

The Table: Fellowship and Feasting with God

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[0 : 00] So, what's the lesson, what's the visual aid this week? How does this golden table speak to us of spiritual realities? That's what we're going to think about this evening, the fact that the table is set, that there is bread there, reminding us that God is present with His people, and God provides for His people, or that God invites us as His people into a life of fellowship and feasting, which I think is something we can understand. We're beginning to reach that season where the planning and anticipation, for some of us it's Thanksgiving, for others of us it's Christmas. That begins, especially if you're involved in the kitchen. But we understand that central to both of these and so many celebrations is the presence of food shared around a table, and friendship, time with friends, time with family. That's true of all celebrations, whether we're thinking birthdays, weddings, there's always food, and there's always people. And it's wonderfully true of the Christian message, and it's one of the great images of the gospel, that God of grace invites us to know Him, to share fellowship with Him, and to receive from His rich supply.

Tables also, I suppose, that speak to us of hospitality. Eleanor Roosevelt, the American First Lady in 1933 to 45, said this, it was a helpful comment about hospitality, true hospitality, consists of giving the best of yourself to your guests. It's good, solid wisdom. And it's certainly true of God in the gospel, that God has given us Jesus to meet all of our spiritual needs. He has given us His very best, that He might be with us, inviting us into fellowship and sharing from His provision. So, the King invites us to fellowship and feasting is the theme we're going to think about together. We're going to think about it from Exodus 25, but we're going to move beyond there to see that it's a theme, not just in this little section, but it's part of and central to, I think, God's storyline throughout the Bible from beginning to end. And it's certainly true, as Bob was already alluded to, in the mission of God's Savior, the Lord Jesus. And we'll think about God's summons as well within that. But to start in Exodus 25, just to remind ourselves once again, this is the King's table. We see it there in how it is designed and its materials. Verse 24, this wooden acacia wood table is to be overlaid with pure gold, with the gold molding, and all the vessels and the plates and the dishes are also made of pure gold. So, again, we're being reminded of glory and purity and splendor.

If you've ever been to a palace, I remember years ago going to visit one of the palaces in Vienna, an unbelievable wealth and grandeur on display, especially in the tableware. You can learn a lot about a person from their crockery. And in the same way, this table is saying that God is king. He is pure, he is glorious, he is holy, and he is honoring his people because he prepares a table for them.

[3 : 41] So, it's the king's table, and it's the king's provision, in two different ways. First of all, we need to think about where this is situated. So, location matters. So, last week, if you were here, we were in the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant was in there, and the theme of atonement that brought access to God. Now, we're in the most holy place. So, all the priests who represent all the people, they can come in. And as they come into this space, they see the table with the provision of the bread. And so, there is that clear message that the Lord is near, the Lord is with us, and the Lord provides for our needs. It's there in what's described in verse 30 as the bread of the presence.

And the Bible tells us these were twelve loaves, representing here is God providing for the twelve tribes, all of His people. And we discover as well that these loaves were replaced daily.

God was reminding the Old Testament believer to pray and to trust, give us today our daily bread. So, as God feeds the priest, He is announcing that He is ready and willing and able to feed His kingdom of priests, His name for Israel, meeting both physical and spiritual needs from His generous hospitality, which is something we see through the story of Israel.

And then, of course, there is the King's invitation. And just to focus there on verse 30, this is God's command, put the bread of the presence on this table to be before me at all times.

So, every word of Scripture matters. And so, the Lord wants His people again to hear loud and clear, I am with you always, and I will always provide for you. Every day, I will provide fresh supply. [5 : 47] This God who has saved them by His grace, calling them out of slavery, making them His own people, is now inviting them every day to experience fellowship and feasting, as He promises His presence and His provision. And again, just to think about the detail of the table, the fact that the table has poles, so it's mobile. So, whenever the tabernacle is moving, the table is moving. And we remember, Israel is on God's mission in the world. They are supposed to be spreading God's glory to be a light to the nations. And so, as the people look in and see how Israel worship, they understand something unique about our God, that He comes so near as to be present and to provide personally and generously.

