

# Eating and Drinking

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good evening. I'm Neil, Neil MacMillan, and I'm connected into St. Columbus. I planted a church from here a couple of years ago, and still work alongside Derek and Corey and Tom who planted the Eskivali Church. So it's great to be with you this evening and to have this opportunity to look at God's Word with you, thinking especially about eating, drinking, and about the Lord's Supper. So a couple of weeks ago, I took a trip to the US. I landed in Washington DC and went to visit a friend who's from Edinburgh, but is the pastor in a church just outside DC. So I went to visit James and got there in the evening. In the morning we got up. What did James do? He took me out for breakfast to the Silver Dollar Diner. We had the country breakfast, fried potatoes, sausage, egg, cheese, gravy, lots of other stuff. Fantastic. Then I left DC, went down to a place called Virginia Beach to visit a friend there called Jeff, and Jeff took me to Dumars. And Dumars is the place where they invented the ice cream cone in 1911, but they also make amazing burgers and incredible milkshakes. So I spent the next week basically travelling around Virginia and then New York. I was in for a few days and a lot of the time I spent eating.
- A lot of my memories are about the food I had. Because when you visit people, one of the ways that they welcome you is to feed you. If somebody comes to visit you, you welcome them by feeding.
- When Natalia is speaking to us about the refugees coming to Edinburgh and we want to love and serve and be hospitable to the stranger, then one of the things we can do is invite them into our home and feed them. And in a similar way, God greets us as strangers, invites us into his home, invites us into his family, and then provides us with a meal as a symbol and a sign of his welcome, his hospitality, his desire to provide for us and care for us, and to enrich our lives through his grace.
- So the Lord's Supper, we sometimes call it, or the Communion Service, is a really important part of our worship and our shared experience of the grace of God. It's a time when we come together as a family to meet with our Father in Heaven, to meet with the Lord Jesus, our older brother, to gather around their table and to be welcomed, to be nourished, to be strengthened, and to be blessed.
- [ 3 : 1 6 ] And one of the great things, of course, about life is this, that the things that we need the most, God makes them pleasurable for us. So, you know, food could be bland, and maybe for some of you, if you cook for yourself when you're a student, your food is bland. But, you know, the great thing we're eating is that God has made eating not only a necessity, but a great pleasure. And it is this wonderful thing that God does for us in the Lord's Supper too, that He gives us something to eat and drink, something that is tangible, something that is pleasurable, something that appeals to all our different senses. And that allows us to have this sense of celebration together, the wine, the bread, the sense of the goodness of God, celebrating the fruit of God's kingdom, enjoying together God's lavish, generous grace to us in the gospel. All these things are associated with the Lord's Supper.

The very centerpiece of Christian worship is the preaching of the Word of God. If we look at the New Testament, there's much more about the preaching of the Word than there is about the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist. And the weight of emphasis then in the New Testament is on the Word preached. But the Lord's Supper is for us a visible Word. It's a Word that can be seen, tasted, grasped, enjoyed in a different way. The preached Word of God communicates and conveys our salvation. The visible Word of the Lord's Supper reassures us that we are gods, that we belong to His family. It brings home to us again in a really tangible way, the reality of what we believe and trust. Now in 1 Corinthians, we have the Apostle Paul speaking about how Jesus communicated directly with him as an Apostle about the Lord's Supper. That's how important it was that he got direct revelation from Jesus. And he says, I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you. The Lord Jesus in the night when He was betrayed took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me in the same way. Also He took the cup after Supper said, this cup is a new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me, for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Now what we get from Paul then there is this two very simple ideas of what's involved in the Lord's Supper. One is this, that it's a looking back, it's a remembering. Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me. But it's also a looking forward. He says, do this as often as you will as you eat this bread and drink this cup. What are you doing? You are proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes. So as we eat and drink together, we have this horizon, this future horizon, this future expectation of the return of the living God to be among us. So that's basically, I'm going to divide the sermon up for the next little while as looking back and then looking forward. Then I'm going to take a couple more minutes at the end just to say a little bit more about what actually happens when we gather at the Lord's table. So first of all, we're looking back on the drama of redemption. As we sit, we remember. Now, most stories, most narratives follow familiar patterns. I'm sure you understand that. We have the setting of the scene, the introduction of some dilemma or narrative tension.

