

Satisfied

Matthew 14:13-21

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“That was the best meal I ever ate.” Those words have been running through my mind as I think about the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Don’t you think when all the feasting had finished, when the leftovers had been wrapped and put in to-go containers, when the crumbs were swept up, when those who saw the miracle of multiplication played out right before their eyes...five loaves and two fish...don’t you think that crowd of 5,000, including the stunned and amazed disciples who joined together to eat and eat and eat until they were all satisfied...don’t you think that crowd of 5,000, including those stunned and amazed and satiated disciples might have raised their voices in agreement to say, “That was the best meal I ever ate”?

Everything about that repast they all shared in that remote place lent itself to saying, “Best meal I ever ate.” Jesus snuck away with his disciples to a solitary place. But they were found out. The crowds came. A healing service broke out. Jesus saw the large crowd. He had compassion on that large crowd. He healed their sick. As that day wore to a weary end the exhausted disciples said, “Send the crowds away. It is getting late. Let them go find a village where they can buy themselves some food.” It is not that the disciple had low expectations about the prospects of having their best meal ever in that solitary, remote place now overrun with a huge crowd...it is not that the disciples had low expectations that day...they had no expectations. That is what makes the story so wonderful. The crowd must have felt the same way. Their stomachs grumbled with hunger. They took a quick survey and found all they had between the thousands of them were two fish and five loaves of bread...five loaves of bread and two little fish. Everyone arrived at the same conclusion. There will be no meal here in this remote place. It just ain’t gonna happen. But then...

- Jesus gives a mandate...bring me those loaves and those two, little fish. Jesus gives a mandate, and then...
- Jesus begins to create...we don’t know how...but Jesus begins to create.
- And all of the sudden the hopes of the crowd begin to elevate
- As they see the food multiply, they begin to salivate.
- And when Jesus finally called out, “Come and get it”, there was no time to hesitate.
- When the feasting was finally done, they all agreed their hunger he did satiate.
- And everyone agreed, “That’s the best meal I ever ate.”

“That was the best meal I ever ate.” A friend of mine in Houston walked up to me after a church supper. Patting his tummy with a satisfied look he said, “Wayne, that was the best meal I ever ate.” A few weeks later we had another supper. After supper, patting his tummy with a satisfied look he said, “Wayne, that was the best meal I ever ate.” I looked at him to be sure he said what he just said. Yes, I heard him right. I shrugged my shoulders. Not more than a month later, we had another church supper. Same man, same friend walked up to me, patting the same tummy, with the same satisfied look, and do you know what he said? The exact same thing! “Wayne, that was the best meal I ever ate.” This time his wife was with him. She saw the look on my face, and thankfully she stepped in to help clarify what was fast becoming a confusing situation. She said, “Oh, his last meal is always his best meal.” I nodded my head. Now I understood. Whatever meal this man had just consumed, that was his best meal ever.

Reading about what surely must have been the best meal ever in the bible, this feeding of 5,000, I believe I might be starting to think like my good friend who would pat his tummy and say with satisfaction, “That was the best meal I ever ate.” Today I am saying it as the smell of fried fish and freshly baked bread still lingers in the air. But not too long ago I was hanging out at the home of Matthew the tax collector, who had invited Jesus over to his house for a meal...and when he had Jesus all seated at the table, he whistled and invited a few other choice guests...in no time at all the house of Matthew was teeming with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus was sitting right in the middle of it nibbling on some fried chicken and potato salad and grinning from ear to ear. Licking your fingers after that delicious dinner, who wouldn't say, “That was the best meal I ever ate?”

Although...there was that time in Isaiah when they were giving out the finest food for free.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.” (Isaiah 55:1,2) Wine, milk, the richest fare and food that delights the soul. Sit down at that table and I guarantee you will be saying, “That was the best meal I ever ate!”

On the other hand, there was that day four lepers stumbled upon a bountiful banquet. This was back in the days of the prophet Elisha, and Israel's capitol city Samaria was under siege. A great famine ensued. The situation was so bleak four lepers, starving inside the capitol city decided to leave the safety and security of the city walls and hand themselves over to the enemies who were attacking them. What did they have to lose? They said, “If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die.” While they were heading out to face their fate, the enemy was scared away.

The enemy left without even clearing out their camp. The lepers from Samaria stumbled up an abandoned camp laden with treasures of silver and gold, and most importantly at that particular moment, filled with food and drink. “They ate and drank and carried away silver, gold and clothes...” Lugging all that treasure around as that bountiful feast settled in their stomachs, you know what they said? “Best meal...” Surprisingly, that is not what they said. They said, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.” Those lepers went back in Samaria, whistled to get the attention of the other starving citizens, and the whole town rushed out to share in the bounty. When everyone got to the table, then those four lepers said, “That was the best meal I ever ate.” I like that they knew it was not right to keep it to themselves. Sharing the feast, that makes it the best meal ever. (II Kings 7)

However, if we are going to talk about a meal during the time of Elisha, it is only fair that we also mention his mentor Elijah. During the time of Elisha four lepers found a seat at the table. Elijah helped one widow and her son. The widow was facing hard times. Elijah asked her to bring him a piece of bread. Surely the prophet did not ask too much, just a piece of bread. But the widow said, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” The prophet heard her sad tale and intervened. When the woman obeyed the prophet and brought him bread, her little store of flour and jug of oil started to miraculously multiply. We are told, “The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry.” Day after day after day the miracle was remembered as they ate an endless supply of bread. I’m sure as the miracle unfolded each day they said with amazement and awe, “That was the best meal I ever ate.” (I Kings 17)

And yet speaking of bread that appeared miraculously, day after day after day...the manna the Israelites gathered from the desert floor those forty years in the wilderness...that daily bread...I sure hope those Israelites never tired of saying, “That was the best meal I ever ate.”

