

The Food that Endures

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[0 : 00] The one thing that all people all over the world have in common is the fact that they enjoy good food. And in different countries and according to different cultures, people may eat different things.

And the past weekend, it was my privilege to experience something of the cuisine of Lewis, and it is really excellent. And when we were living in Turkey, we enjoyed Turkish food.

And when we are in South Africa, we enjoy what the people eat there. And after a good meal, we feel good.

And over a good meal, it's also easy to have good conversation. And therefore, it is not a surprise that people will pay a lot of money for food.

A few years ago, I read in an article that one tuna fish was sold for over a million pounds in Japan.

[1 : 08] Now, you can make a lot of sushi from a fish that weighs 222 kilograms, but still, it is an extraordinary price that somebody paid for one fish.

And yet, when we look at the word of God, we see that Jesus realized that we need food. And when he taught his disciples how to pray, he also instructed them to pray for their daily bread.

And on various occasions, over meals, Jesus interacted with people and revealed his kingdom. And in a special way this morning, we also shared in a meal.

And that meal reminds us that there is something more important than just the food that we eat every day.

When Jesus was in the desert, the devil came to him and tempted him. And we read in Matthew chapter 4, verse 3, the following. And the tempter came and said to him, if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

[2 : 31] But he answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And clearly, we can see that even though food is so important to sustain life, that there are things that are even more important than the food that we eat.

Some years ago, a Christian from Cambodia spoke at a conference in Manila. And he shared his experiences in the concentration camps that was established by Paul Pote.

And he said that it was very difficult to be deprived of food, but there was something else that he missed even more.

He said, even more than the deprivation of food, even more than the torture, I resented not having times to meet with God. Always guards were yelling at us, forcing us to work, work.

Nobody then wanted to volunteer to clean the cesspots, and this man volunteered to do the job.

And then he said, no one ever interrupted me, and I could do my work at a leisurely pace.

[3 : 54] Even in those stinking depths, I could look up and see the blue sky. I could praise God that I've survived another day. I could commune with God undisturbed and pray for my friends and relatives all around me.

That became for me a glorious time of meeting with God. Here you have an individual in a concentration camp, and he experienced hunger, and yet he said what he missed more than food was to have communion with God, to be able to pray and enjoy the presence of God.

This evening we have read from the Gospel of John, and this incident that we read about of Jesus meeting with the people took place just the day after he fed the people.

And you will remember that the crowds gathered, and Jesus fed them five loaves of bread and two fishes. And the very next day they came to Jesus, and we read in verse 24, when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here?

Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are not seeking me because you saw signs, but because you ate your full of the loaves.

[5 : 24] Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on him God the Father has set his seal.

So when the people came to Jesus, Jesus immediately recognized that they came for the wrong reason. They came because the previous day he gave them bread and fish to eat.

And they simply saw Jesus as a kind of a patron that needed to feed his clients. The practice was that rich patrons would provide food for free to clients, and then the clients should seek the honor of the patron in society.

And the people came, and Jesus said, You didn't see the sign. You didn't realize that I did a miracle. You didn't realize that I did a miracle. So that you can see and experience something of the kingdom of God.

You've completely failed to see and to understand what happened yesterday. And you simply see me as a kind of patron that should provide you with food.

[6 : 42] It's quite striking that Jesus wanted people to follow him on his terms. And often when people realize that following Jesus means also following him and his suffering, they would turn away and they would say, This is too hard.

At the moment, there is this campaign going on in the U.S. for the elections next year.

And there are several candidates who want to be the president of the United States. And for me personally, it's difficult to understand why.

But they campaign and they want that position. And very often, opinion polls are going out. And then the candidates will look at these polls and then they will adjust their approach accordingly.

And they try to position themselves in such a way that the majority of the people will vote for them. But Jesus, he wasn't interested in opinion polls.

[7 : 53] He came to establish the kingdom of God. He was telling the people the realities and the truth that God wanted to reveal through him.

And those who want to follow him, they needed to do it on his terms. He didn't come to be the champion of the Pharisees to confirm their way of the interpretation of the law.

He didn't come to establish the kingdom of David again. He came to establish the kingdom of God. So that people who are in darkness can move into the wonderful light of God and be reconciled with him.

The people that day who came to Jesus, they completely failed to see these realities. And they really expected very little of Jesus in terms of what he came to do.

He came to establish the kingdom of God. And they simply wanted food from him. They failed to see that Jesus is not a kind of a Santa Claus, but that he is the savior of the world.

[9 : 06] I remember years ago as students, we were doing house visitation in an Indian township on the east coast of South Africa to share the gospel with people.

And a man, he said to us, well, I sometimes pray to Jesus. And, you know, as students, we were very excited. And we said, yes, tell us more. And he said, well, whenever I put money on the horses, I pray that Jesus would help me to win.

And we said, yeah. And he said, no, that's it. That's the only times I pray to Jesus. And again, you could see the limited expectation of this man.

