

Meals, Hospitality, and Public Reading of Scripture

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The Grace and Mercy Foundation



Public
Reading of
Scripture

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Introduction

Sharing a meal together has a sacred quality. Strangers become friends, walls are brought down, and conversations flow around the table. From the very beginning of Scripture to the very end, God uses meals to mark His presence, fulfill His promises, and knit His people together. Shared meals, when paired with the public reading of Scripture, go far beyond merely eating together. They help build and hold a community of God. It's not just about putting food on the table but about offering genuine hospitality and care. When practiced intentionally, sharing meals nurtures relationships and strengthens bonds. It's also a great way to welcome newcomers and help them assimilate naturally.

Eugene Peterson, in his book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, offers insights into meals and hospitality. He writes:

Hospitality and meals are complex acts that require attention to detail and involve persons who are for the most part named. Personal give-and-take is integral to whatever is going on. There are no abstractions in hospitality—particular persons are involved, beds have to be made, parsnips peeled, corn shucked, coffee brewed. And out of these irreducible particulars, organic and relational metaphors and similes flourish.¹

Peterson's point is simple and challenging. The value of shared meals through hospitality is a concrete practice that forms real community. That's why Public Reading of Scripture (PRS) gatherings should make room for shared mealtimes or at least for coffee and snacks. Food opens the door to informal conversation, and conversation opens the door to deeper friendships. This is where those with the gift of hospitality can shine, creating spaces where people feel seen and valued.

PRS Gatherings as Kingdom Tables

For those who believe, every meal is a sign of the future feast. Christian worship includes special meals like the Lord's Supper, which remind us of Christ's death, resurrection, and return. They provide believers with nourishment that gives them hope and allows God's mercy to heal and strengthen them.

The table of Jesus is like this one because it welcomes friends, strangers, and people in need, and eating with gratitude. "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8) is not just a personal invitation; it's a communal calling to practice Kingdom hospitality.

The Psalms picture God's care as a rich, joyful

feast:

“How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.” (Psalm 36:7-8, emphasis added)

“...who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:5, emphasis added)

“Some wandered in desert wastes... hungry and thirsty...

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them...

Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love...

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” (Psalm 107:4-9, emphasis added)²

These passages set the scene of covenant hospitality at the Kingdom Table, an abundance where God’s presence satisfies our longing and renews His people. The psalmist repeatedly shows a pattern: people cry out, God delivers, and the community gives thanks. The Kingdom Table becomes the gathering place for this testimony and renewal.

PRS gatherings thrive when hospitality is intentional and heartfelt. Sharing a meal is not an obligation but a privilege that strengthens relationships and builds trust. It mirrors the life of the early church. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus told Peter (John 21:17). These words are still a call to action today. They remind us that spiritual and physical nourishment are interconnected.

A Biblical Pattern of the Table

The Bible reveals that eating is about more than just a biological necessity. It is linked to memory and relationships and can even be a meeting with the divine. The Bible portrays the table as a place

of grace, community, and the presence of God. Examples in Scripture are found from ancient covenant feasts to Jesus's transformation of meals with both friends and sinners.

Turning points in the biblical story often happen around tables. In the Old Testament, Israel's identity was shaped at various feasts, covenants were sealed with bread and wine, and a meal with a specific diet served as a way of living a holy life. Additionally, eating was about God showing His provision and goodwill toward His people in the wilderness. Then, in the New Testament, Jesus declared Himself to be the Bread of Life and explained the significance of the Last Supper. From Creation to Christ's return, Scripture shows the development of eating and God's plan for redemption.

Here are some examples of eating throughout Scripture:

- The forbidden fruit in Eden (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-7)

- Sealing the covenant (Genesis 26; 31)
- Manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16)
- The covenant meals of Israel's worship (Exodus 24)
- Eating habits of Israel (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14)
- Jesus's radical table fellowship (Mark 2:13-17; Luke 19:1-10)
- Jesus as the Bread of Life (John 6:35)
- The Kingdom of God and feasting (Luke 14:15-24)
- The Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20)
- Prophetic vision (Isaiah 25:6-9; Luke 13:29)
- Resurrection meals (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:1-19)
- The marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9)

These eating incidents occur in many places and are closely linked to God's plan. This perspective

encourages us to view meals not just as functional routines but as opportunities for Kingdom connection and community.

The following section will review biblical reflections about the importance of meals as part of covenant-making and building God's community.

