

AM Genesis 3 Food for thought - "Not by bread alone"

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[0 : 00] Chapter 3. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

! He said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

[1 : 25] And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you?

And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.

He said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, what is this that you have done? The woman said, the serpent deceived me and I ate.

The Lord God said to the serpent, because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field.

[2 : 25] On your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing.

In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken for your dust and to dust you shall return.

[3 : 35] The man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever.

Therefore, the Lord God sent him out of the garden, out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Amen. May God add his blessing to that reading of his word. There has just been Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan.

And at the start of chapter 4 of Matthew it says, Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

[4 : 53] And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

But he answered, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

You may have noticed that the title for today's sermon is Food for Thought, Not by Bread Alone.

And you may have noticed that Psalm 111 that we read at the very outset talks about God providing food for those who fear him and remembering his covenant forever.

However, the title that I chose is not an unsubtle reproof for overindulgence in the festive period.

[6 : 02] Though of course it reminds us that whether we acknowledge it or not, we are spiritual beings, not just physical beings, though we are both.

And when the Lord Jesus quoted that verse from Deuteronomy 8.3, Man does not live by bread alone, but from everything that comes from the mouth of the Lord shall he live.

These were extraordinary circumstances after 40 days and nights of fasting. And a time when Jesus was led by the Spirit after that amazing Trinitarian moment at his baptism where the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit like a dove came and rested on the Lord Jesus.

And God himself thunders that love, that personal love for his Son. And then there is that time of testing in the wilderness.

It is something which on another occasion I would really quite like for us to think through together. It is the most amazing happening.

[7 : 19] But what I would like to focus on this morning is what Jesus acknowledges tacitly in that quotation from Deuteronomy.

It is that man does live on bread. Though not on bread alone.

The way our Heavenly Father has so fearfully and wonderfully crafted us means that we do need bodily sustenance. And while we recognise that every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights, from God himself, and it is his faithfulness on which we must rely for the air we breathe and the water we drink and the food we eat.

But let me repeat, we are spiritual beings but we are physical ones too. Created that way, kneading our bread or we won't survive.

And let's not forget that we will be physical beings in eternity. Though resurrected physical ones. With extraordinary properties as far as our current experience goes.

[8 : 35] But like our Lord in his resurrection body as he is now interceding for us at the Father's right hand. In that sense of course his intercession work is not complete yet and we thank God for that.

But for certain his salvation work is. It might be helpful not to gloss over what an extraordinarily amazing process our nutrition is.

Emptiness of our stomachs, our body clocks, our blood sugar levels and a variety of hormones prompt us to use all our senses to prepare a meal.

We see and select the food, be it a little fish and barley loaves or whatever. We hear the sizzling of bacon in a frying pan.

We smell that wonderful aroma. We taste the food. This stimulates digestive juices and an outpouring of saliva that helps us to swallow down the chewed food.

[9 : 40] Assuming we have adequate teeth to do that in the first place. And then there's a most complex release of acid and bile and pancreatic enzymes that permit a lengthy process over many hours of digestion.

Releasing carbohydrate and protein and lipids and vitamins and trace elements. All necessary for our maintenance and healthy living. Come on you might say this isn't a biology or a physiology lecture.

But if we fail to see the glory of God expressed in his most excellent creative genius.

We fail to appreciate the marvel of the works of his hands and we fail to give him the praise that is his due. So when we eat food we should take note from where or rather from whom the food comes.

We should ponder also how we eat it. We should wonder whether there is significance to that meal. Or do we just like brute beasts munch our way unthinkingly through whatever is in front of us.

[11 : 01] If you've got your Bibles handy. I hope to look at several scriptures with eating at the heart of the message. And as we briefly consider each passage.

Can we possibly learn anything from these encounters? I suppose it's a bit like a biblical tapas meal. With fruit, soup, bread, stew, manna, quail, lamb, fish, barbecue, even possibly some wedding cake on the menu.

Not to mention the best wine which has been kept to the last. Now Genesis 3 that we read together describes the first recorded meal.

It was a meal with disastrous consequences for mankind. It's clear that Almighty God had provided for Adam and Eve a huge menu of fruit from which to satisfy their human hunger.

And there was also a very attractive fruit which was not on the menu. The fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[12 : 13] And that fruit looked wonderful as we read. It was probably smelling wonderful too. It tasted wonderful.

