



I have been very encouraged through this series for multiple reasons. One reason in particular is that I've had more conversations with many of you regarding this theology of food and feasting. For whatever reason, there can be many times after sermons that I don't hear much about the topic or text, but this series has generated quite a bit of conversation, and I've been encouraged by your excitement, encouragement, and even by how God has shown you other passages of Scriptures that relate to this theme.

A couple weeks ago, after one sermon, I had four people share with me truths that so excited me that I had to go back to my office to write them down. I told at least one of them that I was probably going to use it in an upcoming sermon. And, here we are! The after-worship service conversations have made their way into this morning's sermon. So, thank you to each of those individuals. And also, thank you to all of you for how you've encouraged me through your joy in the Lord and his Word.

I do genuinely hope and pray that we all are becoming more thoughtful about this biblical theme and that we are seeking for ways to apply God's hospitality and kindness in our lives. I also trust that you have begun to see that we truly can glorify God in whether we eat or drink! Our eating and drinking, when done in dependence on the Lord, can matter for eternity!

So, what about today? What's the purpose of the sermon this morning? You see the title, which is, "Come to the Table: Feasting and Reconciliation." I want you to think of God's arms open wide, summoning people to his table (like what we saw the tabernacle and Temple pointed to). God was revealing that he was welcoming rebels to come back to him at a feast. This welcome isn't simply so that we who are starved can eat. But, we see in the Scriptures that when God provides a feast, it's a sign of reconciliation. Estranged people and enemies have changed and now are friends. So, the main idea of the sermon today is that **Feasting is an evidence of repentance and reconciliation.**

I'm reminded of Romans 2, after Paul says to this Roman church that the entire world lives out their sinfulness, he directs his attention towards fellow Jews. And before they can think they're off-the-hook because they're Jews, Paul goes on to express how even Jews (in their law-abiding) still sin. They don't honor God through faith. But, despite the fact that people turn from God through their immorality or their morality, God is still kind towards them, and in Romans 2:4, we read that "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance." I think we've seen up to this point that food and feasting is an evidence of God's kindness to this world. It's what many Christians would refer to as a "common grace," meaning that God has given the kindness of food and feasting to the entire world – not just to people who trust Jesus and follow him. But food and feasting isn't to stop at being a common grace. It can also be an evidence of saving grace. Let's put it another way. It's great to be able to eat food with other people and experience nourishment, fellowship, and enjoyment. But what does it matter if you are invited to all the feasts in the world, but you lose your soul and starve eternally in Hell? Common grace isn't enough. So,

today, we're going to focus our attention on how food and feasting points to and is an evidence of God's saving grace. He is calling people to sit at his table. Maybe you're here and you haven't trusted in Christ Jesus. You wonder even what "repentance" means. Well, it's a relational term. It means to turn from finding your life and identity in things other than God, and to turn to God for forgiveness and reconciliation. I pray you see God's arms welcoming you to feast with him. But repentance isn't only a word for people who haven't trusted Jesus. Repentance is the way of life for Christians because we are still imperfect. So, if you are a Christian here today, I pray that you revel in the immeasurable kindnesses God has given to you in Jesus, and that you would want to show others his kindness!

Now, we're almost ready to dive into the Word. I'm going to take this main idea, and ask two questions: Where? How? In other words, "Where do we see this truth in the Bible?" and "How can Christians highlight God's saving grace through food?" So, let's dive into the first point:

1. Where do we see this truth in the Bible?

We are not going to go through all the passages in the Bible on this, but I will take you to three passages that I think are very encouraging. In all three we clearly see that feasting is an evidence of repentance and reconciliation.

Elisha & God's Enemies. The first scenario is with the prophet Elisha. Do you remember a few weeks ago when I lovingly called him the prophet of food, and we saw how God worked through him to heal a poisonous stew and provide a feast for God's prophets. Today, we're going to a different scenario that's found in 2 Kings 6.