The Spiritual Significance of Eating and Feasting in Old Testament Narratives

Sealing the Covenant

In the ancient Near Eastern context, sharing a meal wasn't just casual fellowship; it was a serious act with legal and spiritual significance. Feasting could make agreements and bring peace between groups. In Genesis 26:28-31, we see a biblical example of a meal used to seal a covenant:

They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace.

You are now the blessed of the LORD.” So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. (Genesis 26:28-31)

King Abimelech went to see Isaac at Beersheba after a time of fighting over land to ask for peace. Abimelech offered Isaac a nonaggression contract because he knew that God was on his side. Isaac got up a feast, and they all ate and drank together. In the ancient Near East, this was a way to confirm a covenant. The next morning, they made the oath official and said goodbye in peace. This scene shows how eating together helped people make up with each other. It was a time to turn dispute into trust and to show a pattern seen throughout the Bible.

In Genesis 31, we see another clear example of a covenant ceremony sealed with a meal shared by Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban:

Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country. (Genesis 31:51-54)

Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, ended years of mistrust. After confronting Jacob in Gilead, Laban suggests setting up a heap of stones as a physical marker of their agreement. They name it *Galeed* (“heap of witness” Genesis 31:48) and *Mizpah* (“watchtower” Genesis 31:49), with both acknowledging God as judge between them. Jacob offers a sacrifice and invites his relatives to eat bread, and they share a meal together in the hill country. This meal, following the covenant

oath, served as a ceremony to turn past conflict into lasting peace.

In both stories, eating together was a sacred act that brought people back together and reminded them of their pledges to each other. These incidents show a broader pattern in the Bible: meals typically symbolize peace, trust, and the presence of God in human relationships.

Receiving the Law and Eating

One of the most dramatic covenant meals in Scripture happened at Mount Sinai. After God gave the Law through Moses and Israel affirmed the covenant, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders ascended the mountain. Exodus 24 tells us that they beheld God, and they ate and drank:

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And

Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy 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.* (Exodus 24:7-11 emphasis added)

It was one of the most stunning moments in the Old Testament: God didn't just give laws; He invited His people into a relationship. People received the law and responded with consent to be obedient, then Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the covenant, formally sealing the agreement. Then, they ate and drank in the presence of God. This meal was not accidental. It sealed the covenant. In this liturgical moment, God shared a table with His people.

Peter Enns, in his commentary on Exodus, explains how this event foreshadows the Lord's Supper as part of the covenant celebration, highlighting the themes of blood covering the sins of people and of sharing a meal.³

Sabbath at the Table: Passover, Manna, and the Gift of Rest

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Israel received the Law at Mount Sinai. The fourth

commandment tells them to keep the Sabbath holy by stopping ordinary work (Exod 20:8-11; cf. Deut 5:12-15). That raises a practical question: if no one works, what do they eat?

Scripture gave two answers. First, during festival days, there was a narrow allowance: basic food preparation was permitted so people could eat.

On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. (Exod 12:16).

Second, God provided bread from heaven each morning and forbade the hoarding of it. But on the sixth day, He gave a double portion. The extra did not spoil, and on the seventh day, there was nothing to gather. So the people stayed home and rested.

See! *The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you*

bread for two days. *Remain each of you in his place*; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." So the *people rested* on the seventh day. (Exod 16:29-30 emphasis added).

Rest was a gift God supported by providing beforehand.

To help future generations remember this lesson, Moses ordered that one omer of manna be kept in a jar "before the testimony." Aaron placed it there as the LORD commanded. Israel ate manna for forty years, until they reached a land where they could settle. The preserved jar taught them that they live by what God gives, not by what they can produce.

Passover conveys the same truth every year through a meal. Families ate lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs under God's protection. The following week, the Feast of Unleavened Bread started and ended with a "holy assembly" when no ordinary work was done. The food

itself teaches: unleavened bread is "the bread of affliction," eaten to remember the day of rescue from Egypt.

You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt (Deut 16:3).

Families practice their identities and welcome new members of the covenant at this table. Manna and Passover both reveal how the Sabbath works at the table: God gives ahead of time; His people stop everything to assemble; and the community consumes what He has already given. Not only is not only about ceasing work but also about receiving God's gifts with thanks. Week by week, you learn that life is given, not earned.

Eating as Worship

Continuing in the Old Testament, eating was central to Israel's worship. The fellowship offering (Leviticus 3:1), or peace offering (Leviticus 7:11-18), stands out as a great example. These sacrifices were shared. Part was burned on the altar for the Lord, part was given to the priests, and part was eaten by the worshiper and their family in God's sanctuary. This was not just a symbolic gesture: It was a literal meal with God. The prophet Malachi even calls the altar "the Lord's table" (Malachi 1:12), which alludes to the relational nature of worship.

