

“Dinner with Jesus”

Luke 14:12-14

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Four Lakes Church of Christ



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Introduction:

As we think about the four gospel accounts, we realize that Jesus loved to teach whenever food was involved. I know that we love eating together as a congregation, and we do not consider it an accident that the Culver's down on Cottage Grove Road had their grand opening the same week that we moved into this building! Certainly we enjoy eating together, and we know from the word of God that Jesus also loved sharing a meal and that He used those meals to teach some very important lessons. We remember what He did with the five loaves of bread and the two small fish. We remember how He shared meals with Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, and we remember those lessons that He taught. We remember the significance of the Last Supper as the Lord taught those lessons that are recorded for us in the book of **John, chapters 13-17**. Those lessons were shared over a meal. We remember those times that the Lord appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, and we realize that several of those appearances took place over a shared meal—the appearance on the road to Emmaus and the appearance as Jesus cooked breakfast for the disciples on the beach at the Sea of Galilee. Over and over again, we read about the Lord teaching as He shared those meals. And then, even heaven is described as being the great wedding feast of the Lamb of God.

This morning, I would invite you to think with me about a passage from **Luke 14** where Jesus once again is described as eating dinner, and as He shares in the fellowship of that dinner, He teaches some incredibly powerful lessons. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1629**. In the opening verses of **Luke 14**, we discover that Jesus has apparently been invited to share in a Sabbath dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee. And just from that, we know that trouble is brewing! In **Luke 14:1**, the Bible says that the Pharisees were ***“watching Him carefully.”*** In other words, they were looking for Jesus to make some kind of mistake. Some people are like that—some people are always looking out for the worst in others. But as they were getting ready for dinner, the Bible says that Jesus responded to their watching by turning aside to a very sick man and then asking the Pharisees, ***“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”*** In other words, because they were looking for a fight, Jesus pretty much started it. He then healed the man and challenged the Pharisees for their hypocrisy—they would rescue their own ox out of a ditch on a Sabbath day, but they would get upset with Jesus for healing someone. In **verse 6**, Luke tells us that they had no reply to these things. And while He was on a roll, the Lord kept on going by telling a parable about guests who would jockey for the best seats at a wedding feast. Some would get there early to get the places of

honor, but then as more prominent guests would arrive, those who got there first would be bumped, the host would ask them to move, and they would be humiliated. Jesus said that it would be better to take the lowest seat first and then to allow the host to move you up instead of down, ***“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (verse 11)***. We have the picture of a kid who tries sitting at the adult table at Thanksgiving, but then gets bumped back down to the kid table—it is embarrassing!

Remember: The meal started out with the Pharisees watching Jesus, but it is very clear at this point now, that Jesus was watching the Pharisees! And the Lord is not done yet! In the middle of this lavish dinner full of very important guests, the Lord now turns to the host. I would like for us to focus our attention this morning on **Luke 14:12-14**. We are about to find that Jesus has some advice concerning how to put our guest list together. If you will, please look with me at **Luke 14:12-14**...

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

As we focus in on these three verses, I would like for us to pull out several very basic ideas as we take what Jesus said here and apply it to what we are doing right here in Madison.

I. And as we look back at what the Lord said here, we notice first of all that we are to check our hearts so that we will AVOID PRACTICING HOSPITALITY WITH SELFISH OR EVIL MOTIVES.

Or, as the Lord says here, we are not to invite people into our home for a meal so that they owe us, or so that they will do something nice for us in return. In other words, God is not only concerned about where we sit at a party, but He is also concerned about who we invite! The Lord pays attention to the guest list! Of course, the custom back then (as it still is now) is to invite our close friends, and family, and coworkers, and neighbors—those with whom we have a lot in common. We invite people over to strengthen relationships that may already be pretty strong. But notice what Jesus says. He says, ***“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or [your] rich neighbors....”*** That is a pretty strong statement, and when we consider the tense of the verb here, it gets even clearer. Jesus is telling us that we are not to always ***“keep on inviting”*** our friends and rich neighbors. In other words, we can eat with our friends from time to time (that is not the problem), but we are not to eat with them exclusively. We are not to eat with them over and over again while we ignore everyone else. If we only eat with our friends and rich neighbors, it has the potential of basically reducing

hospitality to a business deal, **“I will invite you over, but then you owe me.”** That is the danger Jesus is addressing here. We are not to think that way. It is hard enough for a new Christian or a guest to feel included in the congregation as it is, and so the Lord is warning us about the danger of always having the same people into our homes (or eat out with the same people) all the time. We are to be careful not to practice hospitality or fellowship with evil motives. We are to get out of any rut we may be in, we are to shake it up a little bit, and we are to be careful.

II. There is a second basic idea here, and that is, as we invite people into our homes and as we eat out with others, WE ARE TO BE MOTIVATED BY LOVE.

