

Hospitality

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[0 : 00] Starting a new series thinking about one of our values as a church. We have things that we want to be as a church and one of them is hospitality.! And in your goodness and your kindness to speak to us.

And so we pray as we sit with the word of God and as we think about what it means for our lives. We pray that you give us receptive hearts. Hearts and minds to understand what you want to say to us.

That you'd correct us and teach us, rebuke us, train us in righteousness. That we, your servants, might be equipped for every good work. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Before we get into the passage, just a sort of introduction really of what this is about.

You might say when we talk about values, it's kind of the DNA of our church. What do we want to be about? And why is it important? What is hospitality?

Why is it important? What does it look like? And why is it, I think, a fundamental aspect of gospel living? To start off with, by hospitality, I mean spending time eating with people.

[1 : 34] Simple really. There's nothing sort of, you know, we understand what it is. And we love eating with other people, don't we? It's why the hospitality sector across the world is worth billions of pounds.

Because as people, we love doing that with one another. And yet, as much as that is true in the world, I want us to kind of shift our focus maybe to the goal of hospitality when it comes to a church family.

I just want to be clear on the goal from the start. Christian hospitality is not about impressing people. It's about having extended time with people to deepen relationship.

That is what it is about. It's not about impressing people. It's about having extended time with people in here, with your church, and with people out there, people in the community that we love. Extended time with people to deepen relationships. That goal is a battle to maintain. And easily lost.

[2 : 44] Which is why we need to keep it at the forefront of our thinking when we think differently. And I can say before we look at the passage, it was almost definitely not the goal when it came to eating in the Greco-Roman world in the first century.

In our passage this morning, we're going to see Jesus invited to eat at the house of a prominent member of society, a Pharisee. Meals were a huge deal then.

Taking the seating order, which Jesus addresses, the order set by the host was significant. Where people sat, it displayed rank, prestige, with often social and political ramifications.

The dynamics observed at a meal in the passage, it's like a window into that society. Like pulling back the curtain to who was flavour of the month and who was bottom of the pile.

Packed with ulterior motives. The kind of, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours type of thinking. Guests sought honour. Hosts wanted to curry favour, looking to climb the social ladder.

[3 : 50] The situation might be different to today, but what Jesus has to say is relevant to us because it's easy to drift.

When our goal shifts from deepening relationships to maintaining a reputation, hospitality can quite quickly morph from a joy into a duty.

Anxiety, anxiety about performance, replaces the simple desire for friendship. The opportunity for us this morning is to recapture the Christian, biblical vision and goal of hospitality.

And really what we see is the invitation is what matters the most. The invitation matters the most because that's what embodies really the gospel invite from the living God.

That's what hospitality is about. So let's dive in. Luke 14, we're going to start reading at verse 7 down through to 24.

[4 : 57] This is Jesus.

Then Jesus said to his host, When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Jesus replied, A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, I've just bought a field and I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Another said, I've just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out.

[6 : 58] Please excuse me. Still another said, I've just got married, so I can't come. The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

Sir, the servant said, what you've ordered has been done, but there's still room. Then the master told his servant, go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.

I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. A humble invitation to a meal reflects God's foundational design, the design for communion with people.

That is the design. God designed to have communion with the people he's made, and the meal reflects that. It is a truth that is woven from Genesis all the way to Revelation.

God's desire to be in relationship with his people. It's where the story begins, isn't it? Genesis 1 and 2, God repeatedly tells Adam and Eve that in relationship with him, they can eat.

[8 : 18] They can eat from any tree in his garden, all by one. You move on through Genesis. When the angel of the Lord comes to meet Abraham, Genesis 18, his first reaction is to go get a meal prepared.

God rescues his people from Egypt. He provides food for them in the wilderness in miraculous ways. And over the next few weeks, we're looking at one incident today. All different meals and times where Jesus eats with totally people from the top to bottom of society.