And so, there is that invitation to trust God with daily needs and to enjoy life with Him. That wasn't just for Israel. That was to all who would come in. Going back to that Eleanor Roosevelt quotation, if true hospitality consists of giving the best of yourself to your guests, every time the people of God would go to worship, they would see this is absolutely true of God, their King. And remember, this is in the context where every day they're going out to gather the bread from heaven. So, He's providing every day so they never go hungry twice as much on a Saturday so they can rest on their Sabbath to Saturday. And He gives them the bread of the presence as they come into worship to make absolutely clear, and no one can make the mistake. He opens up His table.

The invitation is there, a holy God sharing friendship with people by His grace. And this is the same God that we worship today. It remains the invitation of the Christian faith, this invitation to trust in Jesus as Lord and King, and to understand that when we do that, we have this wonderful privilege of being brought into personal fellowship with the living God. In fact, the living God comes to dwell in our hearts by His Spirit, that every spiritual blessing becomes ours. All our needs are met by our merciful God.

And we're invited to live trusting, give us today, our daily bread, physical, spiritual, trusting that He is by our side and is present with us. So, it's a wonderful theme, and I just want to spend a few minutes now recognizing this isn't an isolated theme, but it's central to the story of Scripture. So, we're going to think about fellowship and feasting and God's storyline. We had an image there of a royal banquet. Historians like to dig into all aspects of court life, and there are many who have spent a lot of time looking at the details of royal banquets of the kings of Scotland over the years.

And as they go into those details, you get information, well, why were the feasts held? Who were the guests of honor? Even what was being eaten way back in 14th, 15th, 16th century. So, for example, in 1596, King James VI came for a visit with Queen Anne of Denmark, and there was a series of banquets held in Edinburgh. And so, there was one called the Sugar Banquet, for those with a sweet tooth.

[9 : 34] This lavish banquet that was hosted for the princely sum of 30 pounds, good value for money. Later on in the year, there was a meat and poultry supper with some patisserie served at the cost of 26 pounds.

And at these events, and many more through that year, lots of different lords and ladies were there, lots of expensive silverware. The best of Scottish produce was on the menu. You could tuck into ptarmigan, capricaylee, stuff that we probably wouldn't go anywhere near these days. But it's clear, historians make this point that, you know, the menus change as produce changes, as they have access to foreign food, I suppose. The guest list clearly is going to change through the centuries. But the principle remains that royals love to hold feasts to celebrate big occasions. And when there is celebration, they bring their friends the great and the good. It's not how God works. But running through the Bible, there is the reality that God is the true King, who offers fellowship and feasting to His people as a gracious gift. And I think that's where God differs so markedly from the royals who would always tend to look after those who would be of benefit to them, whereas God graciously invites, as we heard in that parable, the weak, the crippled, the poor, the blind, and the lame. But I want us to just have a quick tour through the Bible from creation to new creation to just see this theme, because it's a wonderful theme. So, you think about where Adam and Eve began life, Genesis 2. We go back here so often, because there is the Garden of Eden, and it's a paradise. It's a garden full of goodness. There is everything they could ever possibly want in that garden, and God Himself came near. There's fellowship and feasting. The book of Exodus, the one that we're in, of course, they're getting the manna from heaven every day. In Exodus 24, some of the leaders have shared a covenant meal in the very presence of God. And this manna that God is providing

every day, that will continue all the way until Joshua chapter 5, verse 11, until the very first day when they enter the promised land, and they get to eat from the produce of the land. And the point is, God is still going to be providing, only this time now it's not going to be bread from heaven. Now it's going to be the goodness of the land. But fellowship and feasting is there as they're in the wilderness, and it's certainly there as they reach the promised land. And part of the covenant is that when the people live in obedience to God, He promises blessing, and some of that blessing is physical and material.

Good crops and harvests are there. And I think as well, it's recognized in the bread of the presence that was there, both at the tabernacle and the temple, that as the people enter into God's land, which is a good land, and as they live in right relationship with God, then they're going to receive that blessing of living in God's presence and enjoying His provision, fellowship and feasting. That was a reality celebrated in songs, the songs of Israel, famously Psalm 23, I think. We have King David praising the shepherd king, the one who spreads the table in the wilderness so that His people are supplied on the journey of faith.

[13:12] But as the story of Israel continues and this theme continues to develop, we see the tragedy of moral and spiritual decline in Israel and then in Israel and Judah.

