

Feasting With the Lord
I Corinthians 10:1-4; Exodus 24:9-11; Deuteronomy 27:3-7
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Well, I'd like to begin by taking a poll, and it's going to be a little bit hard to tell because you guys are all so spread apart. But I want you to raise your hands, and you have to raise your hands really high and keep them raise. Raise your hands if your favorite holiday is Christmas, raise your hands if your favorite holiday is Christmas.

Okay, now raise your hands if your favorite holiday is Thanksgiving.

I would say it's pretty even, but it looks like the slight edge goes to Christmas. Well, according to a recent 2024 poll, which asked Americans, what is your favorite holiday coming in first with 36% of those votes, was Christmas, and coming in second with 23% of the total votes was Thanksgiving. However, there was a related question in that same poll, similar, but a little different, which asked, what holiday do you enjoy the most?

Not what's your favorite, but which one do you enjoy the most? And interestingly enough, Thanksgiving actually had the higher enjoyment rate than Christmas. And I'm not a sociologist, but if I had to guess why, I'd imagine that part of the reason for that is because whereas Christmas, at least in the secular world, centers around presents which can be stressful to shop for and which can often be disappointing, Thanksgiving centers around having a full out banquet with your closest friends and family, and who doesn't enjoy feasting with friends and family?

Well, as we prepare to do just that this coming Thursday, I wanted to introduce a biblical topic for you one to give you more reason to be grateful this season, but two it also help you think about how being a Christian impacts how you celebrate a holiday such as Thanksgiving. This is a topic that I've shared in the context of certain Sunday schools, as well as with the graduates and career leadership team, and I'm glad to have an opportunity to introduce this topic with you all this evening as well.

But the topic for tonight is what might be called divine hospitality or eating and drinking that is, feasting with the Lord. In the New Testament, we are repeatedly exhorted to show hospitality. This would have been an essential trait in the early church since many of the churches gathered in the homes of their members. Furthermore, many of the apostles and teachers would have been itinerant, meaning they were traveling teachers.

And so someone like the apostle or missionary Paul would have therefore relied upon the hospitality of church members in order to have both shelter and food. We actually have a great example of this kind of hospitality, in particular here at Brownwood, especially during the Global Missions conference, where the 30 or so visiting missionaries are. Our guests are not put up in

hotels, but they're hosted by our members. And for a week at that, well, that would have been the norm year round in the early church. So it's not surprising when we see the New Testament to repeat myself again, exhorting the church to show hospitality. Romans 12:13, for example, says, contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. In first Timothy 5:10, a widow was to be enrolled to receive care, but only if she had demonstrated to have been someone who had showed hospitality.

In first Timothy three and Titus one. One of the qualifications of an elder, and this is unique to elders and not to deacons, is that he must be hospitable and elders that's talking about you, not your wives. You are to be hospitable, although it certainly doesn't hurt if your wife, like mine, is also very hospitable. And first Peter chapter four verse nine says, show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

And I think that's insightful, because what the apostle Peter is acknowledging is that showing hospitality can often be a cause of grumbling. And why? Because hospitality reality is both inconvenient and very costly. Hospitality is inconvenient and costly. And one more passage Matthew 25, verses 31 to 46. I'm not going to read the whole thing for you, but perhaps you can turn there in your Bibles and follow along.

Matthew chapter 25 is about the final judgment, and on that day Jesus says, The Son of Man will come in glory and sit on his throne, and with all the nations gathered before him, he will proceed to separate the sheep from the goats. And what is the criteria that the judge will apply in determining who are the sheep and who are the goats? Matthew chapter 25. I'm going to start reading from verse 33.

And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left, and the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Then skip down to verse 41. Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me. You cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me no food. I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me.

So what is the criteria? In one word? Hospitality. Now, when we hear the word hospitality, that may for you conjure up images of extravagant meals with friends and family. Indeed, you may associate the word hospitality with something like Thanksgiving. But the word for hospitality in the Greek is either.

There's a few words for it, but it's either xeno, philia or phobos. Xenos and I share the Greek with you only because I think you'll likely hear something familiar. And that word xeno philia. Philia is the word for love, and xenos refers to the stranger. And so the word literally means showing love to the stranger. The opposite of hospitality, then, might be captured by the English word xenophobia, having fear or even disdain of the stranger or foreigner in your midst.

So by definition then, and the New Testament, how hospitable you were, was measured not by its extension to friends and family, but by its extension to the stranger. So one scholar, Bruce Molina, defines hospitality as I quote the process by means of which an outsider status is changed from stranger to guest. And now, perhaps you can better sympathize with Matthew 25.

So important is this trait that you could say your eternal fate depends upon whether or not you practice to. In fact, John Calvin in his commentary on Isaiah, went as far as saying that no duty can be more pleasing or more acceptable to God than showing hospitality of strangers. But the focus of tonight's message is not about us showing hospitality.

