

Let's Eat

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- [0 : 0 0] After this, I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.
- He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. And again they shouted, Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.
- The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who was seated on the throne. And they cried, Amen! Hallelujah! Then a voice came from the throne saying, Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small.
- Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder shouting, Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
- Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given for her to wear.
- [1 : 2 4] Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. Then the angel said this to me, Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.
- And he added, These are the true words of God. At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, Don't do that.
- I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for it is the spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.
- First of all, I'm going to take some time to look at Revelation chapter 19. So I don't know how lockdown is affecting you, but one of the things that's certainly going on with me is just kind of thinking about food even more than usual.
- My next meal, my next snack, my next treat. And I'm really lucky because I've eaten so many great meals recently and in my life.
- [2 : 3 0] One of the best, most memorable meals I ever had was eaten in a restaurant called Rossellini's in a village called Ravello. And Louise and I were celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary.
- So we've just had this. That's our 30th wedding anniversary. It was a few weeks ago. It was spent in lockdown. But our 25th was in Ravello in Italy. And we ate in Rossellini's, a beautiful restaurant.
- And we were outside on our terrace, looking over the ocean, the moonlit Amalfi Coast. And the best food, the best company, the best memories.
- So we've all had really great meals. And we've all probably had really terrible meals as well. Sometimes I've gone to some very bad restaurants and that's been self-inflicted.
- My bad choice. Sometimes I've had absolutely terrible meals at restaurants that other people have recommended to me. And I've gone home with food poisoning. And that's always something that rather upsets me.

- [3 : 36] Well, in this chapter of Revelation, we've got a description of a feast, of a meal. Just towards the end of what Anna-Laure read there, it talks about how we are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb, or the marriage feast of the Lamb.
- So here, throughout the book of Revelation, God is giving us lots of really powerful pictures of the new creation, of the new heavens and the new earth, of what life will be like with Jesus in the coming kingdom.
- And the picture that's used here is of this amazing, beautiful, eternal feast. And in the background against that, if you were tuned into the reading, when Anna-Laure read earlier on, is Babylon.
- Babylon. So Babylon comes to a ruinous end, and that's contrasted with this beautiful feast that's held in the kingdom of God. Babylon is the bad restaurant that poisons us, that leaves us hanging over the toilet, throwing up our guts.
- Babylon represents the kingdom of the dark lord Satan, which is doomed forever. And so throughout this book of Revelation, what we see is this contrasting, or contrast between two ways of living, two kingdoms, two choices.
- [4 : 57] The kingdom of light, the kingdom of Jesus, the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of Satan. And God was saying to people back in the first century, and he's saying to people today, you know, where do you align yourself?
- Where do you go to have your hunger fed and your desires met? What is it that nourishes you in life? Are you choosing what is good and true and lovely and healthy?
- Are you going after things that in the end are going to just turn out to be pretty toxic for your system? So two restaurants, one good, one bad.
- Two ways to live, one good, one bad. Two different ideas of how we sustain and nourish ourselves in life. One good, one bad. And our kind of thirsty thought, the thing that I want you just to hold on to through the week, and a phrase that might stay with you, is just this.
- When we see a table and bread, we're seeing God's invitation to come and eat with him. As we explore this idea of the marriage supper of the lamb, the wedding feast, I want to say this.
- [6 : 11] When we see a table and we see bread, we're seeing God's invitation to come and eat with him. I want to think a little bit more about the divine diner, the place where God will feed his people forever.
- So the feast of God's kingdom, the new creation, is amazing. Think of a table groaning with food. Just imagine a table spread with the best kind of food and the most amazing drinks.
- A smorgasbord of everything that you love to eat. Pastries, cakes, cheeses, fruit, wines, desserts, canopies, mains, appetizers, your favorite foods from all around the world.
- It's a picture of joy that God holds out to us. Back in the Old Testament, in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah prophesied far into the future to see this coming kingdom.
- And this is what Isaiah said. He said, So this beautiful picture of a caveman, coming kingdom where God's people feast on the best of everything and where death is swallowed up forever.
- [7 : 44] On the cross, Jesus swallows death so that we can be fed on his riches. In Luke chapter 13, Jesus says this, People will come from the east, the west, the north, the south, and take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.
- So throughout the Bible then, bread and table and food are a sign of God's commitment to have fellowship and relationship with us.

When we see the bread, when we see the bread, when we see the bread, when we see the table, we're reminded that God's a God who loves community and celebration and joy and sharing life with us.

In the New Testament, Jesus loved to eat with people. So we often read about Jesus eating meals with people, even preparing food for others. Jesus' first miracle is at a wedding where he turns water into wine and is the best wine possible.