But you profane it when you say that the
Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is,
its food, may be despised. (Malachi 1:12)

The rhythm of Israel's year was shaped by communal meals in the Lord's presence at various festivals. For example, Passover meals, with lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, remember how God saved the Israelites from Egypt. It was a covenant meal that retold the story of

redemption and linked each person to what God had done to save them.

The Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) celebrated the harvest and gave thanks to God as the provider of all sustenance. The Feast of Booths (Sukkot) was a weeklong celebration of hospitality that honored the journey through the wilderness. It welcomed not only relatives and servants but also foreigners.

These meals were holy because they were eaten "before the Lord" at the pace He chose (Leviticus 3:1), turning food into communion and nourishment into a sacrament.

If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering,
if he offers an animal from the herd, male
or female, he shall offer it without blemish
before the LORD. (Leviticus 3:1)

Particular Eating as the Distinction and Identity of a New Nation

The instructions about sacrifices and eating extend far beyond seasonal festivals. As a newly formed

nation, Israel received dietary laws that impacted their everyday choices. Laws pertaining to what to eat and what to avoid were acts of obedience in a covenant relationship with God.

The dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 were not health codes but constant reminders of God's call: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). Distinctions between clean and unclean foods marked Israel as set apart. Certain prohibitions carried clear symbolism: Avoiding and handling blood honored the sacredness of life, removing leaven at Passover represented purging sin, and other bans rejected pagan practices of the time.

These laws formed a visible boundary between Israel and the pagan nations. One example is Daniel's refusal of the king's food in Babylon, a daily act of covenant loyalty. And these practices were kept throughout generations, as these laws are distinct in shaping a national identity as the people of God. People are commanded to obey, and that God commands it is a sole and sufficient reason for obeying them.⁴

The Spiritual Significance of Eating and Feasting in New Testament Narratives

The Old Testament's table themes reach their climax in Jesus in the New Testament narratives. He calls Himself the Bread of Life, feeds multitudes as a sign of God's abundance, and shares table fellowship with "outsiders" to display welcoming grace. His parables of banquets picture the Kingdom's invitation, and the Last Supper reinterprets Passover around His saving work. Even the risen Christ is known "in the breaking of bread," pointing forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This section explores how New Testament meals reveal identity, covenant, mission, and hope.

Jesus and His Food

But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word[a] that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Matthew 4:4 comes from Jesus' reply when the devil tempted him to turn stones into bread. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses reminds Israel that God let them hunger in the desert and then fed them manna to teach them a lesson: people don't just live on food but also on what God says and gives them. Jesus shows that he won't use his power for himself or go against the Father's wishes, even when he is famished,

by quoting this passage. Chooses dependence over self-reliance, which is something that Israel often fails to do. The point is clear and practical: bread matters, but God's word, promises, and commands are what keep us alive. Another story in the Gospel of John shows Jesus teaching about what he considers food for him. This passage picks up just as Jesus finishes the conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. While the woman goes to report about him to her townsmen, the disciples come back with food:

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4:31-34)

At this point, Jesus moves from the matter of physical hunger to spiritual calling. Jesus has been fed by doing the will of God, part of which at

least is revealing himself to these Samaritans and offering them life everlasting. This conversation demonstrates that God's work comes before any self-serving indulgence and that contentment finds fulfillment not in consumption but in doing the will of God.

Jesus at the Table

In John 6:35, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." He makes this important "I am" statement shortly after feeding the five thousand (John 6:1-15), which was a miraculous act using only five loaves and two fish. When the crowd follows him the next day, hoping for more food, Jesus redirects their focus: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (John 6:27a).

Jesus uses the crowd's physical hunger to show them an even deeper spiritual truth that only he can satisfy. In calling himself the Bread of Life in

verse 35, he connects Himself to the manna given to Israel in the desert. But while the manna was an immediate form of nourishment, it was only temporary. Jesus gives something more: eternal sustenance.

In this way, Jesus broadens the meaning of food to more than just a physical act of replenishment: Eating becomes one that involves the spirit, pointing to life-giving relationships between His people and God, where He is always present.

Radical Hospitality: Jesus Eating with Sinners

By the first century, meals in Jewish culture had become even more charged with religious meaning. Pharisaic tradition saw the home table as an extension of the temple, with stringent rules about who could come and who couldn't. Being at the table meant you were accepted, whereas not being there meant you were an outcast.