A hero comes along, there'll be some great crisis and then hopefully a resolution and happily ever after. So in my home, some members of my family have been eagerly awaiting the return of designated survivor on Netflix. So I don't know if you follow designated survivor, but there is a hapless housing secretary in the US government who becomes overnight, all of a sudden and unexpectedly, the US president after a terror attack kills the real president. The story is about this dilemma then that there's a plot against the United States, but we don't know who's behind it, what they're doing or why they're doing it. We have an FBI hero, agent Hannah Wells, who is uncovering the plot. And we know that in the end, after some great crisis, all will end well and that the world will be brought back to normality and that good will prevail. That's the narrative arc that most stories follow. And of course, all those stories are a reflection of the great story, which the Bible story, the story of what God is doing in our world and in our lives. So in the story of God's work in this world, we have the setting of the scene at creation. We have the fall of humanity into sin and rebellion, looking to live life without reference to God. That's the twist in the plot when things go wrong. We have the promise of rescue and all the clues and pointers of the Old Testament. And then we have the coming of Jesus, the rescuer, who through the deep crisis of the cross prevails over evil and begins the process of restoring his world. And the very turning point of God's story and history, the very turning point of the narrative of Scripture, and the turning point of the life of every believer is the work of God on the cross to rescue sinners and to restore his world. The cross is the key moment of human history. The Son of God crucified for sin in a crucible of suffering. Here all the key strands and themes of human history come together. Here the truth of God meets the lies of his enemies. The justice of God meets the injustice of his accusers. Here vengeance and hatred are met with grace and love. Here cruelty and mercy coincide, here love and suffering. Here there is lostness and redemption. There is despair and hope. There is destruction and restoration. There is death and life. There is good and evil.

And all these great themes of life, they intersect in one place in history, they intersect at the cross of Jesus Christ. It's a moment of huge tension, of incredible sorrow, of physical agony for the suffering Jesus, of spiritual torment. It's a moment of horror and fear, but of love and rescue. This is the drama above all dramas. It's domestic. He looks at his mother from the cross and says, mother, here's your son, and points to the apostle John. It's immediate. He looks at the man crucified behind beside him and says, today you'll be with me in paradise. It's a heart breaking drama. As he cries to his father in heaven, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It's a merciful drama. As he looks on the people who have pierced him and wounded him and cut him and spat on him and prays, father, forgive them. They do not know what they do. It's a despairing drama.

[ 12 : 01 ] As he cries out in longing and in need and in torment, I thirst. And it's a triumphant drama. As he gives himself to death and cries out to the watching world, it is finished. All of this occurs at the cross of Jesus Christ, where God's great work of rescue and restoration is achieved in the death and suffering of his son, Jesus Christ. That makes the cross of Jesus the key moment for every Christian. It makes it the defining moment for our identity as human beings, that we are loved by our Creator God in such a way that he will crucify his son on our behalf. This is how I know who I am as a human being. Christ loved me and gave himself for me. He bore my sin in his body in the cross. He bled and died for me. That's what shapes my humanity. It melts our hearts and it fills us with hope.

When I see Jesus in the cross, I am set free from fear. I am set free from guilt. I am set free from the curse and the power of sin. In that moment, as I see Jesus crucified, I know that the way is now open for me to be restored to my Father in heaven. As Christ dies in the cross, there was a temple in the curtain in Jerusalem that was torn in two that guarded the way to God's most holy presence. And so in that moment, everything that separates me from my Father in heaven is torn so that I can enter in and know the God who gave me life, created me in his image and calls me home. That's what the Lord's Supper is reminding us of. The Lord's Supper takes us back to that place, to these events. The Lord Supper takes us to Jesus, the broken body, the blood spilled as his hands are pierced in his side, wounded. In the bread and the wine, we have these visible, tangible reminders that God in his mercy gives to us so that we can taste and see that God is good. The bread is broken, the wine is poured out so that the great redemption drama is reenacted in front of us as we worship God together. And as we come, we come with a great celebratory joy. It's a delight for us to come because this is the moment of our rescue and our salvation. This is the Eucharist, the giving thanks. It's a time to remember, to be thankful, to rejoice. So it's a looking back. I also want to say it's a looking forward. We were singing that song, we will feast in the house of Zion. We proclaim the Lord's death till he comes as we eat and drink together. So when we take the bread and the wine, we're remembering the cross, but we're also looking forward to another feast. So God has given us a little feast right now, but it's just an anticipation of a greater feast that is yet to come. In the Book of

Revelation, this is described as the marriage supper of the Lamb. So we're looking beyond our own 80 years or whatever it is in this world. We're looking beyond time, if you want to put it that way. We're thinking towards the new creation, towards eternity, to a feast in the eternal presence of God in the new heavens and the new earth. So this is how it's described in the Book of Revelation. John says this, he says, I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters.

Like the sound of mighty peels of thunder crying out, hallelujah for the Lord our God, the almighty reigns. What kind of feast is this? What kind of celebration? Let us rejoice and exalt. Give him the glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come. The bride has made herself ready. This is the church coming to meet with Jesus in heaven.