Jesus would cook breakfast on the beach for his disciples. Jesus loved a good dinner, a great dinner party with friends at some wealthy person's house.

[8 : 48] Jesus loved a good dinner party with friends at some people.

Jesus loved one of the best sprks parg tins. These symbolic meals speak powerfully of God's love, the feast of life, the joy the best people believe in Jesus.

God gives us all these meals out of love. Preparing a meal for somebody else is a digital act of love. One of the things things of a lockdown is my wife Louise has found Ot Delta Lengue on Instagram.

So he's Otto Englenge, his recipes on Instagram, and Louise is using lots of them. So finding a recipe, gathering ingredients, preparing, cooking food, serving it up, it's an act of love.

It's thoughtful and it's generous. And that's God in his attitude to us. He wants to feed us. He wants to enrich us because he loves us.

[10 : 15] God gives us our daily bread. You know, we get our daily bread from the hand of God. He uses shops and jobs and wages and farmers and supply chains.

But God's the one who's behind it all, providing for our every need, making sure that we are fed. The current crisis has reminded us how fragile the world is.

We need God to sustain us. And God gives these good gifts of food and our daily meal to us as a reminder that he wants to bless our lives and enrich us.

Every meal that we have throughout the day is a moment of joy and rest. In the hard work of each day, we can sit down and enjoy something delightful and good that nourishes and sustains us.

It's a small celebration that reminds us of God's feast, that God's love. And God gives us these gifts to sustain us so that we will live for his kingdom and his glory, so that we will bring his word and his message.

[11 : 20] God sustains us because the work of bringing his kingdom is not yet finished. Christians have got so much to do still in this world. So God feeds us physically and spiritually so that we can nourish others with the good news of the gospel and bring them joy.

So what a great picture of the divine dinner, the eternal feast. We get to taste it now and we will enjoy it for all eternity.

And it's God's gift of grace to us. So whenever you see a table and bread set before you, you're seeing God's invitation to come and eat with him.

So the divine diner, the divine dinner is one thing that's held out to us. It's an offer of life and joy. And the contrast, of course, is with Babylon. And I just want to say that Revelation is saying to us, don't buy into Babylon.

Babylon is a way of life. It's a restaurant, probably. You could put it that is run by a bunch of Bampots who are using organized crime to set up a restaurant chain with branches in every city of the world.

[12 : 34] The food they use is toxic. The labor they use is forced. They run drugs. They traffic people. They launder money. They corrupt and bribe whatever they can.

If that was a restaurant chain that you were invited to, would you give them your money? But that's what Babylon represents in the Bible. In verse 2 of chapter 19, we read this, that God has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged in her the blood of his servants. And that's a reference to Babylon. And it's really harsh language. But again, God's saying there are two ways of being in this world, two places where we can go for our sustenance, for our food, for what will nourish us and sustain us in life.

And verse 2 does sound really pejorative to call Babylon a prostitute. Now, that's not an attack on women. God is not name-calling sex workers.

But actually, God is here promising that he will destroy every system, every power in this world that organizes itself to exploit and oppress people sexually or in any other way.

[13 : 55] God is against everything that abuses other people. And Babylon the prostitute is about systems that feast on the misery and suffering of others.

The background to this is in chapter 18. The previous chapter where we see the fall of Babylon, the systems of this world, the wealth that that promises comes apart so easily. For you and me, Babylon is about what we feed off for our happiness, what we think will make life worthwhile for us.

Babylon's about our intoxication with wealth or pleasure and money. Babylon's about our Some people, some of us maybe even take a twisted pleasure at the thought of our prosperity, our rising up at the cost of the suffering of others.

Sin is dark. Sin is dark. Sin is dark. And often we're dark in the way that we look at the world. So Babylon is evil. Babylon hates God, hates what is good and hates God's people.

And so in chapter 19, when Babylon finally falls, heaven celebrates because it's the final end of every evil and abusive and oppressive system.

[15 : 18] So God's offended if we keep making table reservations in Babylon. When we choose to eat there rather than accept the invitation to dine at his table.

We don't want to buy into what Babylon is selling. We want to choose the light. When we see the table and the bread set before us throughout the week ahead, we're seeing God is inviting us to come and eat with him.

So there's a divine diner. There's Babylon, which we don't want to buy into. I just want to kind of finish off by talking about you are what you eat.

So we're all probably quite food conscious. We don't want to come out of lockdown having put on too much weight. And I'm on Strava. I see the way that some of you try and keep fit and keep healthy and stay well.

And we do think about what we consume in life, what we take in, how we look after ourselves physically. We need to do that spiritually as well. And when I'm saying to you choose Jesus, I'm not saying become religious or become a better person.