He simply see Jesus as somebody who can help him to win some money. And he failed to see that Jesus is God and the son of God and the savior and the redeemer.

In verse 28, we read the following. Then they said to him, what must we do to be doing the works of God? And Jesus answered them, this is the work of God that you believe him who he has sent.

[10 : 19] The people said, what do you expect of us? What do you mean we should not work for earthly bread but bread from heaven? And what does it mean that we should do the works of God?

And then Jesus really put his finger on it and he said, what you should do is to believe in me. You should believe that I am the savior, that I am the messiah, that I am the son of God to establish his kingdom.

You should accept me for who I am. You should not come to me with your own agenda. But you should come and bow before me and seek me so that you can have life, that you can experience and receive the mercy of God and the grace of God.

You need to believe in who I am and then come to me. So they said to him, then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you?

What work do you perform? And then they continue and they said, our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness as it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

[11 : 37] The people are saying, they're still thinking in terms of earthly food. And they said, our forefathers, they were fed by Moses.

And they said, Moses gave them manna every day. And by implication, what they are saying is that what Jesus did the day before wasn't a big deal at all.

He fed them only once. And Moses, he fed their forefathers every day for an extended period of time.

And they said, what sign can you give us? They say, well, we looked at you, we saw you yesterday, but we're not impressed. Our forefathers had a better, a greater experience with Moses.

And then Jesus said in verse 23, in verse 52, Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my father gives you the true bread from heaven.

[12 : 47] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

They said to him, sir, give us this bread always.

Jesus then explained and he said to them that in reality, it wasn't really Moses who gave them the bread, but the bread was provided by God the Father.

And he's saying to them that what the Father is doing now is he gives you the true bread from heaven. And he said that he is the bread who came into the world so that people can have life.

The people still didn't understand and they said, well, give us this bread always. And they still think in terms of the manner that Moses provided always for the people.

They fail to see what Jesus came to do. They were not grateful because of what they experienced the day before.

[13 : 53] But they came to Jesus with their demands. They wanted more from him. Jesus wanted people to come to him.

But the attitude of the people counted for much. You'll remember when Jesus ventured into the area of Tyre and Sidon, a woman, a Canaanite woman, who many considered to be a cursed woman who had a demon-possessed daughter.

She came to Jesus and the disciples immediately wanted to send her away because they thought that she was bothering them. And then Jesus engaged into conversation with this woman.

He expressed in words what the disciples was thinking. And he said, I came for the people of Israel.

And then the woman said, but when you eat and you give food to the children, there are breadcrumbs that fall on the floor and the little dogs can eat them.

And then Jesus praises her because she taught the disciples a lesson, not just in faith, but also what the kingdom of God was about. And the attitude that she came with was one of humility.

[15 : 11] And the gospel authors tell us that she knelt before Jesus and that she worshipped him.

She knew enough to understand that he was God. And she received mercy. And her attitude was so different from how others often approached Jesus, like the Pharisees, to criticize him and the people here to demand more.

In verse 35, we see Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger.

And whoever believes in me shall not thirst. He's the bread of life. And when we eat this bread, we will not hunger again.

And we will not thirst again. In South Africa, there is a famous dish called poikikos. And whenever we go back to South Africa, my father will prepare this dish.

You have to cook it outside over an open fire. And it takes about four to five hours to prepare. And it's different layers of food that's in this big black pot.

[16 : 21] And usually he would finish it and then he would serve everybody. And because we missed it and we haven't had it for a long time, we always eat too much.

And at the end of the evening, we feel that we are so full that for the rest of our lives, we will never have to eat again. And then the next morning, we wake up and we feel hungry and we feel ready for more of that same food.

And you realize that it doesn't matter how much food you eat today. Tomorrow you will be hungry again. And that is true with anything that we may desire in this world.

Harry Oppenheimer, the billionaire, was once asked, how much is enough money? The question really was, how much money do you need to earn to be satisfied?

And when they asked him, he said, always a little more. And with that, he was saying, it doesn't matter how much money you have, it will not satisfy you, but you will always look for more.

[17 : 43] When it comes to spiritual food, Jesus is saying here that when it comes to our spiritual hunger, that he can feed us.

And that we will be satisfied. The people, they've completely failed to understand their own need for spiritual food. They were distracted by their need for material food, for real food to eat.

And they failed that Jesus can comfort them, that he can restore them, and that he can redeem them. And Paul, who was a Pharisee himself, later wrote the following in his life when he sent a letter to the church in Philippi.

He says, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. And he said then, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Lord, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

He said, but whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. And the things that he mentioned here were all things that a lot of people aspire to and that was really important in society.

[19 : 11] But then he said, but whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I counted everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

And he said, I counted everything as rubbish, as trash, when I compare it with what I receive by knowing Christ Jesus.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share the suffering becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

When the people asked Jesus, what is the works of God that we should do? Jesus said to them, you must believe in me. And Paul, he discovered the reality of having faith in Christ and knowing Christ.

