

Hospitality - Luke 5:27-38

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[0 : 0 0] We're continuing in the, this is the second week of a kind of a four part, and then we're! going to head back into Isaiah after that. The passage that we're going to be looking at! is in Luke 5, from verse 27 all the way down to 39. I'm going to pray for us. Lord God, we thank you for your word, the Bible, and we thank you that this is the way that you have designed, ordained, to speak to us, to speak to us collectively as a church, but to speak to us individually as well with the different things that are going on in our lives, and so I pray for each one of us, wherever we're at, and whatever's going on, that you would speak to us powerfully through your word, that you would teach us, that you would rebuke us, correct us, train us in righteousness, that we, your servants, may be equipped for every good work. We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. So before we kick off really reading it, let's just, just a bit of a recap. Last week, we started, we looked at the kind of, the goal of hospitality. The goal of hospitality, we said, was to deepen relationships. That's the goal. The goal, that's the reason that goal is because meals embody the gospel invite. They embody the gospel invite. And, and really, it pointed at, it pointed at, to show that how eating meals was really Jesus' strategy for God's mission. He ate with people to draw people to himself and make disciples. This week, we're in familiar territory, and Jesus is once again eating. Yet this week, not at the house of a Pharisee, but a tax collector, completely opposite ends of the spectrum. Last week, the house of the religious elite. This week, the lowest of the law, it is a different crowd, with a different mindset. Before we dive in, it is worth just reminding ourselves about how tax collectors were viewed. It is not like someone who works for the HMRC. That's not what it's like. A tax collector in first century Jerusalem was seen as a traitor and the enemy. Tax collectors would have been Israelites. They were Jews, but they collected taxes for the enemy, for the Romans. In essence, they were collecting money to fund Roman occupation.

Enemies of Israel were viewed not just as enemies of the nation, but because Israel was God's people, they were viewed as enemies of God. So they were working for the enemy of God. Tax collector, lowest of the law. How might we think about that today? Well, imagine World War II. Imagine someone from the UK, a British citizen, collecting money from Brits to give to the Nazis. That is what we're thinking of when we think of tax collector. It wouldn't go down well, would it? They'd be treated as the scum of the earth. That is exactly how Levi and every tax collector was looked at. And yet this is the house, Levi's, where the meal, what we're going to see, takes place after Jesus calls Levi to follow him.

On top of that, the house is filled with more tax collectors and sinners. You can imagine, can't you, what folk thought as they would walk past and see Jesus is in there with this bunch? Isn't that bloke that sat there, Jesus? The one who's been teaching about the kingdom of God. What on earth is he doing in there? Perhaps those who were eating with him are thinking the same thing. What on earth is he doing sat with us? You can picture perhaps their surprised faces and how the room started to turn. Can we really trust this bloke, Jesus, given where we've just seen him? You see, grace can be hard to digest.

I wonder, given the circumstances, before we dive into the passage, how we would respond, how do you think a World War II veteran would feel about eating with a Nazi sympathiser?

There is not a single person who would expect that to take place. And if they did, if you saw that, the association would make you suspicious. Because it's not the done thing. And I wonder, is there someone or a group of people perhaps that you think right now I would never share a table with?

[4 : 4 4] Or the reverse, are there people you might think would never share a table with you?

Perhaps, maybe, you feel that, you know, that your past would contaminate you and people wouldn't want to be with you. We all know how contamination works, don't we? If you stack a clean plate on a dirty one, the clean plate gets dirty. The mess always spreads. And the problem is that

we can treat people the same way, fear their sin, their brokenness, their worldview will somehow rub off on us.

In our passage today, we see Jesus turn this assumption on its head. He shows us a holiness so pure and powerful that when it touches the dirty plate, the dirty become clean.

This gives us, it gives us an incredible opportunity as we look at this to be able to sit down at a table because we're empowered by the spirit of Jesus without fear.

Now wherever you land that this is, what it really is considering something impossible, it's really to be able to sit down with anyone without prejudice, without ill thought, or without inferior complex.

This radical way of life comes about by seeing that Jesus' scandalous grace extends to us too.

Let me read our passage for us. In verse 27, chapter 5. After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth.

[6 : 40] Follow me, Jesus said to him. And Levi got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house.

And a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, who belonged to their sect, complained to his disciples.

Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus answered them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. They said to him, John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.

Jesus answered, Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he's with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. In those days they will fast.

[7 : 41] He told them this parable. No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.

And no one pours new wine in old wineskins. Otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

And no one after drinking old wine wants the new. For they say the old is better. So how can Jesus do this?

How can he enter the messiest of situations and not be defiled? It's because he operates on a completely different principle. He reveals a holiness that doesn't just avoid contamination, but actually restores.

That is what happens when Jesus meets with sinners, when Jesus spends time with them. You remember the same happens when he touches the leper. For those who are impacted by sin and have been spiritually unclean, his holiness overpowers the impact of sin.

[8 : 53] It's like a reverse infection. People are cleansed and made whole by meeting the Holy One. You notice the order here that we have?

We have first Jesus calls, Levi. That call of grace. It comes before any change. It is this gracious call that invites Levi to leave everything and throw a feast.