[16 : 32] This is about trusting Jesus because he's the bread of life. It's receiving him himself that brings you spiritual life and spiritual joy and spiritual strength.

He's the one whose presence in our lives will sustain us through everything hard and dark. He's what's good for us spiritually. We don't earn this bread.

We don't buy it. We just receive it. It's God's gift to us. The table is set out in front of you. You just sit down and eat. Again, Isaiah the prophet said this.

He said, come, everybody who's thirsty, come to the waters. Even you who've got no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what's not bread? Why spend your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good. You will delight in the riches of fear.

[17 : 30] That's the gospel invitation. That we can have this feast if we will have Christ. If we receive him, we receive all that God is promising.

So coming to the feast is coming through Jesus. Just a little bit earlier in chapter 19. Got my Bible here. I'm just having a quick look.

Verse 7 and 8 says, Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. That's not our righteous acts. It's the righteous acts of Jesus on our behalf.

So thank you if you're invited to a wedding. You're going to think about what to wear if you're going. So when people come to the wedding supper of the Lamb, the Lamb is Jesus, they have to come dressed in white linen.

[18 : 31] And in the book of Revelation, the clothes in white linen are clothes that have been made clean through the blood of the Lamb. So these are people who have been made clean through the blood of Jesus.

How does blood make us clean? That's not an obvious idea for some of us. But it speaks about the death of Jesus on our behalf. That his death is what atones for our sin, our rebellion, our choice of Babylon over God.

By atoning for our sin and its weight and its guilt, Jesus does something that we could never do for ourselves. That's why we need to receive him.

He sent you an invitation. Come, you're invited, he says. And we need to respond with our RSVP. For those of us who have received Jesus, I want to say this.

Let's live in his presence day by day. God invites us into his presence to feed us, to nourish us. And we want to be the kind of people who are nourished by the presence of God in our lives and by his joy.

[19 : 44] We want to be a feast for other people. We want our lives, our presence, our friendship, our lives to be nourishing for other people.

So that we'll be a blessing to them. So that we can bring them joy. Well, how can we bring God's joy to others? Only if day by day we're living in his presence, feeding on his goodness.

That's how we can be hospitable and generous and kind. I would normally say to you at this point, have somebody around for a meal. Share your table with others.

Not so easy in lockdown. But I know some people are sending other people meals. For our 30th wedding anniversary back here again, we got sent a hamper of food.

And I've been living off it for weeks. There was absolutely great food in that hamper. There are still ways to show generosity and kindness and blessing to others in the lockdown. So just thinking again about these two ways of living.

[20 : 49] Living with fullness and joy and hope. Feasting in the presence of God. Or else allowing yourself to be nourished by the darkness of the Babylonians of this world.

I'm going to kind of switch metaphor here completely just as we finish to think about gardening. So yesterday, sitting out in the garden with Louise, my good wife.

And Louise has been working really hard on our garden for the last few weeks. And as I was sitting there watching her work, I made the kind of foolish comment, it looks pretty messy.

She had a handful of dirt in her hand just at that moment. I almost got covered in it. And then I looked again. And I saw that what she was doing in the garden was paying off.

That there was more life in the garden than death. The garden looked messy. But actually, there was so much new life. And I know that some of you don't normally attend any church.

[22 : 01] You're just tuning in online. Some of you normally attend Cornerstone. But you don't know if you're a Christian. You're not sure. If you're a believer. You're quite skeptical about Christianity.

You've got questions. So you're on a spiritual journey of some sort. And that's probably still going to look quite messy. But I want to ask you this.

Have you passed from death to life? Is there more life in you now? More of the life of Jesus in you now than there was before?

Have you chosen him? Because when we choose Jesus, we don't just choose a little bit of Jesus. We go all in. We give everything to follow Jesus.

Because he's our life. He's our feast. Our festival. Our celebration. Our joy. And I want to say to you, if you've never thought about this before in a particularly personal way.

[23 : 01] I want to say, perhaps now, in this moment, in this season, is a time where God is saying to you, make Jesus your life. Make Jesus your joy. Give everything to him.

And that can be just a really simple thing that you do now. Of asking Jesus, be my life. Be my joy. Let me say a quick prayer. And then I'm going to hand back to Sandra and Tim.

And they're going to give us a couple more songs. Father, we thank you for the feast of Jesus Christ. That you're a God who loves to provide for us spiritual food and physical food.

To nourish our lives and to sustain us. And we thank you that in that life there is joy. And we pray for anybody who doesn't know the joy of the Lord.

That they would come to know it and feed in it and feast in it today. Lord, you are goodness itself. And we pray that we would know that in a very personal way at this time.

[23 : 57] No matter what our circumstances might be. We give all this to you in Jesus' name. Amen.