But it was actually deadly. Because God had also created the pinnacle of his creative genius, mankind, with the capacity to choose.

Made in his image. Remember God's capacity to choose. Ephesians 1 and 4. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

God chose. It was that capacity, the capacity to choose, which the Almighty wished humankind to exercise. Choosing to obey and serve and love God alone.

But our first parents chose, coerced by the father of lies admittedly. But our parents chose to directly disbelieve God. To disobey God.

[13:17] And to serve themselves. And not God. And in that sinful choice, mankind fell from grace. Sin erupted on the world.

And sinful chaos and rebellion became the norm. So that meal had food created by God, but not on the menu.

Man craved what he should not have. And so ate in rebellion and pride. Without, I suspect, saying grace before she and he ate.

Quite an unusual meal. A disaster of a meal. Where there was actually nothing wrong with the food. But the hearts of the guests were all wrong.

Well, lentil soup and bread is up next in Genesis 25, verses 29 to 34. We all know this story well.

[14:14] Where action man Esau thought so little of the significance of his Abrahamic birthright. That he was very quick to sell it to his dissembling brother Jacob.

For literally, a plate of lentil soup and some bread. Well, alright, he was hungry. He had been out in the fields hunting and he was exhausted.

But the ease with which he forfeited that birthright. Remember, he is the grandson of Abraham. Through whom all nations on earth would be blessed.

And you have to think he didn't hold that privilege in any way highly. So here again, there's nothing wrong with the food. With the lentil soup or the bread.

Cooked from ingredients provided by God's goodness. But Esau's heart was wrong. And what about Jacob's heart? Jacob the supplanter.

[15:14] The heel gripper. The opportunist. There seems to have been little good about either of their hearts. Though we must remember that all things work together for good.

In the divine master plan. And we find Jacob mentioned in Matthew chapter 1 verse 2. As a bloodline ancestor of our Lord.

So, here again, there's nothing wrong with the food. Lentil soup is still one of our favourites. But the heart of the cook and the eater were wrong. Would we ever cook food to soften someone up to do what the otherwise would not have thought of doing?

Are business deals sometimes done this way? Are heads of state wined and dined at Windsor Castle in this way? Moving on to Exodus 12.

What about the Passover? That meal as we have there of roast lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Eaten standing with cloaks.

[16:28] Tucked in. Ready for a quick getaway. If we focus on the food alone there. We might be tempted to think of this as the original fast food.

Eaten standing. Waiting for the sign to move out quickly. But actually, this was a meal a long, long time in the planning.

And part of that signage, pointing God's people ahead of time to the Saviour. The one who was to come, as Moses later said, a prophet like himself who would be raised up.

But what was important there was the blood. The blood of the lamb. The blood which if sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels in faith, averted the angel of death.

The angel who put to death all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. The land of darkness. This was a meal eaten in faith and in anticipation.

[17:35] Though even children of Israel, children of promise, if they did not apply the blood, would die. And as for food in the wilderness.

Well, given the barren nature of the landscape between the Red Sea through Sinai to the Jordan and all the wanderings in between, have we ever considered the logistical miracle of providing for the physical needs of an estimated 2.5 million people with food and drink for 40 years?

Imagine our army catering corps trying to provision for that. Instead, as the psalmist put it, men ate the food of angels.

Collected every day six out of seven with double provision for the Sabbath. But even that divine provision, it wasn't enough. We don't have meat. We don't have meat.

We don't have water. We don't have. We don't have. We don't have. Putting God to the test time after time after time. That's what Psalm 78 that we're seeing tells us about.

[18 : 47] This desert food, miraculously provided by the hand of God, was an ongoing token of God's grace and fulfillment of his promises and part of his plan.

But it's also a tale of man's ingratitude and sense of entitlement. One of the most sobering accounts in the Bible is from 1 Samuel 25.

That's the account of that ungrateful, oaf and fool Nabal. He was someone whose selfishness and ingratitude knew no bounds.

Who, despite refusing to offer any food to David's men, and that was contrary to even the most basic standards of Middle Eastern hospitality, he still managed for himself to hold a feast like a king, gorge himself and get very drunk.

And then he was struck down by God. After his wife Abigail told him how she had averted David from wiping him out, him and his estate.