The focus of tonight's message is about divine hospitality. Because you see the reason why we are called to show hospitality is because God first showed hospitality to us. And this theme of divine hospitality, of feasting with the Lord of God inviting us into his house to eat and drink at his table. This is a massive theme that is interwoven throughout all of Scripture.

We see it, for example, at the very beginning of the Bible in the Garden of Eden, when the Lord takes Adam and places him in his garden, and then he invites him to eat of every tree except for the tree of knowledge. So Gregory of Nyssa, a fourth century church father, writes, When God created the world, God prepared it as a rich and abundant garden that would serve as a place to host humanity.

The first humans were able to enjoy what God had provided for them, and were not required to seek for sustenance or communion outside the garden. Sanctuary. Moreover, we see this theme virtually every time a covenant is ratified throughout the Old Testament. We see it in the Psalms, where the Psalter portrays God as a generous host who spreads a table and who protects and provides for his people.

We see it in the prophets who foretell of a great messianic banquet to come. We see it in the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus regularly dines with all sorts of people. And of course, we see it in the book of Revelation. In fact, one of the very last scenes of the entire Bible is the marriage banquet, feast of the lamb.

This is a hugely important theological motif that literally bookends the entire scripture.

Now, obviously we can't survey all of that tonight. And so for the remainder of our time, I'd like to just give you a teaser, just a taste of how this theme unfolds in the Bible by looking at the wilderness period of Israel's history, between their deliverance from Egypt and their inheritance of the Promised Land. As an aside, if you care to explore this theme further, Michael Jordan at Westminster, California, has some really good talks on this.

And Christine Paul, who taught at Asbury Seminary until she passed away last year, has written a book called Making Room, which I would strongly recommend that you read. But turn with me now to Exodus chapter 24, verses 9 to 11. As you turn there. In the preceding context of this passage, God has delivered Israel out of Egypt. He's brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai to worship him.

And of course, the first thing he does is he gives Israel the Ten Commandments. God formally enters into a covenant with his people. Then in Exodus 24, the Lord now ratifies or he confirms this covenant, and Israel vows to keep all the words that the Lord has spoken. And after making burnt offerings and peace offerings, we read in Exodus chapter 24, verses nine through 11, Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and A.B., who and 70 of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel.

There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God, and ate and drank.

If you weren't looking for it, you could easily overlook that last phrase, couldn't you? They beheld God and ate and drank as part of the ratification of this covenant, the 70 elders who represent all of Israel feast with the Lord as a symbol of now being in relationship with Yahweh, as a symbol of their fellowship. And given the context of the Book of Exodus, you could even say that this was the goal of Israel's salvation, that this was the purpose of them being delivered out of bondage so that they could eat and drink with God, so that they could be the beneficiaries of this divine hospitality.

Well, because of this grace, because of this generous character and work of God himself, it's not surprising to see that showing hospitality was codified in the law itself. Israel was to reflect this divine hospitality, especially in the way that they received and hosted the alien and the sojourner amidst them. So in Exodus 22, verse 21, we read, you shall not wrong.

A sojourner or oppress. Numbers 9:14 we see that God protects the sojourners rights to participate in worship, and we read. And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, so shall he do. And in Deuteronomy 16, God protects their rights to a fair trial. And I charged your judges at that time here the cases between your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother, or the alien who is with them.

Indeed, in Numbers 15 we see that the stranger is to be treated no differently than an Israelite. Numbers 15 verse 15 for the assembly there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who so generous with you, you and the sojourner shall be alike before the law, before the Lord. One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.

I would have even greater importance in the legal codification of hospitality. Isn't the mere instruction to display it, but the reason for why Israel was to display it? What's striking is that God never corrects Israel's perspective of the stranger. Or put differently, God never challenges or denies the strangeness of the stranger. Israel and anyone else, for that matter, in the ancient world, would have been reluctant to fully embrace aliens and sojourners for the same reason for why we might be.

Because they were different, because they had different customs and religious practices, because they might be less clean and less polite than we might hope. They might be ungrateful

guests, and might even steal from their hosts, because they may be dangerous to ourselves and to our family. But God doesn't say, show hospitality to the strangers because your perception of them is wrong or stereotypical or racist.

It never says that. Rather, what's the reason? Let me read Exodus 22:21 again for you, but this time I'll finish the verse. You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners. Why was Israel commanded to show hospitality? Because they themselves were once strangers, and indeed not just in Egypt, but strangers in relation to God.

And not just strangers, but enemies they had. It's strange themselves from his holy presence. And yet God had invited them into his home. He had invited them to his table. So Israel was delivered up out of Egypt. They were brought to the foot of Mount Sinai, where they ate and drank with God. And God gave them statutes and commandments, instructing them to show the very same hospitality that he had showed them to the alien and sojourners amidst them.

And now their itinerary shifts from Sinai to the Promised Land as they journey throughout the wilderness to Canaan. What do we see that God does in the wilderness? Well, he sends bread from heaven and water from a rock. In other words, God continuously spreads a table before them, even in the desert, as Psalm 23 will later say, even in the presence of my enemies.

