

TO LIVE AND LET LIVE 2006

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, November 5, 2006



Isaiah 25: 6-10: On this mountain, the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And, he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain. The Moabites shall be trodden down in their place as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit.

Matthew 11: 28 - 30 Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

A fantasy or a myth is not really a lie; it often conjures up an illustration that helps us to better understand **real life on earth**. From China comes a story that is not true. It is only a fantasy, a myth, a fable - but a very meaningful one! **It is the myth about the man who died and angels carried his spirit away**. On the way to heaven, though, they made a little detour. They took a side trip to hell. The angels said, **"We do this with everybody. It makes them appreciate heaven even more."** So here, they were at the windows of hell. The man was not so sure that he was in the right place. He saw hell, lined with long tables, stretching off to the horizon. On those tables was the best of every food he could think of ~ fresh fruits, the choicest cuts of meat, rich sauces and gravies, vegetables all simmered to perfection...It was every bit a feast fit for a king! He thought, **"Is this supposed to be hell? Heaven should be so good!"**

Then the crowds that thronged the tables distracted his eyes. What a bunch! **Bickering, arguing, fighting, pushing, and shoving each other!** It was like the **scrimmage** line of a football game. The man looked more closely at them. What a shock! Here were all these people sitting at tables overflowing with good things to eat, and yet every one of them was starving! **Hollow eyes, sunken cheeks, ribs like washboards on every chest, knobby elbows and knees, where the muscles had wasted away...** These folks were dying of hunger! **How could it be? What was going on?** He asked, "What's the deal? Why don't they eat? Why are they all starving?" The angel said, **"There is only one rule here in hell: they can eat all they want, but they have to use 4-foot chopsticks!"** The man looked again. Sure enough! All the people were picking at the food on the tables. However, they could not get it to their mouths! The chopsticks were too long! Long tables overflowing with good food ~ all just out of reach because of those four-foot chopsticks. **The maddening crowd of hell ~ hungry, but never satisfied.**

Then the angels took to flight again. They winged him on his way to heaven. However, here is the surprise of the fantasy! Because, when they got to the gates of heaven, the man looked through the doorway and **once again, he saw long rows of tables, loaded with good food!** Seated on either side of every table were millions and millions and millions of folks. Also in their hands were four-foot chopsticks! Then he noticed it. All these people looked happy, well fed, and delighted about their circumstances...! It was unbelievable! **Their cheeks shone! Their bellies were full! Their faces were rosy and expressive!** Laughter! Conversation! There was **no**

arguing and bickering at all! The man asked, "What's going on? The answer came, **"Here we feed each other!"**

Charles Dickens, in his novel, "The tale of two cities," conveys another truth! He wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times! It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, and it was the epoch of doubt! It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, some were going God's way, and others were going direct the other way...."

When we sat at the Lord's Table this morning, it all happened again. The Chinese fantasy, and the cities described by Dickens tell of choices still facing every one of us. **A choice of tables** ~ "to live and to let live at the Lord's Table" or struggling to feed ourselves in endless battles like those in the hellish image of four-foot chopsticks

Isaiah described hell on earth in early history. Nothing has changed – it has gotten even worse. Our world is in turmoil and nations are in conflict. Masses are **scrounging** at tables overloaded with food, stuffing their own needs in gluttony. That is what they have learned from the top. Their rulers, their kings, their leaders are gluttons. The purpose of power is consumption. Eat the other nations up, as **Saddam Hussein ate up Kuwait**, as the Europeans ate up the Native Peoples of North America, as the powers of the **First World** eat up the countries of the **Third World**. The feasting becomes maddening, until the gluttons of the nations have devoured each other several times over. **Everybody** wants. **Everybody** needs. **Everybody** takes. **Every** society becomes a culture of vampires. The world grows very dark; the nations run with blood, the feasting tables grow heavy with booty. However, **it is never enough** ~ the eyes of the people grow mean ~ their cheeks burn with anger ~ their tongues lash out in rage. It looks like hell!

Isaiah prophesied and said, Look! There is another ~ a different table. It is a feast of extravagance! It is a culinary delight! It is a showpiece of the best cuisine! What is the difference? Listen! **At the tables of the world, the Rulers are served first! In fact, the purpose of the tables is to collect from others in order to give to the Rulers!** That is the gluttony of the world order! That is the glut in the economic system. **However, here the HOST sets the table as a gift for others!** He does not suck it all to himself, like a giant vacuum cleaner. In fact, he serves at the table, giving food to the lowest, and the last, and the least. **To the child** who is too weak to raise a bottle to her lips ~ **to the man** whose arms were shot off in the War ~ **to the woman** with elbows twisting wildly away, pinned by torment and cruel beatings. The King sets the table. It is a table of Grace where no one feeds himself or herself. Others feed them all, from the least of them to the greatest. **At this table** the atmosphere changes. **At this table**, the sense of community spirit is made new. **At this table**, those who have received from this Ruler gain strength to feed other and the table grows, till it stretches to eternity. The food multiplies. The feasting flourishes ~AND in that awful dark room of earthly hell, torn by the gluttonous slurping of demons, a little glimmer of light shines, and a loving God's presence becomes evident.

At which table are you sitting? **Did** you figure it out? Who stands at the head of that table? **Did** he demand that you bring something to him to feed his gluttonous face? Or **did** he set the table for you ~ called you to himself serving you with his love, forgiveness and care ~ and filled that hunger in your life?

This table expands to the horizons of our society, to the far reaches of the **Space Coast**, to the distant corners of **America**, to the ends of the **earth**. Either you grab at its goodies with four-foot chopsticks and starve to spiritual death, **useless for yourself or God's Kingdom** or you feed someone else with your four-foot chopsticks.

It is indeed a choice between two tables! Which one did you choose? AMEN