In this chapter, we have a scenario where the Syrians are specifically targeting Elisha because the King realizes that somehow Elisha has been used in Israel to thwart the Syrians warfare tactics. So, the King sends his army to where Elisha is staying. One morning, Elisha's servant woke up, looked outside and saw an army! Can you imagine that scene? I just think of a guy rising early, little tired, and all of a sudden, his heart must have been racing and his eyes probably felt like they were bugging out of his head. He goes to tell Elisha, and Elisha's response is cool, calm, and collected. He tells the servant to not be afraid, and then he prays that God would open the servant's eyes to see reality. The servant then looks at the mountain behind them and sees an angelic army. But the Syrians come against Elisha, and then Elisha prays that the Lord would strike them with blindness. They're blinded, and then Elisha essentially says, "This isn't the place nor the time." Elisha plans to reveal himself, but just not then and there.

Up to this point, there's mystery at what is happening. You can imagine the servant of Elisha is confused at what is taking place. Why blind them? Why not just take them all out? Well, let's read 1 Kings 6:19-23 together: And Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria. As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw, and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. As soon as the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down?" He answered, "You shall not strike them down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." So he prepared for them a great feast, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel.

The Syrians have been utterly clueless about God. They're just trying to win some wars against Israel. So, they're only thinking militaristically while we see that God seeks to reveal His glory to their hearts! So, they lose battles. Then they lose their good sight. As a result, they lose some good old common sense. Then, they receive their sight back when they're in Samaria – the capital of Israel. Can you imagine the sinking feeling they must have felt in their stomachs? If I were a soldier, I think I would say, "I'm think I'm going to throw up. Would you just please make me blind again?"

Now, the Syrians are faced with reality. I'm sure they think they're going to die. It must not have helped to hear the king of Israel say, "My father, shall I kill *them*? Shall I kill *them*?" It's like the king of Israel is all too happy to murder these people. "Can I? Can I? Please?" But, Elisha says something that probably shocks the king. He says, "You shall not kill *them*. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."

What?! How can Elisha command kindness to people who have been trying to murder the Israelites?! These are people who took little girls away from their parents and had them as their own slaves. Now Elisha says to make a meal?

Before you judge anyone in this story for potential anger at this command of Elisha, I want you to imagine what it might be like if God called you to feast with your enemy. For some of you what I'm saying here is almost too hard to bear. You think, "No, Pastor Timothy, anybody but that person." Or you think, "I think it would be great if they're saved, but I'm not going to ever talk to them again." Elisha points to Jesus' sentiments and even points us here to eternal realities: "Set food and water before them. . . ." Feed them. Care for them. Provide for them. Love them. Ventura, this is the type of love we ought to and must have for our enemies. You may think, "WHY?" Because of Jesus. It is because you were an enemy of God. "Yeah, I know, but not that bad." Oh, if you think that you have no idea the holiness of God and the depths of your own depravity. Jesus came into the septic of this world and died as a result of the people who said they loved God. And, God placed your sin and my sin on Jesus. You want to think you're not as bad as the other person? It's only by pure grace that none of us are like the demons! Maybe this is one lesson the king of Israel needs to see. He's no different than the Syrians. Neither the Syrians nor the Israelites have really been giving any thought to God. The Syrians are no more deserving of death than the Israelites. Instead, the Syrians are in need of grace just like the Israelites are in need of grace.

The perplexing wisdom of God has graced the Syrians and now enemies are brought at a table to feast. And their feasting was a sign of acceptance. They knew what could have happened, but they were spared. Instead of fighting, they feast. Then we're told they didn't come on raids again. Repentance. Reconciliation. This is what saving grace is! Now, let's go to another scenario. This time, we're going to listen to a story Jesus tells. One of my favorite parables referred to most commonly as

The Prodigal Son. In Luke 15, starting in verse 11, we read: And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Jesus is speaking to an audience with scribes and Pharisees as well as tax collectors and sinners. As you hear this story, you begin to realize that the younger son represents the tax collectors. The older son represents the scribes and Pharisees. What we discover is that both sons are essentially the same. They only want what the Father can give them, not the Father himself. But, we’re only going to focus on the younger son. What does he do? In the ancient culture, demanding his inheritance was like saying, “I wish you were dead.” The Father astoundingly stills shows kindness to his rebellious son. And the son squanders all the wealth. The son finally realizes he’s at the end of his rope when he’s so bad off that he’s longing to eat the pods that the pigs ate. For Israelites, keep in mind, pigs were unclean animals. He was working with them, and he wants to eat what they eat! But no one gave him anything. Notice that starvation pig pods is the moment of desperation.