And as they're journeying, what was Israel looking forward to? How is the Promised Land repeatedly described in the Pentateuch in verses like Exodus 13:5, Exodus 33:3, Leviticus 20:24, Numbers 13:27, Deuteronomy 26:15, again and again and again. How is the Promised Land repeatedly described as the land flowing with milk and honey? So what was Israel looking forward to?

Feasting with the Lord their God.

So that when we get to Deuteronomy 27, when the new generation of Israelites are now at the very precipice of Canaan, and they're about to enter into an inherit the land, this is what we read in Deuteronomy chapter 27, verses three through seven.

And you shall ride on them all the words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land, that the Lord your God is giving you a land flowing with milk and honey. Verse five. And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones, and you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. And you shall sacrifice peace offerings, and shall eat their. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. Let me say it again. The end goal of Israel being delivered up out of Egypt, and the end goal of the entire wilderness journey was to enter into the Promised Land with a view of eating and drinking with God, of eating and drinking and rejoicing and feasting in the presence of their Savior.

And in a sense, you could say that this is the goal of our salvation as well. Couldn't you? Once again, what Revelation 19 shows us is that all of history culminates in the marriage supper of the lamb. That's what we are also looking forward to. We're looking forward to a meal, a banquet,

feast, so that when you show hospitality to others, you're not just reflecting what God has done for you, you are also giving that person a glimpse or a taste of that final meal to come.

I pointed out earlier from First Peter chapter four that showing hospitality can be a cause of grumbling because it's both inconvenient and costly. And as we all make preparations for Thanksgiving and later in December as we make preparations for our Christmas parties, I would imagine that our guest lists will be curated based on who we enjoy spending time with, based on people we like.

And that's perfectly fine. Don't hear me condemning your holiday traditions, but I would nonetheless have you consider this question how can you make your holidays more costly? It's a terrible question to ask, isn't it? How can you make your holidays more costly? Who can you invite and how might you prepare it so that it costs you more? Because understand that the more costly your hospitality becomes, the more it reflects God's own hospitality.

You know, when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, as already mentioned, God sent bread from heaven, which they called manna. And when they were thirsty, God poured out water from a rock. And while initially when the manna was still a novelty, the Israelites were grateful for this provision, they eventually grew tired of it. They were tired of the same old boring meal.

They grumbled. They were tired of God's hospitality. But what they didn't realize, or rather what they lost sight of, was the reality that this humble meal of bread and water had come at an enormous cost to their generous host. And what did it cost? God to spread this table before Israel? Well, let me read two passages for you that gives us the answer.

The first is from John 6:48, where Jesus says, I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the man in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that 1st 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.

And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. And the second is from first Corinthians ten, verses 1 to 4. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them.

And the rock was Christ.

What did it cost God to invite us to his table so that we might eat and drink in his presence? What did it cost God to show us his hospitality? It cost him His son.

You know, I think it's quite easy for even Thanksgiving, a holiday when you focus on giving thanks to someone else. I think it's quite, quite easy for even Thanksgiving to be celebrated in a self-centered manner, especially, I think, in a church like ours, where we're predominantly

middle class or upper middle class, where we have everything we need, you can thank God, but if you're not careful, you'll find yourself thanking God only because he has blessed you with all this blessing.

With all this stuff. And that's why you're grateful. And so here's my challenge to you take this holiday season as an opportunity, not just to thank God for as many blessings, but to, in turn, direct those blessings to the least and to the lost. In other words, use this holiday as an opportunity to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is at the very heart of that hospitality that God has richly bestowed upon you.

Let me close with this quote from Martin Luther as he's reflecting on that passage we saw earlier on the final judgment in Matthew 25, Martin Luther said this about hosting the least. He said, when you receive them into your homes, God himself is in our home. God himself is being fed at our home and God Himself is lying down and resting.

Once you open your homes to the Lord this season, let's pray.

Gracious Heavenly Father, indeed you are rich in mercy. You are abounding in steadfast love. You seek to show and pour forth your blessings, grace upon grace. And once again, Lord, if we only have eyes to see, your faithfulness is evidenced all around us in every moment of our lives. And whichever way we turn. But you have sent your son to the cross so that he might die, and so that we might feast upon his body and blood, so that we might eat of the bread of life and the living water. And it's because Christ got up from his table and went to the very end. It's because Christ got up and made room for us at the table, that we enjoy the richness of your grace and generous hospitality. What I do ask that you would remind us of this grace. Remind us of this truth, of this gospel truth, and may our hearts overflow with thanksgiving, even in the next 20 minutes, as we give expression to all that your hand has provided. But may we not stop at just giving thanks to you. May the overflow of your riches overflow even in our lives, so that we show that blessing towards others. And through that Lord, may more and more people be recipients of your gracious love. We pray these things in Jesus name,

Amen.