Jesus entered this world and radically redefined the table. He ate with religious authorities such

as the Pharisees, but he used those occasions to question their focus on ritual cleanliness over inner righteousness (Luke 11:37-41). He also disregarded the unbroken social rules by eating with tax collectors, sinners, and the marginalized people (Mark 2:13-17; Luke 19:1-10).

While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you. (Luke 11:37-41).

He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw

Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:13-17)

In Mark 2:13-17, Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector who is despised in Jewish society for working with Rome and is frequently linked to corruption. Levi responds immediately and invites Jesus and his followers to dine with him by throwing a feast in his house. This gathering scandalizes the

Pharisees, who see table fellowship as a sign of acceptance. In the eyes of the religious leaders, Jesus's willingness to share a meal with moral and social outcasts blurred the lines of holiness. Jesus's example becomes a living parable of the gospel—a place of welcome and restoration. Jesus's table was where the unworthy are invited into fellowship with God.

James A. Brooks, in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, notes:

In Semitic society, table fellowship was one of the most intimate expressions of friendship. For this reason, the religious leaders could not understand how Jesus could be a religious person and dine with 'bad characters' . . . The love of Jesus for all kinds of sinners, his initiative in seeking them, his giving them full acceptance, and his desire to have close fellowship with them was a new and revolutionary element in religion and morals.⁵

In Luke 19:1-10, another shocking event is recorded with a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus.

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."
(Luke 5-7)

While in Jericho, Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, who had grown rich through a profession widely despised for its association with greed and betrayal of fellow Jews. Again, to stay in someone's home meant sharing their table, a public sign of acceptance and fellowship. As Jesus went with Zacchaeus, the religious leaders were shocked. Yet during this meal, Zacchaeus experiences a radical transformation. In this moment, the eating itself is the ground on which grace is extended, repentance takes root, and Jesus's mission is

seen. Jesus's guest list was a living parable of the Kingdom's inclusivity.

The Kingdom of God and Feasting

When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married

a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’” (Luke 14:15-24)

Scripture contains many examples of depicting the Kingdom of God as a feast—an abundant place of provision, joy, and genuine fellowship in God’s presence. One example appears in Luke 14:15–24, where Jesus teaches the parable of the great banquet.

Receiving an invitation to a banquet was a high honor and signified acceptance into a particular

community or relationship. Luke 14’s feast imagery made clear that salvation is more than just having legal standing before God; it’s also about being accepted into his fellowship and living in a community that has been restored.

Joel Green, a New Testament scholar, explains:

[Jesus] has invited those who cannot repay him, from whom he has nothing to gain by way of enhanced prestige or monetary enhancement. He has participated in the creation of a new social order in which the boundaries that normally exclude people like himself from people like them are rendered inconsequential. He initiates a new community grounded in gracious and uncalculating hospitality.⁶

In God’s Kingdom, salvation is like being welcomed into a loving community where everyone is accepted, walls between people are gone, and kindness is shared freely.

The Bread of Life and the Last Supper

The seder meal is a ritual feast that is the centerpiece of the Jewish holiday of Passover, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. It is a highly structured meal with symbolic foods and readings from the “Haggadah,” a portion of recited text from the narrative of the Exodus. When Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples before the crucifixion, it was a symbolic meal. Just as the Jews commemorated God delivering them from slavery in Egypt, the followers of Jesus are to remember the work of Christ, who redeemed His people from the slavery of sin:

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:19-20)

At this moment, Jesus takes a normal meal and

turns it into a ceremony for a new covenant. The bread and wine become tokens of his redeeming work, as opposed to mere nourishment. Jesus gives his instructions to eat and drink in His memory within the context of the most fundamental human activity: eating. And the symbolism is rich and poignant:

- The cup represents his blood, which was used to secure the forgiveness of sins and the establishment of a new covenant.
- The bread signifies his body, which was broken as a sacrifice for our salvation.

The table becomes a sacred place where God’s grace is received. In participating in the Lord’s Supper, believers hold up the redemption narrative to that community and act it out.

Prophetic Vision

In Luke 13:29, Jesus says, “And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.”

This dramatic remark is based on the Jewish belief in a future messianic feast, when God's rule will be fully established and His people will celebrate in His presence.

To "recline at table" was to share in intimate and joyful communion. Jesus is saying that the Kingdom feast will be for people not only from Israel but also from all across the world. Some religious leaders thought that only those who are ethnically or religiously qualified would have a seat. Jesus clarified the table qualification.