[ 17 : 16 ] It was granted for her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. The angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, these are the true words of God.

So there's a greater feast. What God is saying to you is a time is coming for you beyond this world. When you will see him face to face, he will seat you at his table and he will feed you with his hand.

All the groaning, the suffering, the pain, the tension of life in this world gone. And just the joy, just the pleasure, just the delight that there is in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah looks forward to this new creation in chapter 25 of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah writes this way. He says, on the mountain of the Lord of hosts, he will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wine, wine and food.

It's about celebrating together. It will be rich food, full of marrow, aged wine, well refined from the best sellers. He will swallow up in this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

[ 18 : 54 ] He will swallow up death forever. And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day, behold our God, we have waited for him that he might save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

This is the hope that God sets before us. We're part of the drama, that's the thing. If we're Christians, this story is our story. We locate ourselves within the narrative.

We live between the redemption of Jesus Christ and the restoration of all things. As we serve Christ in this world, we are seeking to bring the new creation, and we are living with a new horizon, looking beyond the drama of this world to the glory of eternity.

Sometimes we think this life means so much, and we cling to the things we have in this life so hard. But Jesus tells you, this is just the prelude. This is Act 1.

[ 20 : 23 ] The curtain will sweep back one day, and you will see a whole new world, a new creation, a new heavens, a new earth full of glory. I love thesynographers.

Thesynographers are the people who work in theatre and TV to create the scenery. I think it's a really amazing gift to be able to sit in a theatre and suddenly the curtain goes back.

They've created this whole world out of just a few props. God is setting the scene for a great, great reality. This world is so beautiful and so precious, and there are so many delightful good things in it.

And yet these are just tiny drops of the pleasure and the goodness and the glory that is to be revealed when the curtain comes back. And you see Jesus as he is truly to be seen, the Lord of the new creation.

You will enter a world of light, beauty, of gorgeous singing, and of bliss, and Jesus will be there welcoming you to his table, looking on you with love, showing you his wounds, and saying, all for you, all for you.

[ 22 : 09 ] So we look back, we look forward. I just want to just very quickly say what happens when we take bread and wine. Just to kind of wake you up and really get you excited, I'm going to read to you from the Westminster Confession of Faith.

So this is a highlight of the service for you.

It's really but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance as the elements themselves are to their outward senses. You can go home and Google that, okay? Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 29.

Now, that's just because I want to, I read that and I just want you to understand a little bit what's actually happening when you take the bread and the wine. The bread and the wine do not become the body and blood of Jesus in any literal sense.

Jesus is not physically present in the bread and the wine. But as we take the bread and the wine, Jesus is present in our hearts and he is present by his spirit, just as he is when we preach the gospel or when we pray.

[ 23 : 49 ] So as we receive what the Westminster Confession is saying is this, as we receive the bread and the wine, we are receiving Christ by faith. As we take the bread and the wine, he is feeding us and nourishing us spiritually.

He's using these visible tangible signs to speak to us and remind us of the truths of our faith, his body and blood, his suffering and death. And he's reassuring us of the reality of these things. He's driving them home.

Why? Because he knows we need help. We need encouragement. And so the blessings that are represented through the bread and the wine are made more real to us by Christ in his spirit as we receive the bread and the wine.

The Lord bolsters our flagging faith and nourishes us spiritually. Who is the Lord supper for? Just want to finish with that. Well it is for those who trust in Jesus.

It is for Christians. It's not for perfect people. It's not for good people. It's for repentance sinners who have come to Jesus for rescue.

[ 25 : 21 ] It's for those who know that they've got no righteousness of their own, but understand that they are covered with the righteousness of Jesus.

And so I don't know if you have ever taken communion or not, some of you. But the most important thing is to have taken Christ. To have taken Him as your Saviour and your Lord and your God.

To have trusted in all that He has done. To rescue us from the brokenness of our pride and our greed and our lies and our lust and our rebellion against the Father in heaven. All those things. He rescues us from that.

And it's to say I want to be rescued. And it's also saying I want to participate in your restoration of all the good that you are doing. All the healing that you are giving.

That's what it is to take Christ. To say that you want those things for yourself personally. And when we come to the Lord's table, He's saying this to us. He's saying I love you. When you take the bread and the wine, that's all He's really saying. He's just reminding you this. I love you. I really love you.

[ 26 : 51 ] I love you so much I gave everything for you. I love you in a personal way for who you are and all your sin and all your brokenness and lostness. I love you.

And when we take the bread and the wine, what are we saying? All we are saying is this. We love you too. We love you back. Thank you Jesus.