They turn away from God, turn away from God's Word. They presume there's greater joy. They presume there's a more secure provision to be found in finding alliances with other nations or worshipping foreign gods. And so instead of blessing, as the people disobey and turn their back on God, they discover curse.

And part of that curse under the covenant was a literal physical famine. Sometimes the people were hungry as a judgment, as an opportunity to repent. And sometimes, and this was even more solemn and somber, I think it was the prophet Amos that spoke of times when there would be a famine of hearing God's word. Because God's people have sinned so much that there is now a separation that has been created ultimately leading to exile, the people now being far from God's presence. Gone is fellowship and gone is feasting. But the theme hasn't gone. And then the prophets pick up this announcement of hope, that there is the invitation and anticipation in prophets like Isaiah of a day coming, when God, by His grace, will invite the hungry and the thirsty to come to Him again and be satisfied,

Isaiah 55. Or Isaiah 25. In fact, let's turn to Isaiah 25, because it's such a great little chapter. Isaiah 25 and at verse 6. Here is Isaiah anticipating this end time feast. Isaiah 25, verse 6, page 709. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain, He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. He will remove His people's disgrace from all the earth.

[15:43] The Lord has spoken. What a message to an exiled people that there is a day coming, a future day of feasting with God. Death and sorrow and sadness gone forever. Joy in God's presence, in God's goodness that will last for all eternity. It's not just a New Testament idea. It's there in Isaiah. And of course, central to that hope and central to this story is the coming of Jesus, the King, who announces, I am the bread of life. He is the great I am. He is God with us.

And in describing Himself as the bread of life, He's saying, I am God's provision for you. I am all you need. Jesus came to fulfill all that the manna prepares us for, all that the bread of the presence points us to, that God in His infinite kindness has provided a spiritual feast in giving us Jesus, the King of grace. And of course, every time we share the Lord's Supper, we're being prepared to understand that the only way in to that living fellowship, the only way in to that feast of eternal joy is through Jesus' sacrificial death, the broken body and the shed blood.

And so, after Jesus returns to heaven and sends the Spirit, and we are in the age of the New Testament church, it is no wonder that the people would gather regularly to share this meal, this reminder of Christ the King who is present with His people, Christ the King who has provided for salvation, Christ the King who, by His Spirit, supplies physically and spiritually for our needs. And always with that hope that is spoken of at the climax of the Bible, Revelation 19, new creation, the marriage supper of the Lamb, the themes of so many of Jesus' parables picked up. Here is this invitation for the people of God to come to this feast. Evil has been defeated, the enemies of God have been destroyed, new creation will be established, and God and His people will dwell together forever. And we will feast from His goodness and His love for all eternity.

[18 : 25] So, this tabernacle table is just a small window into this great unfolding story that speaks to us of a King who loves to feast with His friends, who is a great host, who provides generous hospitality and issues a gracious invitation. And just so we can see that really clearly, let's just spend a few minutes now thinking about this theme, fellowship and feasting, and God's Savior. Let's think about Jesus, our King. So again, you know, the table is there. When we think about tables, we think about hospitality. And when we think about hospitality, we think about human connections. We think about Thanksgiving coming up. We think about joy that's shared. Think about Christmas gatherings, stories that are told. Whenever we share space and share a table, new friendships are being established, old friendships are being renewed. Tables can become a place of real blessing.

Sometimes life is so busy that when people take the time to share a meal, where we can actually enter into deep conversation, when we can let other people into our lives, it's a wonderful blessing. Sometimes it's all too rare. And it's not about fancy food. Sometimes we get worried about hospitality because we think it's about being, you know, high-class chefs. It's not like that at all. For any of us who have known the simple joy of spending hours around a campfire or a humble supper of cheese on toast, those too can become special because it's all about the connections, the love that is shared, the relationship that is developed.

Hospitality is a wonderful practice. It's interesting, I think, that for so many sort of commentators this now, they're saying, here's the great method by which Christians can make our faith credible. And they don't talk anymore so much about apologetics. Often, they're talking about hospitality. People are desperately lonely. People are looking to make connections.

[20 : 47] opportunities to meet with us, to know what makes us tick. That makes faith credible. Rosaria Butterfield, that was her story. She wrote that book, *The Gospel Comes With a House Key*.