The eating imagery points to the Kingdom as a place of abundance, welcome, and fellowship with God, echoing Old Testament visions set in Isaiah 25:6-9:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will
make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged
wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine
well refined.

And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
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, this is 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."

Isaiah shows a prophetic vision of the future messianic banquet, portraying the Kingdom of God as a lavish feast of joy, victory, and fellowship. This feast is the moment when God removes "the covering that is cast over all people, the veil that is spread over all nations" (v. 7), an image for the power of death and separation from Him. In a stunning promise, God "will swallow up death forever" and "wipe away tears from all faces,"

erasing grief and disgrace from His people. The passage concludes with a cry of worship.

This banquet scene becomes a foundational backdrop for Jesus's own Kingdom teaching, where eating together symbolizes restoration and eternal joy and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the New Testament's vision of the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure"—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And 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."

(Revelation 19:6-9)

This Revelation passage describes the joyful end of God's salvation plan. The ultimate fulfillment of a great feast in heaven is the celebration of Jesus' union with His people, the Church. The picture is based on Jewish wedding customs and the Bible's pattern of a special meal that seals a covenant. In ancient times, a wedding feast was the most joyful and grand occasion in the community. It showed love, dedication, and the combining of two lives. The Church is the bride in this scene. She is wearing bright, clean linen, which speaks of the righteousness that God has given her through Christ.

Craig Keener, a New Testament scholar, notes:

[This passage] promises deeper intimacy with God in a permanent union like marriage (19:7). Insofar as Jesus' meals with sinners were a foretaste of the messianic banquet, those who fellowship with him now (cf. 3:20) experience a foretaste of their future blessing.⁷

Feasting is a key part of this picture. It shows the abundance and joy of being with God. In Isaiah 25:6-9, God prepares a lavish feast for everyone. In Jesus's teaching that God's Kingdom is like a wedding feast (Matthew 22; Luke 14), this is not just a symbol; it is a real picture of intimacy and fellowship. In this final celebration, God and His people will sit together, with no one between them. They will rejoice that God has won over death, sin, and all other obstacles. The righteous actions of God's people are like the fine clothes of the bride, preparing us for this future closeness with Him. The feast is the consummation of the redemption story. Every covenant meal, from the Passover in Egypt to the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room, points to this eternal table. At the

marriage supper, eating becomes the way that God's people not only remember what He did to save them but also fully enter into His delight forever.

The Symbols of the Church's Table

After his resurrection, Jesus continued to reveal Himself in the breaking of bread. On the road to Emmaus, two men initially didn't recognize him, but after much conversation, at the table for the evening meal, as Jesus broke bread with them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him (Luke 24:30-31).

In Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to disciples who were troubled and doubtful. As the disciples recognized the resurrected Jesus, they were filled with joy and marveled. In the midst of this, Jesus took time to prepare a broiled fish before them (Luke 24:42-43).

By the Sea of Galilee, Jesus used the fish that the disciples had caught and grilled it over a charcoal

fire. He literally cooked breakfast for His disciples. Then, after they finished breakfast, Jesus restored Peter and commissioned him to “feed my sheep” (John 21:1-19).

Shabbat, Acts 2 and Implications for Today

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

The early church patterned its life on these practices, devoting itself to “the breaking of bread”. The meals were the expression of eucharistia or “thanksgiving” and “blessing,” and “the breaking of bread” was remembered as a central practice of the earliest Jerusalem community. These meals were called “agape meals.”⁸ That community was formed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and included many Jews and proselytes already in Jerusalem for the feast. Shared meals were common during Jewish festivals and Shabbat, but in Acts 2, they become both a continuance

of Israel's Shabbat rhythms and a new, Spirit-filled emblem of a renewed people, Jews and non-Jews who share their time, homes, assets, and food in Jesus' name. So Acts 2:42 shows the new family of God that the Spirit brought together.

“Here are my mother and my brothers!
For whoever does the will of my Father in
heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
(Matthew 12:49-50; cf. Mark 3:31-35)

In the Gospels, Jesus redefined the meaning of family by moving loyalty from lineage to obedience. In a culture where ethnic family lines gave people a sense of identity and security, he formed a new family based on hearing and doing God's word. The first Christians experienced this spiritual family life by calling each other brothers and sisters, sharing what they had, and eating together. In short, family is the community of those who do God's will, with Jesus at its center. And doing God's will begins with hearing God's word together.