Then he came to his senses. The father even feeds his servants well. And here, the son doesn’t expect to be reinstated as a son. He simply wants to be like a servant. If he can just have food. So, he rehearses his speech to his dad. He is going to ask for forgiveness, but he’s not acting with presumption that he deserves to be forgiven or reconciled. Yet, what happens?

Ventura, imagine this story again. An estranged child. A loving father. A father always looking for his wayward child. It reminds me of many of you here as you pray for your children to come to the faith and/or be reconciled with some of you, too. This father looks on the horizon and there is his son. His age doesn’t matter. His wealthy status doesn’t matter. He does the unthinkable. He runs! Oh, Ventura, get the picture of this! The father represents God the Father! What love! What tremendous care. He runs and hugs his son, and doesn’t let his son finish his rehearsed speech. Not only does the father forgive. The father is reconciled to his boy. And what happens? He calls for the finest feast! The son went from the lowest place, longing for pig pods. Now he receives the finest robes, a ring, and then a feast. This feast is a sign of the reconciliation and welcome. This is how the father celebrates. And, Ventura, this is how God, in pure grace, celebrates anyone who turns from their sins and trusts in Jesus alone for forgiveness and reconciliation. Do you know your brokenness and sinfulness? Do you know your lostness without God? Do you know God’s immense grace? His arms are open wide. And he is preparing a feast for all who trust him. Feasting is an evidence of repentance and reconciliation.

The Laodicean Church. In Revelation 3:15-20, Jesus speaks these words to a local church in the town called Laodicea: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and

repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

There are a couple of things about this passage that I think many times gets misunderstood. The first relates to being hot, cold, or lukewarm. I’ve heard many times that hot means being on fire for Jesus and being cold means being against Christ. So, what’s said is that Jesus would rather have us show what we’re really committed to than being “wishy-washy” lukewarm people. But that’s not the point. The idea of lukewarm water actually connects to the historical context of Laodicea. You see, Laodicea had an aqueduct that brought from six miles away. By the time the water came into the city, it was lukewarm. And that meant that the water was actually unclean and practically undrinkable. Lukewarm doesn’t mean “wishy-washy.” Lukewarm actually means wretched. Hot water had a purpose. Cold water has a purpose. But diseased water doesn’t.

In the context of Laodicea, I want you to notice how Jesus describes them. They’re rich and prosperous. They’re aligning with the cultural values and they’re essentially self-made people. It sounds a lot like many in the Western world. I’m reminded of the story of a Chinese pastor visiting the United States churches and after his tour of churches, he was asked what he thought of the American church and his response was, “It’s amazing what you can do without the Holy Spirit.” He was commenting on the prayerlessness of the churches. Could that be said of many of us? Are we dependent on the world and on cultural standards of acceptance and wealth by society and government? Jesus calls that lukewarm. Jesus says we’re really actually naked.

But Jesus doesn’t stop here. He doesn’t say to professing Christians that he has washed his hands clean, and he’s done with them. He could do that, couldn’t he? But he doesn’t. Instead, we move into the next illustration that often gets misunderstood: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” When I was younger, this statement was taught as Jesus inviting people to salvation. While that could perhaps be true for Laodicea, we need to get the point. Jesus isn’t speaking to irreligious people. He’s speaking to a church! Beware of buying into the lifestyle and values of any worldly society, including the American Dream! It’s vomitous to our Lord.

But if you have fallen prey to this, listen to Jesus’ words to Laodicea: Behold, I stand at the door and knock. The picture is of Jesus being outside the gathering place. He’s knocking on the church’s doors. Will the church let Jesus in? Will we let Jesus into our midst or do we want an Americanized version of Jesus? Oh, how I pray that our response to Jesus is to always have the door open to our Savior. And, why would I say this? Look at his love. He stands at the door and knock, and if anyone hears his voice and opens the door, he will come in and eat with him. To hear his voice means you’ve repented. You’ve turned from your sinfulness and turned to God as your satisfaction and life.

Maybe only one person in the church responds by turning to Jesus. Guess what? Jesus responds. And, he responds by eating with that person. God’s arms are open wide to accept. God’s welcoming people to the feast. Feasting truly is an evidence of repentance and reconciliation. Relationship with God is restored, then celebrate with great joy!

