, Paul wants to settle our hearts and says this, too: **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**³ Do you believe this? If you are God’s child, I pray that the Spirit would convince you that there will be a day so glorious that you will not look back on today and say, “I guess it was worth it.” Instead, you will get to a day where you won’t even bother comparing because the glory is so wondrous! As a result, God speaks to us through Paul saying, **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”**⁴ Every issue. Every shard of brokenness in this world that intends to cut and harm us will be taken by God and forced to submit to his good intentions for us – even gout, Crohn’s or any other number of issues that cause groaning. So, instead of being embittered, lament and take the burdens to the Lord. And then find comfort from the Lord who promises to give greater grace even through the burdens.

- **Remember that we’re in the not-yet.** The world is not perfect yet, right? Correct. Yet, I think in our first-world country, we can tend to think we should be able to heal from anything. It is true that we have amazing medicines and life-saving procedures, but we’re still human. We’re still under the curse of God because of sin. That means, in this life we will have tribulation. So, for example, I may or may not be healed from certain things. I pray I’m healed, but God does not guarantee that. And sometimes we can think that if God allowed one person over there to be healed then he ensures everyone will. Or, if a doctor can do this for that person then he will do it for you. But God is more personal than this. We don’t understand his ways. Like Job, we don’t see what goes on in the Heavens. But we can hear Paul’s words when he was confused about a persistent problem in his life. Remember his words in 2 Corinthians 12? **So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.**⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:18.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:28.

said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”⁵

God’s grace is sufficient. I know the struggle. I know what it’s like in some ways to say, “Is this going to be the rest of my life? I won’t make it if it is. But God, who is our loving Father, who sits us at his table in the midst of the enemies, says, “My grace is sufficient.” And so Paul is an example of one who trusts the Lord. He clearly can’t do life with this thorn in his flesh in his own strength. But he’ll trust the Lord to get him through each day. So, it is with any of us who have any type of physical problems and even ones related to food. We’re in the not-yet. But remember, God’s grace is sufficient. And someday, the not-yet will be all gone. Finally, let me give one more point.

- **Thank God for what he has given.** In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Receive food with *thanksgiving*. You may not be able to eat or drink as much as you’d like. You may feel the awkwardness and anxiety at gatherings. But, Lordwilling, God can grow you to become thankful for what you *can* eat and drink. If you know God has good intentions for you, you do not have to be ashamed of the limitations. Instead, you can boast all the more gladly in Christ and make that boast known to others. The reality is that Jesus empowers us to give thanks and to hope even while groaning. And ultimately, we can give thanks because God hasn’t only provided physical nourishment, but as we’ve spoken in all the weeks in the past, God has given us Jesus Christ who has given us the spiritual nourishment and life, fellowship, and enjoyment that our soul utterly needs.

Please never miss or diminish your salvation! You who deserved the wrath of God have been given forgiveness and life through Jesus. But if you’re here today and you haven’t turned to Jesus for reconciliation with God, you may be able to eat all the food this world gives, but what does it matter to gain all the food but lose your soul in Hell? Oh, I pray you’d turn to Jesus for salvation and trust the God who cares for your soul. Christian, better to have a future feast to look forward to and minimal food here than all the feasting here and eternal separation from God. So, thank the Lord for what he *has* given.

In all of this, I’ve given encouragement as it relates to experiencing the effects of the fall in our lives, but what about our own sinfulness when it comes to food? Some of you might hear of God’s three-fold intention of food being nourishment, fellowship, and enjoyment; and you may be concerned that with all this talk of food, we could end up idolizing it and turning from God. Well, that’s a legitimate concern, and that leads us to the second point.

2. Christians ought to give thanks for God’s gift of food although they have competing sinful desires.

Just because something could be used in a sinful way does not mean that we then give it up. What if I said that I could be tempted to idolize Tracy? Do you think I should then divorce her? Absolutely not! I need to repent and love her the way God calls me to love her. This should be the similar mentality with food. We know we can have a love-hate relationship with food and drink. How ought we to relate to it? Well, first, let me simply say that God is not a killjoy when it comes to food. Do you remember Jesus’ first recorded miracle? It’s at a wedding feast, and he miraculously provides wine. This points forward to the Kingdom feast to come, being welcomed to God in his home! God is not a killjoy. In actuality, we are. Sin is a breaking apart of God’s good gifts. Sin is idolatry, and God abhors idolatry because it minimizes him and it destroys human beings created in his image. When we idolize food, we dishonor the Lord and

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 12:7–9.

blind ourselves to his grace. So, I think there could be two helpful questions we can ask ourselves in relating to food and drink.

