PART FOUR – THE GOODNESS OF FOOD

By Pastor David Fields

1 Timothy 3-4; Isaiah 25; Psalm 104

"*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.*"

1 Corinthians 10:31

"*He [the Lord] makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for the people to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts.*"

Psalm 104:14-16

I. The God Who Dreams Up Honey

"*Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste.*"

Proverbs 24:13

A Thought Experiment

What kind of God would make a world with honey?

What kind of God would give us tongues to enjoy it like we do?

Here's one description of coffee I came across this week:

"Richly fruit-toned and resonant. Aromas and flavors of blueberry compote, red grape, cocoa nib, candied kumquat, and violet. Sweetly tart acidity; syrupy-smooth mouthfeel. Long finish with deep fruit and floral notes balanced by grounding chocolate."[1]

That's not just about finding nutrients. That's about beauty. That's delight in the key of worship.

"*For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,* [5] *because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*"

1 Timothy 4:4-5

II. A Eucharistic Life

Paul addresses the false teaching about the goodness of the material world in the physical, material body of Jesus – God the Son.

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1 1 Review of Oak & Bond Coffee Company - Ethiopia Gera Estate Gr. 1 Anaerobic Review Date: Sept 2025. https://www.coffeereview.com/types/anaerobic-experimental/

2 - Surah Al-Ma'idah (Chapter 5), verse 73. - The Noble Qur'an. https://quranyusufali.com/5/

Now, that was a challenging notion to Greeks and Romans of that time, because they pushed a sort of dualism between spiritual and material. Jewish folks had an issue believing this too, for different reasons. If God became a human, how does that preserve God's holiness, His otherness, His majesty? Our Muslim neighbours, for similar reasons, would argue against this Christian view:

"They do blaspheme who say, "God is Christ the son of Mary…Christ the son of Mary was no more than an Apostle… His mother was a woman of truth. They both had to eat their (daily) food."[2]

Scholar John Dickson notes:

"The fact that Jesus had to depend on daily food is thought to be the knockdown argument against the incarnation. The majestic creator could never find himself in the inglorious position of depending on food."[3]

This is another religious text that says, *The human body is not a fit site for God to dwell* - And the Christian faith says, 'Oh…yes it is!' (see John 1:14; Colossians 1:19).

We see how Jesus Himself, consistently 'gives thanks' before the meals He serves in Luke's Gospel:

"*And he [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks [eucharisto], and broke it, and gave it to them, saying "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.*"
Luke 22:19

1. Table Grace

"*For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving (eucharistia),* [5]*because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*"
1 Timothy 4:4-5

The Word of God:

What does 'Word of God' mean here? In Paul's writings, the 'Word of God' generally refers to the message of the Gospel – to Jesus' unique identity, His life, His death, His resurrection and now His reign as the world's true King.

Thanksgiving:

It's living, and eating, as a worship-filled response to all Jesus has done to save and heal and transform us. It's a recognition that Jesus' work on the cross was about reconciling all things to Himself.

Prayer:
We take a few moments before dinner in this simple but profound recognition of the good gift God gives - meal by meal:

'Our good God – Father, Son, and Spirit – we thank You for this meal. Help us in the tasting to recognize Your good gifts to us. Through it, strengthen us for the task of loving You and our neighbour, all for Your glory and our joy. Amen.'

2. Slowness

"IMITATION CITRUS FLAVORED DIETARY ARTIFICIALLY SWEETENED CARBONATED BEVERAGE. That, I submit, is not a label; it is an incantation. Someday, it should be set to a suitable plainsong tune or Anglican chant."[4]

There is something about the highly processed, packaged food approach to life that is revealing of something more insidious simply than ingredients. It's a pace of life, and a way of being, that loses touch with reality.

What's the biggest barrier to appreciating the grace of the table? It's not about economics. You can always eat better and cheaper at home if you shop well. The issue, dare I say, the enemy, is speed.

Robert Capon's take a whole chapter to describe cutting an onion, and invites us to spend an hour with an onion in the process. Why? As he says:

"Man's real work is to look at the things of the world and to love them for what they are. That is, after all, what God does, and man was not made in God's image for

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3 John Dickson, Undeceptions Podcast, Episode 47, Everyday Sacred podcast https://undeceptions.com/podcast/everyday-sacred/

4 Capon, Robert Farrar. (n.d.). The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection. https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/151959-the-supper-of-the-lamb-a-culinary-reflectio

nothing. The fruits of his attention can be seen in all the arts, crafts, and sciences. It can cost him time and effort, but it pays handsomely. If an hour can be spent on one onion, think how much regarding it took on the part of that old Russian who looked at onions and church spires long enough to come up with St. Basil's Cathedral."[4]

Learning to cook is about learning to really see - to connect to our role as being made in the image of God.