We have a negative: Don't do it this way. And now we have a positive: Do it this way! And so the Lord turns to the host and says that he should have invited the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and that only then would the host be truly happy. Real happiness comes when we reach out to help other people. Can you imagine the difference in the conversation around the dinner table? Imagine what a bunch of rich Pharisees would talk about, and then try to imagine what a bunch of poor people would talk about. On the one hand, the Pharisees would have had all of their rich people problems, but on the other hand, the poor (at least to me) seem to have their own very interesting stories. One of the best stories I have ever heard over dinner was told by a friend of mine who used to be homeless. He told about falling asleep in a dumpster for cardboard. And for a homeless man, that was luxury—the cardboard was clean and dry, it was a great place to sleep...until he woke up the next morning being dumped into a truck, and then the truck started compacting him. Some of you know who I'm talking about. I would much rather be around that kind of conversation than to listen to all of the boring problems of the rich and famous. And Jesus says that if we invite the poor into our homes, only then will we be **“blessed.”** That word refers to being happy. Helping others makes us happy.

And we find in this passage that it also makes God happy! In fact, in the next paragraph, Jesus goes on to tell the story about a rich man who hosted a great banquet. The rich man invited his rich friends, but the rich friends had all kinds of excuses—they had rich people excuses! One guy had just bought a field, and he had to go inspect it. Another guy had just bought a few oxen, and he had to go take the oxen for a test drive. Another guy just got married and had to keep his wife happy. And so after all of the excuses, the host in the parable told his servant to go out into the streets and bring everybody in to the great feast—the poor, and crippled, and blind, and lame, and they all came to the great dinner. The parable was a message about the kingdom of heaven. Generally speaking, those who have accepted the Lord's invitation are the rejects of society. Generally speaking, members of the Lord's church are rather average. It reminds me of our Scripture reading this morning from **1 Corinthians 1**. According to Paul, there are not many in the church who would be considered wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, **“...but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things**

which are strong" (verse 27). God has done this so that we cannot boast, so that we cannot brag that we have saved ourselves. We don't have any members here who society would say, "**Oh wow,**" about. And so when we invite people into our homes, we are not to ignore others who may be lonely, others who may be struggling in this life, because those are the ones who are most likely to obey the gospel. God did not save us because we were so awesome, but He saved us to prove that if he could save us He could save anybody. We also, then, are to be motivated by love.

You know, it's one thing to give money to the church—money that ends up being used for the benevolence program; it's one thing to help out with a food pantry; but it brings it to a whole new level when we actually invite people into our homes, or when we invite people out to dinner and actually share a meal. Sharing a table opens us up to having a relationship with someone. We remember how upset the Pharisees were that Jesus ate with "*tax collectors and sinners*" (Matthew 9:11). The problem in their eyes was that eating with those people implied some kind of relationship. And it did—that is how Jesus reached out to people—He shared meals with them. Usually we don't have a problem sitting next to a stranger at a ball game or on an airplane, but what if I go sit right next to a stranger at a booth at Culver's this afternoon? That person would most likely have a problem, because sharing a meal implies some kind of closeness and acceptance. In the same way, Jesus often shared meals with strangers as a way of reaching them with the good news.

Today, then, the message for us is that we should be doing what Jesus did. We are not to be focused on feeling good because of how many cool people we have into our home, but we are to do what Jesus did. Motivated by love, we are to pay attention to those who are often ignored in this world. We are to care for people as we follow the Lord's example.

III. As we come near the end of our study this morning, we learn something else from these three verses, and that is: WE LEARN THAT GOD WILL PAY US BACK AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST.

And the idea here is that the poor and lame and blind will not be able to pay us back in this life; however, God notices, and God will pay us back in the end. I guess there are many people who do not want to wait that long to be paid back, so they will continue to invite only their rich and healthy friends over for dinner, but we find here that God is watching! God pays attention to where we spend our time on the weekends. God cares who we hang out with. And if we love those who may not always be honored or respected by the world, God will honor those decisions.

Over the next few days, then, let's think about people we know who might appreciate a little bit of bonus fellowship. We can invite them into our home for dinner, we can take them out somewhere, we can even invite them to our church picnic next week at the Turleys' home. Whatever we are willing to do, we learn this morning that God notices and that God will reward us at the resurrection.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this brief passage, we realize that Jesus was talking about so much more than sharing a meal. He taught as He ate dinner, but the Lord was pointing toward something so much better as He tried to get all of us to think about someday dining with God in heaven. Several times in the Scriptures, the Bible describes heaven as a great feast, a feast that has been prepared by God Himself. And yet we find in the gospel accounts as well as in the book of Acts that the Lord's invitation was most often rejected by the religious leaders, the rich, and the powerful. And then we find that those who accepted the invitation were often those who were average, those who had no real hope of ever making it big in this world—normal people, like those of us here this morning.

Thankfully, our position in eternity is not determined by where we sit at a banquet, but our position in eternity is determined by where we stand before God—have we accepted His invitation, or are we too good for it? God's invitation is not a subpoena, but it is a request, a request that we join Him for dinner. We know from the Scriptures that God offered His only Son as a sacrifice to make the invitation possible. We accept the invitation by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be buried in water so that our sins can be forgiven. Baptism is described in **1 Peter 3:21** as making an ***"appeal to God for a good conscience."*** Baptism is our way of saying **"Yes"** to God. If you have any questions, we would invite you to study the Scriptures with us. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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