This is Jesus' strategy. You might say strategy is to eat with people. And it culminates, of course, all the way to the end of the Bible, forward to the greatest of all meals, the wedding supper of the Lamb of God, Revelation 19, where we will all be there, dining together as God's perfect, restored people. Relationship and friendship with God is the heart of the gospel. And eating together seems central to that. It's what we see announced, isn't it? In verse 15, somebody announces to Jesus, one of them at the table heard what Jesus had said, and he says, blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Eating together is an anticipation, perhaps, a foretaste of what is to come. If hospitality is about connecting and building friendship, how we go about it should reflect that.

[9 : 48] And it's what Jesus is talking about. And at the centre, it's all about the invite. In total, the word translated as invite is there nine times.

It's the Greek word kaleo. I think it has a slightly stronger connotation than invite. It's the same word for to call someone. Or to summon them.

What we see is the invite, the call, the summons is crucial. It's important when receiving an invite and when dishing them out. So if meals are God's design, as we see, for communion with him, how do we ensure we're reflecting his design and not our own social programming?

In this passage, Jesus gives us the one governing principle that changes everything. Humility. Verse 10.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, friend, move up to a better place.

[10 : 55] Then you'll be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. And here we have the principle. It's expressed in verse 10 what it looks like. Here we have it in verse 11. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

That principle is at play throughout the whole passage. The host needs humility, doesn't he? Verse 12. When you give a luncheon or dinner, don't invite your friends or your rich neighbours. If you do, they might invite you back. No, invite the ones who can't give you anything. Think of them more important than what you can get out of the meal. Humility.

Thinking of others more important than yourself. C.S. Lewis on Humility writes, Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

The master, who's been rejected three times, who is rejected three times in the parable, does exactly that. Doesn't think less of himself, but thinks about himself less.

[12:04] He thinks more of the outcasts of society. And do you notice how the language changes? Instead of invite, it's now bring in. Verse 21. Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

There's more room left, and it's intensified further. The perimeter of the search extends. Go out to the roads and country lanes.

Verse 23. Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full. Not invite, not bring in, but now compel. This is a gracious, urgent, commanding welcome that cannot be resisted.

The master, of course, is the living God. And the invite is to feast with him at his table. The master urges passionately for outsiders to come in.

People you'd never expect to be there. And in one way or another, everyone is freely invited without anything expected in return. The poor, the crippled, and the lame, we know they can't afford to repay.

[13:18] The master knows that too. In our house, we kind of, Annabelle does the bulk of the cooking.

It's not that I can't cook. I can rustle something up if I need to. It's just that if Annabelle, if we were to cook the same meal, I'd point you to taste Annabelle's because it would be ten times better.

But when, if either of us is cooking, when we cook for our children, it would be weird, wasn't it? And this is what we don't do.

We're not expecting our children to repay us with a meal next week because they're children and we cook for them because we love them and we want them to be nourished well.

Neither do we expect them to post on Instagram about how great our parenting is. We simply sit and eat with them because we love them and we want a relationship where they can share the ups and downs of the week and things that have been going on in the day.

[14:23] You know, God's invitation to us is exactly like that. A father's welcome. It's not a business transaction or a way that he can benefit.

Jesus invites everyone to eat at his table. There's no social standing and extends to everyone. He calls, summons, compels so that his house will be full of people knowing we can never repay.

Invite to dine and have a relationship with him. Jesus is restoring really what has been lost.

Communion and relationship with the living God. Meals reflect God's design for communion with his people and Jesus invites everyone.

The problem then, as we move on, the problem is this, that sin corrupts God's design. Sin corrupts God's design.

Sin twists our invitations into strategic transactions that we use to exalt ourselves and exclude others. God's design for meals to be that place of deepening relationship, communion, fellowship, slips into not our primary motivation.

[15:41] And when that happens, humility, love and grace just get lost. It's exactly what we see in our reading. Hierarchy, nearly couldn't say that word, hierarchy in society was entrenched.

