

North Americans have a strange relationship with food. Because of mass food production and the easy access to food, our attitudes about eating are often quite messed up. Food is viewed as fuel, as something pragmatic that we need. And so we eat at our desks. We grab food on the go and eat while we drive. We eat quickly as we rush from here to there. And all the while, we forget that there is something quite wrong with our relationship with food.

We start to realize how much of a problem we have as a society in our relationship with food when we consider all the problems associated with eating. We eat to cope. We stress eat. North Americans struggle with obesity. And there has been a growing trend since the 90s with eating disorders.

While North Americans have a complicated relationship with food, this is due to the fact that humans have always struggled with eating. So it is no surprise that when Jesus prepares us for his greatest work, he comes to save us from all of the effects of the curse and sin. Salvation's impact doesn't just deal with some internal problem and not change the way that we live; salvation changes our relationship with God, others, and the world around us. And this includes food.

In Luke's gospel, some have noted that Jesus is either going to, coming from, or is at a meal. It's the gospel that is constantly around food. We shouldn't be surprised, then, that in the final hours of his ministry we find Jesus at the table again with his disciples, preparing them for a new way to live. What's so important about food? Why does Jesus care so much about what we eat?

Get a New Relationship with Food

Five times in this passage, Luke reminds us that this is the Passover meal (vv. 7, 8, 11, 13, 15). When Israel was in Egypt, slaves to Pharaoh, the Lord told Moses to command each family to take a spotless lamb, take its blood and sprinkle it on the doorway of their homes, and prepare the lamb as a meal with unleavened bread. And on that night, the angel of death came through Egypt and struck down the firstborn in every home where there was no blood on the door and delivered God's firstborn son from the crushing weight of slavery. The payment for mistreating God's firstborn son (Exod. 4:22) was the death of the firstborn son. So, over a meal, Israel anticipated their deliverance and God's judgment. The lamb would die in their place.

It's no surprise that God gives a meal each time he brings about his saving work. From the very beginning of creation, God had given his commands in the context of a meal. He had told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree in the garden except for one. And the first rebellion had come by breaking a command about food. Instead of receiving food as God's good gift, they saw the one tree as something that God was withholding from them. And as a result, they ate and realized that sin affects our bodies. They felt ashamed of their bodies.

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And ever since, humans show how sin has affected us by struggling with our appearances. We are too thin; too fat; we have airbrushed ads with perfect bodies that don't actually exist. Sin has caused us to be confused about what it means to be made in the image of God.

So our relationship with food is affected by the curse. We eat on the go, treating food like fuel rather than a gift to be enjoyed. We treat food like it can either give or ruin the perfect body. We stress eat or have comfort foods instead of finding our refuge in the Lord. Still others use food as a way to showcase their status, treating food in a way that highlights our position or status. We have foodies. And we have diet programs that treat food like points, almost religious-like so that we can atone for our sin of overeating by counting the calories.

But whenever God comes to bring us out of bondage and slavery, he gives us a new relationship with food. And so it is here – Jesus comes on the night of his betrayal, and he prepares a meal. A Passover meal. A meal of remembrance. A meal that says that the effects of sin that have distorted everything – including how we view food – have been overcome.

Experience the Grace of Food

Because God comes to save us, he doesn't give us food as something that is functional. He gives us food as a gift, a reminder of his grace. He gave food as an expression of relationship. Food was intended to be a communal activity, a point of connection. When Israel came out of Egypt and was brought to Mount Sinai and received the law, what did God command the leaders of Israel to do? Exodus 24:11 says that the 70 elders went up the mountain part way with Moses for a meal where they ate and drank with the Lord. In the presence of God, the elders of Israel enjoyed fellowship with God, communing with him. But Israel would struggle with food even along the way to the Promised Land – a land flowing with milk and honey. They would repeatedly complain about a lack of food, complaining, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:19), forgetting that 'man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Deut. 8:3). So when God gave Israel bread in the wilderness, it was bread sufficient for the day. And on the sixth day, it was bread enough for two days. It was a gift of grace.

Now, as Jesus sits with his disciples in the final hours of his ministry, he eats with them. And he tells his disciples in v. 15, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." The aim of the meal, you see, is to experience the grace of connection, relationship. Meals are something you share with people you want to have relationship with. You don't generally eat meals with people who are your enemies. This is why an elder should be hospitable – he should be welcoming people to eat with him to build relationships in order to share of God's saving work. There is a grace in eating together. It recognizes that we were made for relationship with God and with one another. A meal is often the way that we show that

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there is something meaningful about a relationship. We want connection. We want fellowship. And the same is true in the meal that God provides. His salvation isn't so that we could just escape trouble, but so that we would know intimacy with him. So there is a grace in food – a connecting, a communing, a relating that is healthy, good, and right.