Jewish families still observe Shabbat meals rooted in God's command: gathering at home, lighting candles, offering blessings over wine, sharing two loaves of challah, and reciting Scripture. It's an intentional time set aside to disconnect from worldly cares and focus on what truly matters.

This long-standing tradition offers us a glimpse into the life Jesus likely lived at the table. The early church sustained this rhythm and expanded it by welcoming people from across the nations. Jews and Gentiles, men, women, and children, slaves and masters all sat at the same table as one family in Christ. The shared table marked a radical shift from the rigid hierarchies of the Greco-Roman world. It showed that people were now defined by their relationship with Jesus, not by their status.

This remains a powerful model today: eating together, listening to Scripture together, and becoming family in Christ, a community guided by God's word and shaped by it around the table.

Hospitality through shared meals and the hearing of God's Word were never meant to be separate. A meal opens hearts, makes room for real relationships, and prepares the community to hear the Word with an open mind. The table and the Scripture are both gifts from God that help us live out His Kingdom.

According to Peterson:

The meal remains as a major condition in which we can, if we will, stay in close touch with history and participate in the eucharistic dynamics of salvation in history. But given the widespread and insidious deconstruction of hospitality, we need to be more deliberate and intentional about it.⁹

Peterson's insight is practical. In an age of hurry, isolation, and transactional culture, it encourages believers to slow down, listen to others, and serve others through hospitality. Christ is always present when people listen to the Scripture together. So, hospitality is more than just a warm smile or

good food; it is the intentional act of serving and welcoming God's people. The table is a place where trust is built, and friends are made since ancient times. God welcomes the outsider and brings rest to the weary. This is what extending hospitality at PRS meetings is all about. Every seat at the table becomes an opportunity to mirror the grace of Christ, who welcomed us into his fellowship when we had nothing to offer.

In a culture marked by busy schedules, eating together and listening to God's Word are both countercultural and transformative. In participating in these biblical practices, we offer a foretaste of the great banquet to come, when all God's people will gather at His table, feast on His goodness, and hear His voice into eternity.

Isaiah wrote about this, presenting God's heart toward His people.

55 ¹"Come, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
 and he who has no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me;
 hear, that your soul may live;
 and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
 a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,

and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
 because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,

for he has glorified you.
⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found;
 call upon him while he is near;
⁷ let the wicked forsake his way,
 and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
 let him return to the LORD, that he may have
 compassion on him,
 and to our God, for he will abundantly
 pardon.
⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways, declares
 the LORD.
⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the
 earth,
 so are my ways higher than your ways
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.
¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down
 from heaven
 and do not return there but water the
 earth,
 making it bring forth and sprout,
 giving seed to the sower and bread to the
 eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my
 mouth;
 it shall not return to me empty,
 but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
 and shall succeed in the thing for which I
 sent it.
¹² "For you shall go out in joy
 and be led forth in peace;
 the mountains and the hills before you
 shall break forth into singing,
 and all the trees of the field shall clap their
 hands.
¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the
 cypress;
 instead of the brier shall come up the
 myrtle;
 and it shall make a name for the LORD,
 an everlasting sign that shall not be cut
 off."

This chapter is God's open invitation to a free covenant feast: "Come, everyone who thirsts... buy without money." (v. 1) It is a picture of grace provided to exiled Judah near the end of the Baby-

lonian captivity. The chapter comes after Isaiah 53, which discusses the Servant's atoning act, and Isaiah 54, which discusses Zion's restoration. Jewish and Christian historians disagree over who "the Servant" is and what "Zion" means, but the chapter ends with God's promise: "you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you" (v. 5). The right thing to do is to "seek the LORD" (v. 6) and "return to the LORD" (v. 7), then you can be sure that "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty" (v. 11).

All of this unfolds in the setting of a banquet: "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food" (v. 2). The outcome is a new exodus, God's saving work, marked by joy and peace, with creation itself joining the celebration: "the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (v. 12).

Through public reading of Scripture, we learn to feast together. It's joining Isaiah's call to 'listen

diligently' as one body and receiving the Word that nourishes. And when that shared listening is joined to the shared table, hearing becomes tasting. It's an invitation to 'come, eat, and live.'

Endnotes

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 215.

² All Scripture is taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV Text Edition: 2025.

³ Peter Enns, *Exodus, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 496.

⁴ Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 197.

⁵ James A. Brooks, *Mark, vol. 23 of The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 62–63.

⁶ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 562.

⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation, The NIV Application Commentary, vol. 20* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 459.

⁸ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 33–45.



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