It was the way that the social structure ordered. We see that in our world today. Invitations were put out there to put the hierarchy perhaps on display with guests jostling for the highest place possible. Hosts carefully considering the seating order to gain future prestige and curry favour. And what do we see? Jesus, astute as ever, he calls it out.

To the guests. He starts with the guests in verse 8. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take... When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say, give this person your seat. Then humiliated, you'll have to take the least important place. To the host. Verse 12. We've read this

already.

[16:48] When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours. If you do, they may invite you back and so you'll be repaid. Being repaid is exactly the host's intention.

That's exactly what he wants. Not with money, but he wants the invite back. Because if he gets the invite back, that is honourable. And he wants to be honoured by the social elite to climb the ladder himself and grow his influence.

It may be the reason he held the meal in the first place. In the parable, the heart is the same. Invitees excuse themselves.

You know, you've got these three people in the parable. The first one's bought a field. The second one's bought some cows. The third guy's just got married. But the principle we see is that the invitees think they're above the invite.

We've got more pressing matters, more urgent, more important. The potential damage it might have to their status. I'm not eating with him. Or then what? Jesus saw right through the whole performance.

[17:54] The guests jockeying for the seat of honour that has carefully, curating his list, not for fellowship, but for future favours. All about climbing the social ladder. Though our context is different, our hearts are the same.

we feel that sting of pride when we're not invited. We build perhaps guest lists that enhance our, or maybe people that we want to have round our house that maybe enhance our social capital, and yet quietly avoid those who we think are beneath us.

the goal. insidiously really, it shifts from communion to calculation. Just imagine parents treating their children like that, showing favouritism to one child over another at the dinner table.

I mean, even as I suggest that, we know that isn't right. Imagine parents not making a meal for their children because of something about them, sending them without food because maybe they'd have been embarrassed outside the family hall.

Every person is made in the image of God. How we treat people, how we treat image bearers, is a reflection of how we treat him. Now, I'm not expecting us to go and invite the whole community into your home next week.

[19:32] There's obviously a wisdom issue there, and the point, you know, you've got to not just invite anyone. The point here isn't a reckless lack of wisdom, but it's a radical change of heart.

Before God, you know, the social ladder that is constructed is totally meaningless. The person you might overlook is an image bearer of God, loved by him, and in need of the same saviour you are. These are real people with real lives who need a real saviour, people who need real love and real friendship and deep relationship because living in this broken world, they go through the same things that we do.

The good news is that God sends a host who operates on a completely different economy. He sends his son Jesus, the host.

You see, in the gospel, Jesus doesn't just teach a new way to have meals, he redefines hospitality with his very life. He is the ultimate host who lives the principle of the verse 11.

[20:47] He humbles himself, the creator, shares a table with his sinful creatures. The principle is lived out for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

If anyone, if anyone had a right to look down on people, it would be Jesus. This is the living God who through his word created the heavens and the earth, the one who sits on the throne and yet it's the son of God who humbles himself from the heavenly places to take on a human nature to come to live among us, subjected to living in a world cursed by sin, experiencing the same temptations and trials that we do yet without sin.

You think the very act of Jesus sitting and eating with anyone is humility in its purest form. The creator sharing a table with sinful humanity.

And yet, this gospel principle doesn't end there. It goes further still and Jesus goes further deeper down, humbling himself to death on a cross.

The one who deserves to be lifted high becomes nothing made of the dust of the earth, dying the most miserable, embarrassing, shameful death there is so that we who in comparison to him are nothing, who are lowly and needy might be exalted and lifted high.

[22 : 21] He invites us who could never repay him. We are the spiritually lame, blind and crippled by sin in the passage. To eat with him, he brings us in, he's brought us in, he's compelled us to fill his house, given us a seat at his table.