Still, now that we are getting back to the Exodus, how about that night when Israel ate a hurried meal. That night their hearts raced with anticipation. God had told them to, “Eat meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.” That meal became known as the Passover. The Lord passed over all the houses of the Israelites. The doorframes of their houses had been covered with blood, marking them for safety and salvation. They ate that meal with their cloaks tucked into their belts, with their sandals on the feet. With staff in hand, they ate with haste. They were in a hurry. That night the Lord set them free from those centuries of slavery. They were on their way to the Promised Land. Roasted meat, bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. “That was the meal I ever ate.”

On the topic of Egypt, what do you think it was like when Joseph sat at table with his brothers? His brothers had thrown him into a pit and sold him into slavery. Those brothers were now in Egypt bowing down before Joseph and asking for bread. Who knows what was even on the menu that night, but when Joseph served a heaping course of forgiveness and reconciliation, followed by a hug fest complete with an extra helping of joyful tears, my guess is 12 reunited and reconciled brothers all went to bed that night saying, “That was the best meal I ever ate.”

Or maybe a woman might come forth and say, “Let me tell you about the best meal I ever ate.” Her name is Sarah. Sarah’s husband was Abraham, the father of our faith, the father of the Jewish faith. All these stories are part of the Jewish heritage, including the stories of Jesus. Listening to all this talk about best meal I ever ate Sarah decided she better make her case.

“I was sitting in the tent one hot day, when my husband Abraham burst into the tent. Some visitors had arrived and true to form, Abraham knew we must show hospitality to the strangers. ‘Quick,’ he said, ‘get a measure of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread.’ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant to prepare. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and the bread I made, and he served the three visitors. I nibbled on some of that meal inside the tent while the men talked together. There was nothing unusual about the meal, at least in terms of the food that was served. But as those three visitors made conversation with my husband, I heard those strangers say the strangest thing. They told Abraham that they would return next year, and I would have a baby by then. Did I tell you by this point in my life I had accepted that I would never have a child? I was old and well beyond the years of bearing a child. I was not being nosey, but who could help overhearing such an outrageous promise. The promise was so outrageous I laughed. A year later when a son was born to us in our old age, a son we named Isaac, which just so happens to mean laughter, I mean to tell you I looked back on the day those strangers stopped and I baked some bread for them and I say, ‘That was the best meal I ever ate.’”

All of these best meals I ever ate, who is right? How do you judge? Who is right? Everybody! Who is wrong? Nobody! Time and time again, when the people of God are fed by the hand of God, they are right in saying, “That was the best meal I ever ate.” Like my friend and his church suppers, the best meal I ever ate really means the last meal I ate. And today the last meal we ate is the feeding of the 5,000. That was the best meal I ever ate.

But goodness, if we can look back from the feeding of the 5,000, we can also look forward. When the prodigal son came home and the father prepared the fattened calf and with tears of joy and a hug for the ages, don’t you know with the last bit of that butchered beef a joyful father and forgiven son wiped their mouths and said,

“That was the best meal I ever ate.” Or Peter and Cornelius, a Jew and a Gentile sitting down eating together, in a house that was then filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues followed by an impromptu baptism service, who could doubt that when the dust cleared that a Jew and Gentile, now brothers in faith, said with reverent and awe-filled voices, “That was the best meal I ever ate.”

I heard my friend say it so many times I just shook my head. I didn’t understand how he could always say, “That was the best meal I ever ate.” Then his wife explained, “His last meal is his best meal.” I guess that just about sums up my sermon on the best meal I ever ate. The last meal is the best meal. And by last meal I am talking about is his last meal. I am talking about the last meal Jesus had. It was with his disciples. We call it *The Last Supper*.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread. He gave thanks and then he broke the bread saying, “This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” After the supper he took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood. As often as you drink it, remember me.” As hard as it is to swallow that the Son of God had to die for us, in hindsight we can all say about that supper, “That was the best meal I ever ate.” And in this case, our best meal was the last meal, the Last Supper.

But instead of triumphing over all the other meals, knocking them all down a notch or two, instead of overshadowing those meals and making them second-rate, the Last Supper really seems to be the best of the best.

- Like the tax-collector and his friends, Jesus invites all the sinners and the outcasts to join him at the table.
- Like Isaiah Jesus prepares the finest meal and the best wine and says, “Come, come and enjoy, come and join the feast. It is all free, it is all given to you with no cost. Just come and share in the feast.”
- Like Elijah and the widow with her unending supply of flour there is an endless supply of grace at this table.
- Like the manna this is bread from heaven.
- Like the Passover there is a lamb that is sacrificed, there is blood that covers the doorframe of our heart, and we eat this meal with anticipation...we are going to be set free from the chains of sin and the cords of death.
- Like Joseph and his brothers this table is all about reconciliation and restoration.
- Like the Prodigal Son there are tears and hugs as those who are lost are found.
- Like Sarah and Abraham our tent is filled with laughter at the outrageous promise of God...a promise that miraculously becomes true.
- Like Peter and Cornelius this table includes all. People come from east and west and north and south to sit down at this table.

- Like those four lepers in the time of Elisha when we have shared in this feast, we recognize we cannot keep such good news to ourselves. We tell others they can come to this table and eat until their heart is content.
- And like the day he fed 5,000, there are leftovers. There is so much grace it cannot be consumed. Our cup runneth over.

Best meal ever? I guess I would have to say, “Any meal with Jesus.” Then again, I guess I would have to say, “Every meal with Jesus.”

“Come and dine”, the Master calleth, “Come and dine”. You can feast at Jesus’ table anytime. He who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine, “Come and dine”, the Master calleth, “Come and dine.”