

Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

Food and Clothing

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Luke 12.13-41

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." ¹⁶ And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. ¹⁷ "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" ²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' ²¹ "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

²² And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. ²³ "For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! ²⁵ "And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? ²⁶ "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? ²⁷ "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ²⁸ "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! ²⁹ "And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹ "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. ³³ "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. ³⁴ "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ "Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. ³⁶ "Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ "Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. ³⁸ "Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. ³⁹ "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ "You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?"

We've been looking at the Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and we've paid special attention THIS season to food and meals and parties in the life and the teaching of Jesus Christ.

There are a number of food illustrations in today's text... The chapter began with a warning, "Beware the leaven of hypocrisy..." that's yeast and it's to say that just as yeast permeates dough and spreads very quickly through the dough, SO hypocrisy spreads and saturates whole communities...quickly!

Then there's a story of a food-producer and his bumper crop and food storage ("gotta build bigger silos/storage towers")... Then Jesus says, "don't worry about food or clothing" – these are used as figures of speech for stuff you need, basic necessities – "don't worry about that stuff." And then a final reference to servants waiting for their employer to return from a trip (wedding) so they can greet him with FOOD... and he is so happy that they cared for him in this way, that HE insists on serving THEM (big plot twist that would have gotten a laugh when Jesus told it because it would NEVER happen in that very upstairs/downstairs culture – way more segregated than even Downton Abbey!)

And the point of all three paragraphs (plus Peter's little question at the end) THE POINT is ...money. If you're visiting us today, maybe you've heard that the church ALWAYS talks about money, well, we DON'T always...or even often...but Jesus Christ DID talk about it. It's a part of life in the real world and the only way to avoid it is to be an escapist.

Everyone talks a lot about money. It's on all of our minds: April 15th is just around the corner, your taxes, your investments, your kids' educations, your coupons/rebates, your paycheck, your savings ("What savings?!")... your bills...what you can afford... and the price of gasoline...student loans... summer vacation... "to rent or to own?"...your budget, charitable giving, retirement, bills. We're all thinking about it...MAYBE we can't stop thinking about money...maybe can't sleep.

THIS particular discussion of money and possessions was started by an interrupter. Jesus wasn't talking about it...AND this guy busts in as if to say, "Hey, thanks Rabbi, for talking about all this great spiritual stuff but I have a REAL-LIFE issue and when you hear it, I'm sure you'll see how urgent it is...and then we can get back to all the pretty spiritual stuff. THE ISSUE IS MONEY – tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me!" And Jesus, does, in fact, change topics and DOES deal with this guy's intrusion...though NOT the way the man wanted...but IT becomes a big topic.

So, since this interrupter brought it up...and since Jesus Christ was willing to talk about it, LET'S DO: 1) Worrying about MONEY 2) Reasons NOT to 3) What does this NOT worrying about money look like?

It doesn't seem like an unreasonable request; imagine if YOU were cut out of the family inheritance! But the man does come across like a bit of a cry-baby ("Tell my brother to share!") – last week, btw, we heard, "Tell my sister to share".

But his interruption is an attempt to say that whatever Jesus Christ is saying CAN'T possibly be as important as THIS! And because the man is trying to reduce Him to a conflict-resolution-coach, Jesus immediately confronts him, "Man, who made me judge and divider over you?"

Then a BIG command... in fact the way it's worded makes it VERY big. The Greek tenses of both commands are ongoing, "Continue to BEWARE and continue to BE ON YOUR GUARD against...": two imperatives to be exercised continuously. "Beware and be on your guard against all forms of greed..." The idea is that greed takes all kinds of shapes and variations. It may disguise itself as being frugal or careful with money. It may look like extravagance and someone who buys a lot of stuff he can't afford but can also look the other way (some who really budgets and spends cautiously. And the idea IS that THIS SIN (greed), which we rarely NAME ACCURATELY in ourselves, is always on the prowl. Probably, if you are greedy, you don't know it. "Beware and be always on guard for every kind of greed."

Then the imperative is given reasoning, "Because life is not measured by how much you have..." and then it's illustrated with a story about food-production. There was a very successful farmer. His land was very fertile and the crop was so big that he had to make some decisions. So, he began to thank God and to seek God for wisdom; no; neither of those. (Romans 1.21-22)

Nor does he seem to consult other people. Proverbs chapter 12 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel." (15) But there's no mention of counsel, or relationship or God. The man is completely self-referential... you see it by the pronouns; it's actually ridiculous, "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."'

It's like he says "I – Me – Mine" so much that he can't even stand it and shifts to the second-person, calls himself, "Soul" ... "Soul, you have many goods"

I don't think talking to yourself means that you're insane, but (for what it's worth), it's always portrayed negatively in Luke's Gospel at least to this point. And this man who has separated himself from God and man, who is an island unto himself, he does slip into a most serious form of spiritual insanity and becomes convinced that he is the owner of his land, his crops (as if he made the clouds rain and the sun to shine); convinced that HE owns his own self (MY SOUL!) and that he owns, TIME itself: "Soul, you have laid up goods for many years to come!"

But it turns out that TIME doesn't belong to him, and his soul does not belong to him and the land, the sun, the rain all belong to God. And God has come to collect. Even the goods will go to someone else... some... bonehead... like the interrupter who said, "Tell my brother to share with me!"

Then the parable ends with a kind of reiteration of the original reasoning, first, "Life doesn't

consist in possessions” and now (at the end of the story), “SO is the man who amasses money for himself and is not rich toward God”.

And the topic unfolds in THAT pattern: first a kind of imperative or command and then a rationale or reason, often in a type of adage or proverb. So in the next paragraph, the command, “DO NOT WORRY about your life, what you eat or what you wear” and then the rationale, a saying, “LIFE IS MORE THAN FOOD AND THE BODY IS MORE THAN CLOTHING”.