The king of kings reserves a place for you at the feast. come here, sit down and eat with me. Talk to me as we eat together. Pour out your heart to me. I want to have the deepest relationship with you as your saviour and as your God. He brings us to his table despite our rejection of him. Spiritually, we were far. We were the ones in the spiritual roads and country lanes miles from the party but Jesus comes and brings us in, he compels us in.

When it comes to invites, the world says, look after yourself, protect your reputation, invite those who will lift you up but Jesus says, here's my reputation, here's my honour that I freely give to you. [23 : 37] the gospel sets us free to live differently. Jesus through us continues to restore meals to their proper place. And so, in Christ now, connected to the vine as his branches, we can reflect as the church God's designed for meals.

They become what they were supposed to be, the place for communion and fellowship and deep relationships and it changes how we go about hospitality. It reframes our thinking towards the goal and we can recapture that vision.

The invitation is what matters. The goal to deepen relationships. That change, you know, that change in the way that we think about it, it can only come if we begin in the same place, if we begin with humility.

Knowing we ourselves are undeserving means we can embody God's welcome. It means that rather than seeking social capital with our friends only, we can extend to the overlooked, the marginalized, the awkward, the different, remembering that we were once outsiders yet Jesus gave us a seat.

The Holy Spirit that once compelled us in, now compels us to extend that welcome to others without all the fleshy agenda that held us back.

[24 : 57] I just want to, you know, we hear all this and it's worth saying this is not another thing to add on to the Christian to-do list.

It's not something that we should use as a way of promoting our piety before others. In our own human weakness and friendly, there are times when this can rub up against us and it can seem like a tall order.

We're all in different circumstances and it will look different in our lives how we might go about it. But we're empowered by the one who invites all to follow him. The Holy Spirit that compelled you in now compels others through our invite to extend that welcome.

What might that look like week by week? It doesn't have to be, you know, it doesn't have to be a perfect three-course dinner party with everything made from scratch.

It could be as simple as prayerfully inviting one person for a coffee, a simple lunch, someone who you don't know too well or you know can't repay you socially. The goal isn't to be impressive.

[26 : 13] The goal is to simply extend the life-changing welcome you've received from Christ. Like we share a table with our children, eating with them out of love.

We share a table looking to the God who will extend his fatherly care that through us, spiritual orphans become spiritual children.

We the undeserving are invited to his feast, given a seat at his table, compelled to come in, Jesus humbled himself to exalt us. that great invitation from the master of the feast, you know, it's still open today, Jesus himself is waiting for your RSVP.

And if you've never accepted his welcome, you can do so today in the quiet of your own heart. And for all of those who already have that seat secure, our mission is simple, go out and compelled by his incredible love, extend his invitation to others.

Until that day we will feast together, with the lamb. That awaits us. There is a place at the wedding supper of the lamb with your name on it.

[27 : 32] And so until that day let every meal be a foretaste of his eternal table, where we sit not to exalt ourselves, but as humble servants ready to extend the kingdom invitation.

Let me pray. Amen. Amen. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel is astonishing and we just recognize where we've come from and where we were.

There was a time when we didn't know you and that RSVP was not, we hadn't responded to it and maybe some of us still haven't, but that invitation is there and it's a great delight that there is a place

waiting for us, that you've invited us despite our rejection of you, you've compelled us to come in so that your house will be full.

We praise you for the goodness of the gospel that you've made us acceptable in your sight so that we can sit there as children of God, adopted into your family.

Lord, we ask for forgiveness for the times when we've looked at hospitality and inviting people to our homes with anxiety and stress because we've sought not to deepen relationships but it's all been about impressing others.

[29 : 12] We know we've done that and we pray that you'd work in our hearts to extend, to have our homes and our church and coffee shops or wherever we would meet over a table to extend that gospel invite to deepen relationships and share the same good news in the way that we live with those who are, with those within our church but those in our community too.

So we praise you, we ask for your help, we commit it into your hands and pray for your blessing upon us. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.