- **Do I highlight one purpose for food over and above all others?** Again, by way of reminder, God's three-fold purpose of food is nourishment, fellowship, and enjoyment.

And, a few weeks ago, I actually went through how we could sinfully elevate any one of these purposes over and above others. If you remember, we went through certain Bible texts to show how when you elevate one above the others, there's disorder that happens. And, while I did that a few weeks ago, I want to do that again today, but in a more practical way. So, let's take each item point-by-point.

For Nourishment. Some people believe that they should only eat what is of optimal health all the time. I don't believe that's biblical because God didn't only give food for nourishment. He gave food for fellowship and enjoyment. Some foods don't have as many or much nourishing ingredients as others, and that's ok. While God doesn't call us to destroy our bodies, he also doesn't call us to always be paranoid with the nutrition information on labels. He calls for enjoyment. Remember the feasts in Deuteronomy? Remember the one where God calls the people to purchase whatever food they want for their enjoyment? Also, remember what the Spirit tells us in Colossians 2: **why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—** ²¹ **“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”?** ²³ **These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.** ⁶

For Fellowship. If highlight fellowship with people above all other things, you might have to ask yourself if you have an underlying idol of acceptance. You aren't enjoying the gift of food and fellowshiping with people. Instead, you're using food to be accepted. I think of Romans 14, where Paul talks about food offered to idols and how some people could eat that food against their conscience because they see another Christian eating it. It's not good to go against conscience, but they're doing it because they know you're spiritual and they'll just do it for that reason. No! Now, I know that scenario is a little different than what I'm talking about here, but I think the point can still be made. Food can be used as a tool or a pressure. That's not the intention of food. We welcome people to a feast or meal in order to show they're welcome – not to manipulate them into liking us or accepting us.

For Enjoyment. What happens if enjoyment is the heightened purpose of food and drinking? Well, you get gluttony and drunkenness. We know the Bible has clear commands against both of these. But, I need to take a moment to define these. Drunkenness is actually pretty easy to define. Sadly, in our country, alcoholism is ever increasing. I'm concerned about the world and also the church. Is drunkenness being tolerated in people's lives? It's serious. It's dangerous. God is clear in Ephesians 5:18, **“¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. . .”**⁷ If alcohol has control over you, that's drunkenness. And, please hear me. If you battle with alcohol, please come to the light. Talk to me or someone else to help you through. Or, if you're a spouse and you are concerned, please talk to us. Many times an alcoholic doesn't really believe they're an alcoholic. We'd love to come alongside to show the freedom Christ brings!

But gluttony is actually a more difficult word to define. Some have thought being overweight or obese is gluttony. Others think that gluttony is eating more than you need on any given occasion (which can't be

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 2:20-21, 23.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:18.

true because of the idea of feasts in the Old Testament). So, what does the Bible actually indicate? In every instance we have the word glutton in our Bibles, it's paired with another word – indicating there are two ideas coming together to help us understand one another. It's paired with drunkenness or being a drunk. It's also paired with laziness and slander. I'm not going to go through all the passages, but I am going to read from a man named Kevin DeYoung who, after briefly discussing these relevant passages, goes on to reveal that our American understanding of gluttony is off. It's not what the Bible says. He wrote this, "When we take time to open our Bibles and read the relevant passages, we find that gluttony is much more than eating an entire bag of Double Stuf Oreos. . . . The composite picture from the passages above suggests that a glutton is a loafer, a partyer, and a profligate. He's the prodigal son wasting his life on riotous living. She's the girl on spring break who thinks the pinnacle of human existence is to eat, drink and hook up. A wastrel living for the weekend. A big-city highlifer who cares for nothing except that he might indulge in high society. A ne'er-do-well who takes lifestyle cues from the *Hangover* franchise" (DeYoung, Kevin. *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*, pp. 92-93).