And just like that joke that says, “DON’T THINK ABOUT A PINK ELEPHANT” and, of course, suddenly we can ONLY think of pink elephants...SO Jesus Christ says, “Don’t worry about money!” and we START worrying about money...

BUT He keeps pumping in all these reasons, all this wisdom, these wise and true sayings, “God cares for the birds and YOU are more valuable to Him than birds!”... “God governs the realm of nature so the flowers continue to bloom more resplendent than kings or queens!...and YOU ARE INFINITELY MORE VALUABLE TO GOD than these disposable shrubs!”
“Seek His REIGN over your life...seek His Kingdom...” – that’s the command/imperative...but then comes the immediate incentive “Because, in God’s reign, all else is supplied...all these lesser needs will be added to you!”

Again, “DO NOT BE AFRAID!” (uh oh, sounds like the pink elephant again!) but instantly the rationale, “Don’t be afraid because you are God’s little FLOCK and your Father, God, has chosen to gladly give you the Kingdom...He delights to reign over you!”

“Sell your possessions and give alms to the poor and mercy to the needy.” AND QUICKLY HE ATTACHES the reason, “Because, where you put your MONEY that’s where your heart goes...” Invest in mercy because that’s what you’ve known and experienced!

And then a final command in this section that SEEMS disconnected from the theme of money and worry and greed and that is in v. 35, “Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps lit... be like men who are waiting for their master...”

But here again, like a “one-two punch” immediately the reason, “Because this Master, YOUR Master will always OUTSERVE His own servants! He will so delight to find you waiting for Him that WHEN HE COMES AND FINDS YOU LONGING FOR APPEARANCE, He will INSIST that you sit down and that HE SERVE YOU!

"Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, the master will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them."

Next week, God willing, we'll see it...when at the Last Supper, Jesus Christ, finds His servants, His friends (as He calls them) waiting and HE HIMSELF rises from the Table, girds Himself with a towel and waits on them, washes their feet with water.

And then He will go, and will wash their VERY souls with His own blood. The Father has chosen gladly to give YOU the Kingdom, little flock, has chosen to reign over you by gladly giving His Son, YOUR MASTER, to wait on YOU. He has come from afar and will find you waiting for Him but will ALWAYS outserve YOU, always OUTGIVE you, "See from His Head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down; Did e'er such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a CROWN"

He is LORD of Nature...the birds...the flowers seem to trust Him and they never seem worried...BUT MORE than the LORD of Nature, HE IS LORD OF REDEMPTION... We don't have to talk to our souls, He is speaking and He is saying, "Fear not little flock, I will withhold nothing from YOU...I will give My own Beloved Soul, My Son for YOU..."

This is more than just a rationale or a proverb or logic, THIS IS A SHOCKING, appalling beauty than is meant to deeply convince us – our Master will always out-do us, our Father hold nothing back; He has chosen gladly to reign over us in Blood-Bought Mercy...so why don't we trust Him...who clothes the hills with flowers and clothes our nakedness AND shame with the beauty of Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Now what does it look like to NOT WORRY in this way? Well it's not like the Pink Elephant. It's NOT simply an attempt to be positive or to be in denial. We may have very real bills, medical needs, taxes, decisions to be made...sometimes we are victimized are cut out of the deal (or the inheritance)... and we are indeed called upon to give our money away ("sell your possessions and give to the poor") ...to give sacrificially...so HOW?

How do we live in this VERY complex world... with debit cards and Individual Retirement Accounts and insurance policies...and also aware of SO MUCH OF THE WORLD trying to get by with so little?

Well, Peter asks, "LORD does this apply to us or to someone else?" AND Jesus Christ doesn't even answer. I think it's a way of saying, "This applies to anyone who hears it." Greed is stalking us all. To have too much money and become self-referential can be a huge danger FOR ALL OF US – we are all privileged beyond what these original hearers could even imagine. AND all of us worry about aspects of life that really aren't of central importance. We can all fret about peripheral stuff...SO, yes, Peter and yes to us – this applies!

Second, under the themes that SEEM obvious, the idea of all kinds of greed and the idea of money and worry and alms-giving and the essence of real life being so much MORE than food and clothing and bills and paychecks...but there's a deeper theme found at the start and finish here and that is AWARENESS.

The interrupter was unaware that He was in the presence of "THE Judge and Arbitrator" – "who appointed Me judge and arbitrator over you?" The man would have said, "Well, uh, no one...but I...uh..." But that was the wrong answer.

The truth is God appointed Him (Heb 7.28) as Judge and Arbitrator over the entire human race. The interrupter was unaware. He thought he was in "small claims court" but in reality he was standing before the King of kings (The Judge and Divider of all people!)

The rich man too...was unaware and dull to the fact that God was blessing him. Romans ch. 1 puts it this way, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." (21)

The great symptom that comes with THIS kind of not worrying is the freedom of awareness that leads to deep security in the Lord of Nature and the Lord of redemption, the great symptom is awareness.

To go through the day unaware that grace is all around us...to think that my achievements are about "me...I...my...mine...myself...my crops...my barns...my grain...my years...my goods...MY SOUL..." – this is the fast track to spiritual insanity... "and their foolish heart was darkened."

And instead, to be dressed in readiness and lamps lit... the path to blessed self-forgetfulness and liberated generosity and peace is from being daily amazed at the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

It's stunning to see the Rocky Mountains and the sunrise over the Atlantic (the handiwork of the Lord of Nature!)...but to think that our Father loves us...gives His Son to serve these rebels... and that He, our Master, our substitute, our Redeemer will ALWAYS outlove, outserve, outgive us. This daily awareness is the engine for true generosity and peace.

"What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the awful curse for my soul, for my soul!"