Look Forward to the Joy with Food

And so, as Jesus prepares for his final hours, he sends Peter and John off to prepare the meal. And yet, Luke tells us that Jesus has made all of the arrangements (vv. 7-13). Jesus is the host, we are the guests. He has prepared a meal in the presence of our enemies. And when he begins the meal, he tells his disciples that this will be the last Passover meal he will eat until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God (v. 16). While Jesus will go to the cross, suffer an excruciating death, and be raised to newness of life, Jesus is looking forward – he anticipates the day that Isaiah described in Isa. 25:6-9 – a day where God would provide a rich meal, swallow up death forever, wipe every tear from our eyes, and bring about joy.

And so, when Jesus gives the Last Supper, it is the last supper before he makes a radical promise. He breaks bread, gives a cup of wine, and says, “This is the new covenant in my blood” (v. 20). Over a meal, Jesus makes a radical promise of commitment to us. He will be our God, and we will be his people. He eats with us with the guaranteed promise that we will eat with him again.

And suddenly, food isn't just about food. A meal isn't just about fuel. It's about promises. It's about hope. It's about the future. For this reason, before Christians eat a meal, we bow our heads, give thanks to God for food, express our trust that he will continue to provide, and admit that we are waiting that day when we will eat with him again. There will be a banquet where sin and death will be swallowed up forever. At the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (described in Rev. 19), our longings for connection, relationship, joy, and satisfaction will all be met by the Lover of our Souls. The eternal banquet, the celebration of pure love is what we long for. And when we eat, especially when we eat the Lord's Supper, we are confessing this longing. For as Paul can say, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Now I must confess that I've always struggled with communion meals. We have this paltry piece of bread and a thimble sized cup and we are told this is a meal. Now during Covid we have pre-packaged wafers that taste like Styrofoam and cups of grape juice that just aren't “feast-worthy”. It doesn't feel like a feast. It feels very functional. I've bemoaned this before, and I admit that I struggle with how we do communion. In my mind, the way that we do communion tells us how broken our relationship with food actually is! Instead of the bounty of God's salvation, we have crumbs and thimbles.

And yet, there is something about crumbs and thimbles that is glorious. It's a reminder that there is a better feast coming. There is a day when all of our longings will be satisfied. Why? Because the One who came to rescue us from all of the effects of sin and death went to the cross, had his body crushed, his blood poured out, so that we could know joy and hope forever! So even as I mash the wafer between my teeth, I am living in between the times and remembering that I nailed Jesus to that cross. I crushed his body, just as my teeth crush the wafer in my mouth. I caused his blood to be spilt, just as I take the cup and drink it and confess that I need his forgiving, righteous work to first forgive me of sins and give me his righteousness, but then to have it go through every vein just as the bread and wine are absorbed into my bloodstream and distributed all throughout my body. I need Christ's atoning work to touch every aspect of my life. And even though it is a small wafer and a thimble of juice, Christ is still working in me bit by bit, changing me, rescuing me, delivering me, remaking me. His promise of salvation and fellowship has only just begun!

I'm not unlike the disciples who need more of his work done in me. They can argue about who is the greatest (vv. 24ff). But Jesus makes it clear that the greatest is the one who serves the meal, not the one who is the guest. Learning to give of my life, serve others, be a host reminds me that there is one who has served me, loved me, hosted me when I was a proud guest.

So what does it look like to think about meals in a gospel way? It means we...

Eat to Worship the Glorious Christ

When we eat, and especially when we come to the communion meal, Jesus tells us to do this in remembrance of him (Lk. 22:19). We eat to remember. We eat to anticipate a day where the unseen guest will be the visible host. We remember the work of the cross – the God who gave himself for us, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). We eat to remember. But we also eat as a reminder to God. When Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me," it is the echo of the words of Leviticus 2:2, 9, 16 where Moses told the people that they were to eat as a memorial to the Lord. When we eat, we aren't the only ones remembering. We are reminding God of his promises to us, asking God to act, to save, to welcome, to forgive, to restore. We eat to worship and remind ourselves and God of his great promises.

We also eat as disciples who come together. We eat as a family. We don't avoid one another. We eat and remember we have to work out our differences as brothers and sisters in the Lord. We eat to show that Jesus came to bring forgiveness that restores relationships between God and humanity, but also fellow humans.

And we eat as people who remember that Jesus has prepared this meal for us. We are dependent upon him. We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the

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mouth of God. We eat and remember that at any moment we could be without. We thank God that he cares for us and he can make a banquet for us in the wilderness (Ps. 78:19). We stop and remember that we don't come to this meal because we are successful, but because Christ is. He has prepared this meal. He has prepared the way. He calls us to stop from our busyness, our restlessness, our incessant need to prove ourselves and just come and sit and be with him, allowing us to be served by him.

As we eat, we worship. We remember. We have fellowship with God and one another. And we find that all of the things that are wrong with how we view food are overcome as we delight in the lover of our souls.