[20 : 02] In that story we've got food eaten to excess, eaten with selfishness and eaten with greed. Now in a back to front way, a kind of glad it wasn't me way, there's also that wonderful narrative about the pot of stew that Elisha's servant threw together for the sons of the prophets.

We read that in 2 Kings 4, 38-41. 2 Kings 4, 38-41. So here is Elisha's servant doing the right thing, making a pot of stew for these followers of God.

And then along comes one of them, one of the prophets, trying to help. He picks as many wild vine gourds as possible. They didn't know they were poisonous. He adds them to the stew for extra flavour.

And then we have that immortal line which no host or hostess ever wishes to hear. Man of God, addressing Elisha, there is death in the pot.

Well, as someone who does entertaining, that is not what you want to hear. Now I use flour as thickening for gravy and so on, but I'm not sure in my hands it would be an antidote for poison.

[21 : 24] But it was just so on Elisha's command. That's a wonderful narrative, you'll agree. With the heart, the motives of all concerned were good, but the food was poisoned through ignorance.

Yet God is the God of miracles, even in the most mundane of circumstances, when his people cry out to him. So, these Old Testament accounts are just samples of many occasions where meals are mentioned.

And this all tells us that in the performance of the most basic acts of living, that God is good and gracious. As Psalm 145 verse 9 says, God is good to all, providing for the needs of mankind, as well as the beasts of the field.

And if you've ever had any doubt about that, if you look at Genesis chapter 6 verse 21, God specifically instructs Noah regarding provisioning for the animals and birds who were going to be in the ark.

Genesis 6 verse 21. But God also graciously uses food symbolically to point us all, including his chosen people of Israel, point us forward to the Lamb of God who died to protect us from God's just wrath over our willful sin.

[23:00] But only if we are covered by the blood shed on the cross of Calvary. And as usual, what a mess we have made of God's gracious provisioning by only wanting in flagrant disobedience of his commandments what we have been told not to take.

We've thought little of God as we've eaten. We've eaten to excess. We've been ill as in the desert or drunk to excess and killed ourselves like nabal or in ignorance.

We've tampered with God's good provision with all sorts of strange additives like cyclamates, for example. And we're paying the consequences. You see, every good and perfect gift is from above, from the Father of lights who does not change like shifting shadows.

We often apply that promise to spiritual issues. But in truth, what we eat and drink and breathe are all God's good gifts day in and day out.

We should remember that. We should give thanks before we eat. Now, if we turn to the New Testament scripture, we might ask ourselves, how did the Lord Jesus view and use food?

[24:17] And I'm just going to give little glimpses here. Party time, first of all. If we look at Matthew 9, Mark 2, Luke 5, not to mention the dinner given in Jesus' honour by his Bethany friends in John 12, it seems that Jesus' preferred company, his disciples apart, was tax collectors and sinners.

Them on the one hand and Martha, Mary and Lazarus, ordinary people whom he loved on the other hand. Jesus was no killjoy. He willingly partook in celebratory parties.

But on each of those occasions, it wasn't the content of the meal which mattered but the character of the company. And that was exactly what the Pharisees complained about.

Jesus was partying with tax collectors and prostitutes. Does the Lord Jesus come in and share a meal with us sinners as we read in Revelation 3.20 after we've opened the door to our hearts?

Well, you'd better believe it, he does. And this is not an occasion for misery and mourning. This is an occasion for joy and celebration and fellowship.

[25:44] After all, we prodigals have been dead and are alive again and we've been lost but are now found. These meals are not about the food in and of themselves but about the company, company which Jesus graciously chooses and enjoys.

Now, in our culture, a competent chef with his or her staff would not bulk it. Indeed, they would welcome, say, 50 covers in a service.

But, 4,000 covers? 5,000 covers plus women and children? Maybe 10,000 at one sitting? Well, not a problem when you've fed 2.5 million for 40 years in the wilderness.

In the Gospels, we have evidence that the Lord's arm is not shortened. His awesome power is undiminished with the passage of time as we understand it.

And in these miracles, providing for the physical needs of the poor, weak and hungry, both physically and spiritually, we see the great grace and wisdom and compassion of our Lord.

[26:57] And we can learn that a very little blessed by the Lord becomes an overflowing cup, bounteous provision. But what matters is his presence and blessing.