As people invited her into their homes and to answer her questions, she came to faith. And significantly, I think it's so important that hospitality is a feature of Jesus' own life and mission in so many different ways. And table fellowship, in the context of the Gospels, is a beautiful theme that we see in lots of different ways. So, we see how Jesus uses a table to create connections. You know, he was famous or notorious, depending how people viewed him, as one who ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. That was a deliberate act, to extend grace, to invite into friendship. And when Jesus invites into friendship, it's an invitation into the kingdom of God. To the most unlikely people, the overlooked. So, that the far from God are being drawn near.

Those who are hungry and empty, they're the ones who are being filled and satisfied. And Jesus uses table fellowship to build these connections of love and grace. And then he uses table fellowship to explain his mission. So, often we find it's in the middle of a meal that he is doing his teaching.

And so often he tells parables about feasting to remind us that the great hope of the kingdom is of joy and of fellowship and of provision. And that there is an opportunity to respond and to come in. And then, of course, central to explaining his mission is the Lord's Supper, that meal that speaks, the broken body, the shed blood, new life is given, forgiveness, atonement, entry back into fellowship is secured by his sacrificial death. And hospitality becomes a way too in the Gospels where Jesus heals, what is broken. So, right at the end of John's Gospel, John chapter 21, we find Jesus hosting a beach barbecue for his followers. So, he has set a fire and he has some fish cooking. And wonderfully, Peter is invited. Peter, who had denied even knowing Jesus, I don't know this man, around a fire, is the same Peter who is then welcomed back in around a different fire. Christ shows him grace and Peter is restored to fellowship and he will feast on the kindness that Jesus provides.

[24 : 14] So, again, just to think about what's happening back in the Old Testament when the believers were given the table in the tabernacle, they were being taught by faith a really important lesson of a God who is really present and really near, of a God who really provides for his people's needs.

And what they only saw in shadow, we see in glorious reality. The Lord Jesus comes as God with us. And that by his substitutionary sacrifice, we are connected, fellowship with the living God, broken by sin, restored by grace. Our brokenness too is healed as we feast spiritually on Christ. And now his mission is our mission. So, just as Israel was invited by their way of living and their worship to show people the glory of their God, so we are called to live inviting others into fellowship with God, to feast spiritually, to receive from his grace.

So, let's close thinking about that. Fellowship, feasting, and God's summons. Just to bring us back to Exodus 25 and verse 30, where God says, put the bread of the presence on this table to be before me at all times. So, every time they came to worship, they knew, here is God's provision for us and he is present. God's summoning his people, come to the feast. Come and worship and receive from me. So, often we think about worship as what we do for God, but rather, as we worship, we're invited to receive from God, to be fed by his word, to receive fresh grace. We sang Psalm 34, verse 8, taste and see that the Lord is good. It's what our King summons us to in the gospel, to live, tasting, experiencing personally the goodness of life with God. The goodness of knowing peace with God through faith in Jesus.

The goodness of knowing sin forgiven, of being made right, not because of our rightness, but because of Christ's righteousness credited to us. To live with the goodness of real and living hope, that when we die, that's just the beginning of our story with our God in a whole new way, to be present with him. And that for each of us, we can know and enjoy this life through receiving his son, through receiving his invitation, that we too would come to that feast.

Maybe we're here this evening and we're struggling a bit in our faith, feeling a bit weary. You know, we're thinking about the theme of God being present, but maybe we feel he's more absent.

[27 : 53] We're thinking about feasting with God. Perhaps we feel somewhat starved. Well, God has provided all that we need as the answer to that, all that we need for spiritual life and strength in the gospel, in his word, as we worship as his people.

And he gives us the table to remind us that Christ Jesus is the one who comes so near as to be present and by the side of his people. And by the side of his people always.

That he has provided for our salvation. He continues to provide for our spiritual life. There are mercies that come to us new every morning. There is grace for us in our weakness.

And we're invited to see, to behold, to enjoy the glory of Christ again and again as the answer to our sense of weakness.

But for all of us as Christian pilgrims, as we go through the journey of faith, we go recognizing that God in Christ has spread a table in the wilderness for us.

[29 : 17] There is a ready supply of grace for today and there will be again tomorrow. And the King who provides for us today and tomorrow and all the days of our life will one day welcome us to that marriage supper. He's the same King who today invites us to taste and see that he really is good. That with Jesus, we fellowship and we feast with the living God.