"I won't push my life to be so fast that I can't spend some hours wasted on preparing food properly. It is a spiritual discipline for me." – Ricky Stephen

a. Slow down and take the time to cook some proper meals each week. Doesn't have to be fancy or expensive, just a chance to slow down, pay attention and give thanks to God.

b. Rearrange your schedule for 'Table Time.'

c. Include your kids in cooking from very young.

d. Invite others to the table with you.

3. Moderation (But not too much)

Moderation is a principle we see all through the scriptures, and Proverbs in particular:

"*If you find honey, eat just enough – too much of it and you will vomit.*"

Proverbs 25:16:

III. The Perfect Meal and the World to Come

Michael Pollan traces his quest to grow and gather, hunt and forage all the elements to make a meal – his *perfect meal*:

"Perfect?! A dangerous boast, you must be thinking….I burned, just slightly, the crust of the cherry galette, the morel [mushrooms] were a little gritty…So, I seriously doubt that any of my guests…would declare this a "great meal." But for me it was the perfect meal, which is not quite the same thing."[5]

Pollan is not writing from a Christian perspective. How could someone even begin to talk along those lines?

We are able to glimpse, even through the brokenness of the world, something of the world that is to come – the new creation that is on the horizon. And we, as Christians, know that means resurrection, means God's heavenly city coming down to dwell with us, the healing of the nations - that's God's big dream. I think Pollan is connecting with something he's made for and doesn't even know it.

Every form of beauty, every art, every 'love,' is straining its neck toward that fullness of what God made us for. Capon puts it like this:

"To be sure, food keeps us alive, but that is only its smallest and most temporary work. Its eternal purpose is to furnish our sensibilities against the day when we shall sit down at the heavenly banquet and see how gracious the Lord is. Nourishment is necessary only for a while; what we shall need forever is taste."[4]

Maybe it's why the Psalmist uses the metaphor for eating to describe experiencing God's presence: "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*" – Psalm 34:8a

When Jesus, at the Last Supper, says that He won't 'eat' of the bread, or 'drink wine' again until He comes in His kingdom, we remember that every bite, and every sip is one bite and sip closer to the world reborn, remade, fit for eating and drinking, and laughing and living.

For as we read in Revelation 19:9:

"*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*"

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5 Pollan, Michael. (11 Apr 2006). The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals. Penguin Books.

Open Up

Describe the best meal, (or one of the best meals) of your life. What made it so good, so special?

Dig In

1. We started the message with the thought experiment (and a quote from Proverbs 24:13): What kind of God would make a world with honey? And make us with the taste buds to enjoy it? How would you answer that question?

2. Read 1 Timothy 3:14-4:5. The false teaching Paul addresses here seems to include the denial of the goodness of God's creation, and the implication it has for what we eat. Paul highlights the role of "thanksgiving" as well as the function of "the word of God" and "prayer" in the process of consecrating God's good gifts of food.

   a. Why do you think thanksgiving – while remembering God's words about his good world, and expressed in prayer – is such a key part of our interaction with food?
   b. What role does thanksgiving and prayer have in your approach to food? How might you want to develop this further?

3. Many people in our community seem to have a good handle on enjoying food. Many would also have a good sense of what the gospel is and the implications for many facets of life. But my guess is that for many, it may be somewhat of a new concept to draw a clear, bible-based line between our enjoyment of cooking and eating and the spiritual life.

   What are your initial thoughts or feelings about highlighting the goodness of food as a way of pointing out the goodness of God? (i.e., "never thought of it before," or "I sensed this but couldn't quite put my finger on how to think about it", or "Yes! This is something I'm really passionate about – here's why!", or "This just sounds all wrong to me, isn't Christianity really about preparing us for the next life?")

4. What is it about enjoying a carefully prepared meal (even if it's not expensive or extravagant food) with others that's so special?

5. Mission and hospitality were deeply connected in the ancient church. Why might evangelistic mission (sharing the love and news of Jesus with others) and hospitality still be important today?

Prayer.

Take time to give thanks to God for the goodness of creation, especially the place of food in sustaining us and bringing joy to our hearts. Lift up any prayer concerns from your group. Spend some time praying for our community, that we would reach our neighbours with the news of Jesus – maybe through setting the table and inviting them over.