And after he had that experience, everything that he has expired to, everything that was really so important to him, that he bought his life on, became like rubbish.

[20 : 43] We can say in the words of the Gospel of John that he tasted the bread of life as he entered into a relationship with Christ.

And that satisfied him. The Jews complained about what Jesus said then. And they said, how can you say that you are the bread that comes from heaven?

And then they said, isn't he the son of Joseph? You are just a human being. How can you be the bread from heaven?

How can you be the bread of life? And then Jesus continues in verse 48 and he said, I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

[21 : 44] And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. Jesus here is pointing them to his mission into this world.

That he came to give himself. To die on the cross. That his body was broken and his blood was shed. So that people can experience forgiveness.

That they can be reconciled in a relationship with God. And walk with him. That they may have life in this world. They who were dead in their sins and transgressions.

That they can become spiritually alive. And also have eternal life. Because the power of sin and death was broken through Jesus' death on the cross.

And through the resurrection from the dead. This is something that is so big. The fact that people through Christ can have eternal life.

[22 : 48] And yet the people came to him and simply wanted a meal. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, He once told the story about a laborer.

And he said, Say in a certain village there is a laborer who worked there for many years. And one day he received an invitation from the king.

And the king invites him to come to the palace and have tea with him. It will be very difficult for the laborer to understand why the king invited him.

It will be difficult for him to accept the invitation. But in the end he would go. And he would drink tea with the king.

But say the king sent an invitation to the laborer and said, I want you to come to the palace because I want you to marry my daughter.

[23 : 50] What will the laborer do? And then Kierkegaard said that the laborer will not accept the invitation. Because he will not be able to get his head around it.

It will be something that is too big for him. He will never be able to understand why the king wants him to marry his daughter. He will not be able to go.

And he said that when it comes to the gospel, sometimes we respond in the same way. We cannot get our head around the fact that God loved us so much that he desired to show us mercy and grace.

And that he wanted to save us. And in order to save us, it is necessary. And it was necessary for Christ to come and die on the cross. For him to send his beloved son into this world.

And we think, this is too big. We cannot respond to it. And then we think, well, perhaps we can come to Jesus like the people did and ask for something relatively small.

[25 : 04] Because we cannot understand why Jesus really came. And we said, well, when we need it, we will pray for sunshine. Or in other parts of the world, we will pray for rain when there is a drought.

And perhaps we will pray for a job for my son or my daughter. Or that I will be able to live in a certain city. Or perhaps when my grandmother is ill, I will come to God and pray for it.

And maybe I will even pray for my daily bread so that I have enough food for tomorrow. And then we stop there. And our relationship with God is simply based on the fact that we think that he can provide for us in our needs.

And of course, that is true. But Jesus wants us to understand the rich realities of his kingdom. That he didn't simply come to give bread to the people.

That it was a sign pointing them to his kingdom. To the fact that he would give himself. That his body would be broken and his blood be shed.

[26 : 16] So that people can be reconciled with God the Father. Jesus invites us also tonight through his word and his spirit to come to him.

Perhaps you have been coming to Christ many times. But with the wrong attitude or for the wrong reason. Perhaps you thought the best that you can get out of praying is simply for God to meet you in your material needs.

Tonight God is longing for you to understand. That he came into this world because he loves you. And he wants you to have life. And life in abundance.

And he wants you to have eternal life. And you can receive it. By coming to him. Surrendering to him. Accepting him on his terms.

As Lord and God. As Savior and Redeemer. Who came and died for you. Asians have told me that they have two stomachs.

[27 : 23] And they said that the one stomach is for normal food. And the other stomach is for rice. And they said that it doesn't matter how much normal food they eat.

They can never feel satisfied unless they also eat some rice for their other stomach. The truth is also for us.

It doesn't matter how much we fill our lives with the things of this world. We will never be able to be satisfied.

Unless we come to Jesus. And receive the bread of life. And tonight Jesus is also inviting us. To come to him.

And he's ready to give the bread of life to us. And he's ready also to give himself to us. So that we can be reconciled with God our Father.

[28 : 20] Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father.

We do thank you for your word. We do thank you that you provide for us every day with all our needs. And that you bless us. But tonight especially we want to thank you that you gave yourself to us.

Through your death on the cross. And that by coming to you we can receive the bread of life. And have life in this world and also eternal life.

We pray Lord that we will come to you and receive from you. And we pray that you will satisfy us as you promise in your word.

And thank you Lord that we have tasted the bread of life. And that indeed it has given us life. And it has filled us.

[29 : 23] And it has filled us with your joy and your peace. And we pray Lord that through the life that you have given us. That we will live in relationship with you.

That we will walk with you. That we will share the good news of the gospel of Christ. And that we will glorify you in all that we do.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.