What does the Bible mean when it speaks about Breaking Bread?

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Answer: The Bible uses the expression “breaking of bread” in different ways. First, Acts 2:42-46 describes the early church breaking bread as part of their fellowship: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." The early Christians came together regularly for common meals, which included the breaking of bread. Acts 2:44 refers to them having “everything in common,” and this no doubt included sharing meals together, each one receiving from the others what they needed. Verse 46 describes them breaking bread in their homes.

Another type of breaking of bread is that observed at the Lord’s Supper or Christian communion. During the Last Supper, described in 1 Corinthians 11:23-39, Jesus took a loaf of bread and broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, “’This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’” The breaking of bread at that first communion table has been re-enacted down through the centuries as a way of remembering that first celebration of both His sacrifice on the cross and the institution of the New Covenant in His blood (v. 25). Henceforth, each celebration of the Lord’s Supper includes the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup of the fruit of the vine.

A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission around the Table

By Tim Chester

People often say that Gandhi and Jesus had a lot in common. While I’m sure some similarities exist, this view betrays a superficial understanding of both men. Take one example: their diverging attitudes about food. Gandhi appeared to have a rather strained and fickle relationship with food. He held the view that taste for food is inextricably linked with sexual appetite, and both were inherently vulgar, debased, and impure desires to be squelched. In his mind, the disciplined man lives in a state of perpetual “partial fasting,” relying only on scant portions in his “grim fight against the inherited and acquired habit of eating for pleasure” (Gandhi quoted in Joseph Lelyveld’s book Great Soul).

“The Son of Man,” rather, “came eating and drinking” (Luke 7:34). This astonishing truth about Christ, along with the Bible’s repeated use of food and feast related imagery, is the subject of Tim Chester’s book, A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission Around the Table. Chester’s main burdens in this book are: to explain the startling significance of Christ’s desire to eat with sinners and Pharisees alike; to reveal the deeper spiritual realities that these shared meals with Christ point to; and to encourage us as Christians to make sharing meals an integral part of our fellowship with others, so as to regularly enact and reflect upon the grace that Christ so freely gave to us.

Digging Deeper

Chester addresses some of the concerns commonly raised by the emergent church—our lack of connectedness, our desire for authentic community, the need for social justice and equality, and the call for the church to reflect people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. And yet he does so without departing from historic Protestantism. This is a book about food and fellowship, yes, but, ultimately, this book is unabashedly about the gospel. It's about substitutionary atonement. So how does Chester connect the topics of food and fellowship with the cross?

Chester demonstrates that hospitality is a recurring theme in God's story. From the forbidden fruit of Genesis to the banquet imagery of Revelation, food and feasting—or lack thereof—is symbolic of our standing before a holy God. In the Old Testament, when Israel enjoyed peace with God, food was abundant. And conversely, in times of judgment, famine struck. Though we all deserve famine, God demonstrates his faithful love to undeserving people through abundant feasting, made possible only by the free distribution of his grace. Chester cites a rich and beautiful passage in Isaiah that embodies this gospel reality:

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.

But how can that be, when our sin separates us from God? Here's the best part!

And [the Lord] 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 (Isa. 25:6–8).

Chester explains: "No one need ever leave this feast. In Isaiah 25 death itself is on the menu—God himself will swallow it up. So this is a perpetual feast" (59).

How beautiful and coherent is the Bible, that we see substitutionary atonement in the Old Testament, God taking the sin of his people onto himself, so that they can be reconciled to him. We eat good food; God eats death. And all of this points to the cross. Throughout his book, Chester relishes this fact. It should, then, come as no surprise that Jesus hosted and otherwise participated in many shared meals, as he prepared a way for us to have fellowship with God. "Jesus is the Passover lamb," Chester writes. "His blood is daubed over our lives; the Lord passes over us, and we're redeemed . . . so we can come to the mountain of God, and eat and drink with God" (113).

Chester, then, charges us to live in light of this gospel reality, inviting others, particularly those we are in the habit of rejecting, to join us around the table. I loved this book. I've been resisting this cheesy cliché, but here goes: it truly was "food for the soul."

So while I appreciate Gandhi's aversion to gluttony and his desire to see hungry people fed, I have to disagree with his assertion that a full meal is "a crime against God and man." For people who put their faith in Christ, a full meal—especially one shared with another—is symbolic of our reconciled relationship with God through Christ, and a pointer to the feast to come.