And you know, of course, there was that meal, that Passover meal, which the Lord Jesus eagerly desired to share with his disciples. That meal celebrating the slaying of the Passover lamb and the protection of the blood of the lamb.

And at that meal, Jesus, in one sense, declares the end of Passover forever. Declaring that the symbols of bread and wine representing his body broken and his blood shed as affirming the new covenant in his blood.

No more do we need to celebrate a looking forward to future deliverance. The deliverance is here in the person of the Lamb of God and on Calvary he made the once for all, all sufficient sacrifice for the sins of his people.

In Luke 24 verses 42-43 we have a small narrative about a piece of broiled fish and of a honeycomb which the Lord Jesus ate as he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

[28 : 23] And here was further proof that he was very much alive and physical in his resurrection body. Now some people would confer special significance on the menu here suggesting that the fish represents God's provision and the Lord Jesus' body and of course fish, the Greek is that secret acronym symbol of the early church standing for Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour.

Possible significance of the honeycomb lies in the parallel with milk and honey of the promised land and the sweetness of life in Christ. But maybe the fish and the honey were just very common food.

And it was the eating of them the proof that he was not any sort of ghost that was important. How gracious of the Lord to give us all this proof that he is not in the tomb he is risen he is risen indeed.

And then there was also that barbecue meal of fish on the shores of Galilee. A meal prepared by the divine master chef.

We've got that described in beautiful detail in John 21. But what I'd like to point out was that what the Lord Jesus previously had asked the disciples to do was to go to Galilee and wait.

[29 : 53] They were to wait there for him to come. They couldn't wait. The fisherman's call was too strong so out to sea they went and they laboured all night in the boats but caught precisely nothing.

Then they reluctantly agreed to follow the advice of a stranger on the shore that stranger whom Peter eventually recognised as Jesus but as they followed his advice and cast their net on the other side of the boat they had a huge haul of fish a hundred and fifty three to be exact.

But when they came ashore they found first of all the breakfast was already there as was Jesus himself. They found that their toiling in their own wisdom proved unnecessary.

Breakfast was already cooked. But the third thing what a demonstration of the grace of Christ Jesus because though he did not need to he still took some of their catch and added that to the meal.

Well friends it's been a whistle stop tour through the Old and New Testaments and we've just had glimpses here of how the Lord Jesus uses food but food that satisfies the body that comes with a message for our souls a message about his love and provision his grace and his goodness his power and his compassion but the internal significance of his own body the bread of life broken for us and his blood symbolized by the Passover wine shed for us.

[31:57] Truly man lives by bread but man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and how gracious he is to have gifted us his word in all its fullness to feed on day in day out surely we're not on a grace restricted diet such that we only have a nibble of this bountiful provision now and again once a week to be like a former chancellor of the exchequer maintain some distorted view of spiritual leanness by fasting two or three days a week we don't eat food of any sort at all let us rejoice in God's provision and graze like the sheep in Psalm 23 on those green pastures I've got one final thought for this morning we usually enjoy eating at home sometimes on special occasions we would go out for a meal to

Casamia or Delamitri or Trigone Hotel or even the cafe at the Baptist Church Centre imagine for a moment that we've been invited all expenses paid to a banquet in a restaurant in central London with three Michelin stars the food would be fabulous the wine unsurpassed the occasion would be so good consider all that and then get a true perspective that such an event would be like a crust of stale and mouldy bread compared with the wedding supper of the lamb to which we in our resurrection bodies have been invited as honoured guests actually we are the bride may God bless his word to our souls let's pray together heavenly father thank you for the way you have made us thank you for the way that you provide for our bodily needs day in day out thank you for your glory which is all around us thank you for all these great and good gifts which you distribute so bountifully thank you for the gift of new life in the

Lord Jesus we thank you that he suffered for us he became the brokenness he paid the price that we deserve to pay for sin and because he took our place we have new life in him how glorious that is our father and we thank you too for that incredible promise of the wedding supper of the lamb when we will join with our beloved saviour in worship and adoration and praise and we thank you that we can only glimpse little bits of your eternal benefits that you have laid up for your people people whom you chose before the foundation of the world heavenly father it's beyond our comprehension to know why you would choose us but we just thank you thank you thank you and we pray that we would in all humility bow before you worshipping and praising and adoring you for all your provisions both for now and for eternity thank you for Jesus in his name we pray

Amen