But wait, Pastor Timothy, you have to be healthy! I never said to not care about your health. If we are concerned about nourishment, we will care about our health. If we're concerned about fellowship, we'll grow in our desire to welcome people to eat with us. If we're concerned about enjoyment, we'll be creative and accepting of the food we eat. But we must embrace all three as patterns in our life. And why would we do this? Because God has gifted us with the food of Christ. He's nourished us spiritually. He's granted us fellowship with him. He's given us fullness of joy at his right hand forevermore! Now, let's move on to one final question to ask ourselves:

- **Have I created a different purpose for food?** Years ago, I was looking at a lawn mower, and as on most things these days, the lawnmower had all these warning stickers on them. I was particularly shocked by one of the stickers. It had a picture of a stick man putting his head to the blade. I just thought to myself, "Isn't that obvious?" But to this day, I can chuckle and shake my head when I think about that sticker. I mean, if you want a haircut, you know you might need sharp blades, but not in the form of lawnmower blades, right?

Where am I going with this? Well, I think that's what many of us can tend to do with all sorts of things in this world. People have done it with marriage, for example. God has his definition of a covenant between one man and one woman in order to put on display Christ and the church. But the world says, "Well, we can redefine. If you want a physical high or if you want to be with any number of people, maybe we can call that marriage." You can make up your own ways, but the Bible is clear that it's sinful to go against the Creator's design. The same with food. Like a person wanting to get a haircut with a lawnmower, we can want something from food and feasting that God never intended. Let me give a few examples:

Getting the body image I want. Did you know that nowhere in the Bible are we told that we are to use food in order to get the Western American Body Image Ideal. Yet, in 2019, the weight loss and weight diet management market size was 192 billion dollars. Again, I'm not against eating with nourishment in mind. That's a key component. However, I think magazines and the current culture is selling an image of "perfection" and people are buying it hook-line-and-sinker, and they're saying this is what God calls for. I don't see that anywhere in the Scriptures. With all that God speaks about with food and feasting, you'd like he'd say something. But he doesn't. Food isn't intended to simply feed a different idol of you wanting to look a certain way. God made you the way you are and loves you deeply. Rest in that, and

see how God shapes you as you live out the nourishment, fellowship, and enjoyment he's given you in Christ and provided for you in the food you partake of daily.

Proving Your Worth through Self-Discipline. Self-discipline with food can take on various forms. Self-discipline in and of itself isn't bad. As a matter of fact, when dependent on the Spirit, self-discipline is part of the fruit of the Spirit! But proving your worth through "self-discipline" is heinous. In Christ, you already have worth! You are a child of God. How do you know you're trying to prove your worth through self-discipline or to get others to prove it? You become judgmental towards others. "Look at them and how they've let themselves go." All of a sudden, your accomplishments and what you do become the focus of your life and pursuit. But remember 1 Corinthians 8:8: **⁸Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.**⁸ If this is you, I pray you'd find rest in the One who is of eternal worth and welcomes you at his table!

In saying this, proof of worth can come in other forms – like disordered eating. Maybe you want to have some semblance of control or show that you have some power and so you engage in anorexic or bulimic behaviors. Oh, if this is you, again, please talk to someone. God's control and power is greater. Using food in this way distorts so many things, and you're abusing a good gift that God intends for you.

So whether you're immensely self-disciplined or you're disordered in your eating, know this, in Christ Jesus there's wholeness and worth. He's the true food you need to nourish your soul.

Self-medicating. This is the final example. In enjoyment and fellowship, we can see how food can care for us. So, maybe I should have put this in the overemphasizing of enjoyment, but I'm putting it here. Food is not ultimately for comfort or self-medicating. I remember many years ago going to the doctor's office and having bloodwork done. My triglycerides were over 400. My sister-in-law, who is a doctor, told me later that they'd probably go down if I stopped eating the big bowl of ice cream every night. Now, I don't think I was "self-medicating" per se, but I was looking to food for immense comfort. And, it was difficult to get out of the habit, but after three months, my triglycerides were down to 86! We need to be careful with what we eat. And, Paul does say bodily exercise profits little. Some want to emphasize the "little," but Paul is actually emphasizing how the spiritual matters so much more than the physical. And, in the Greco-Roman world, they valued the physical highly. Well, if the physical is little in comparison to the spiritual, how valuable is the spiritual. That's the point Paul's making. So, he's not diminishing care for the body. I think he's highlighting it.

So, Ventura, as you think about the already-not-yet reality of living in this world, how do you face your brokenness and your sinful tendencies? **Christians ought to give thanks for God's gift of food even 1) in a fallen world, and 2) although they have competing sinful desires. Jesus has given us himself as our ultimate satisfaction, and as a result, we can learn how to receive God's gifts with thanksgiving. We can know that in his presence is fullness of joy and thus we can trust him to give us our daily bread. And in the midst of the struggles of this world, we can be confident that he prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.**

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 8:8.