Now that we’ve asked “where” we see this in the Scriptures, we can now move on to asking

2. How can Christians highlight God’s saving grace through food?

Some of what I'm about to say is repeat, but repetition aids learning, right? So, let's start with the most obvious one:

Hospitality. This idea keeps coming up. We know God is the hospitable God. God welcomes us to his table. But I want to show a little more clarity on how hospitality is essential for Christians to live out. Let's think about the book of Romans. The book of Romans begins by speaking of the entire world being bound in brokenness and their own sin. Chapter 1 ends by saying everyone has an undiscerning (or, reprobate) mind. And then Paul says that we seek to find communities of people where we can approve of each other's sinful tendencies.

This is sad and horrific. Yet, when we look at the world, we see it everywhere. So, Paul continues his letter by explaining how God rescues sinners and this sinful world. Jesus came to die and take the punishment sinners deserved in their place. As a result, anyone who trusts in the Lord will be forgiven. Then Paul goes on until the end of chapter 11 to detail how God's glory is shone in saving sinners. Finally, we get to chapter 12, and Paul talks about people who can discern. The word "discern" is the exact opposite Greek word for "undiscerning" or "reprobate." These people also gather together into a group. And they don't approve of sin. Instead, they seek to approve of God's will and God's ways. So, Paul then details God's ways. As Paul lists so many attributes of this new community of believers in Jesus, we get to verse 13 and read this: Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Do you see that? Hospitality! Why? Because this is God's will. This has been God's way with us, and we get to display that new way to others.

Ventura, before I move on to another application point, I do want to say how grateful I am for you. This past week, Caique Bull (who sought to be our church intern, and is still seeking wisdom to see if there are other ways to come to the States from Brazil) - he expressed just how loved he and his wife have felt by Ventura. Seeing all the donated clothes for their family, knowing a car has been waiting for them, knowing our church was ready to pay their airfare - and we have never met them personally. Ventura, that's generous hospitality, and that type of hospitality reveals that our unity isn't around worldly things. It's around Jesus Christ. We long for the gospel to be on display. Praise the Lord!

But, we don't have to do this to be hospitable. This past week, Marlene Ross called to tell me just how meaningful the Meal Train is at our church. Where she and Bob cannot make the food they need because of their pains and hurts, but because people drop off food, not only do they get the nourishment they need, they also get a little time of fellowship with the church family - which encourages them in the Lord. Ventura, hospitality and contributing to the needs of the saints matters! It reveals God's glory. It shows that he has granted us repentance and reconciliation with him - and one another.

Now, let's look at another application.

Accept all believers. The sin of partiality is clear in the book of James. Don't highlight the wealthy over the poor. Paul talks about not favoring Jews over Gentiles. Within our churches, we ought not to play favorites. Instead, we recognize that God has given us this family. I don't get to choose who my family is. God chooses - and that should give me great joy. Yes, some family members can be harder to love than other ones. But, with all, we should be, as Acts 2 says, devoted to the breaking of bread with one another.

Now, I will give one final point.

Eat with the gathered believers. Someday, all believers throughout all time will feast together. Until then, we see examples of God's people feasting in larger feasts. The local church eating a meal together. Israel feasting together. Ventura, this is something I'm excited about because the elders are beginning to discuss the importance of corporate meals of remembrance and anticipation of the Lord's return. Last week, at the elder's meeting, I even said that I think we need to find a deacon of feasting! Or, maybe we just say deacon of hospitality. Either way, maybe God is working in you to volunteer for something like this. I think all the elders would love to see purposeful family meals at different points of the year to help remind us of the glorious truths of God's common and saving graces where he nourishes us, provides us with fellowship and also everlasting enjoyment.

What application comes to you? I want to encourage you to take a few moments to ponder application in your heart. First, if you haven't trusted Jesus, please come talk to me or any other believer here. We'd love to answer questions you may have. Second, if you are a Christian or a non-Christian, I pray and hope that you see the amazing love of God. Third, I pray all of us would grow in repentance and rejoice more in being reconciled with God. **Feasting truly is an evidence of repentance and reconciliation.**