In verse 28 and 29. Jesus' grace is the cause. Levi's repentance is the effect. And Jesus, not fearful of people's sin, not fearful of the impact they will have on him, goes to eat at his house.

Verse 29. Surrounded by the lowest of the law, tax collectors, and the well-known down-and-outs who everyone else looked down on. This is a celebration meal.

That's what it is. It is an act of repentance. It echoes later on in Luke, Jesus tells a famous parable.

[10 : 03] Three parables actually in Luke 15. That culminates in the final one is the prodigal son. And how does that end when the son repents, when he runs back to his father?

It ends with a celebration meal. The angels say that when one sinner turns, there is rejoicing in heaven.

And here we have Levi called out from being a tax collector. He's impacted by grace, receives grace, and then grace flows out of him.

In repentance, holds a banquet, a feast with the one who has brought spiritual health and wholeness to his life. This is a feast of grace where everyone is invited.

And what we see is Jesus redefines holiness here as healing, not as avoidance. He redefines holiness.

[11 : 06] What we see is this is the holiness of hospitality. Verse 31, look what he says. Two, look what he says. Jesus answered them, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. Jesus himself is the divine doctor whose presence cures spiritual sickness. Repentance is not the entrance fee into the meal, but it is the effect of Jesus' call and Jesus' presence.

It is the effect of the call out to Levi. Holy Jesus enters sinful brokenness and brings healing. The people there, you can imagine a dumbstruck.

What is he doing? What is he doing eating with us? It's unbelievable. But we encounter, the problem we encounter is in the hearts of the Pharisees, isn't it?

The problem we encounter is that whilst Jesus is not afraid of contamination and wants to move, it's a holiness that draws near.

[12:16] What we see with the Pharisees is a fear of contamination that isolates. That is where we're going next. The Pharisees have a problem with Jesus and fear is its heartbeat.

Verse 30, The Pharisees, the teachers of the law who belong to their sect, complained to his disciples. Notice they complain not to Jesus, but to his disciples.

What do they say? Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? It's worth to do a bit of background here. Why they must have thought like that.

A central feature of the Jewish faith was being spiritually clean. Spiritually healthy before God. And on the face of things, it perhaps looks like their fears are well founded.

Because written into the Jewish law, sin and the effects of sin were like a contagion. That in fact, easily. There were washing rules about how to prepare yourself for going to the temple.

[13:20] And so they didn't want to be near things that were sort of seen as unholy. Fear of sin. Fear of being impure is the heartbeat.

But that is not holiness. That is not holiness. That is not the holiness that we see from Jesus. And you see, what happens is it's fear.

And the fear leads to isolating themselves from those who are seen as unclean. Remember, the Pharisees, these are the religious elite. They're the esteemed men of God in society, seen as the ones closest to him.

Surely, their holy reputation, their perhaps God-likeness, you might say, as men of God, you would think would be built on something more substantial than who they're associated with.

Who they eat with. You would think. What we see is their holiness, their God-likeness is laid bare as fragile and changeable as the wind. It doesn't rest on the unchanging character of God, but it rests on their distance, their fragile ability to avoid a sinner.

[14:35] And perhaps on the shifting opinions of their contemporaries. It's a skewed off and off-centred thinking. The heartbeat is fear.

And it's actually missed the mark. It's missed the understanding of what God's law was really all about. Because the heartbeat of... If the heartbeat of God's law was fear, we're done for.

But the heartbeat of God's law is not fear. The heartbeat of God's law is love. We know that that's how the law of God is summed up with two commands.

Luke, Jesus would speak them, will speak them later on in Luke 10. He says, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus there is repeating the summing up of the law given to Moses. The heartbeat of God's law is love, not fear. The Pharisees think that this imposed segregation and distance demonstrates a holiness by removing themselves from the possibility of sinful contamination.

[15:43] But it demonstrates the opposite. Because the true holy... Because true holy living, the true purely love that Jesus has, comes from drawing near.

The apostle John would later write, as we've read earlier, there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment.

The one who fears is not made perfect in love. Now we know that fear that they have is complex. Perhaps they fear punishment from God. What if those sinners stain us?

Perhaps they fear Jewish opinion. What if others look at us the way that we're looking at Jesus right now? With suspicion. Perhaps, maybe, they fear being led astray by their sin.

Unfortunately, when we look back at the history of the church, there are countless examples where that same fear has crippled the church's witness.

[16:57] The church reaching out and it's welcome. Where the church has operated out of fear rather than love. Where the church has looked at points of difference and perhaps reasons to bar

people from entry because of fear have been there.

Requirements of certain behaviours, perhaps, that are not based on the Bible. And the problem is when met with that kind of harsh adherence, looking for reasons, it sort of breeds in looking for reasons to draw back, to isolate rather than to draw near.

And when the church operates like that, it is far from being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. the temptation to be like that is still there.

There are people in society at large who, and all of us really, to a degree, look at the world through different lenses. But there are folk that perhaps we fear.

maybe those who have a different understanding of sexuality. Maybe those, there's so many points of difference, isn't there? Topics that we don't want to discuss.

[18 : 22] Politics or environment. And we fear having those conversations. What if the conversation goes somewhere but I don't want it and then I'm stuck? Maybe there might even be fear of what another Christian might think.

if you were seen hanging out with a certain person in a certain place. Now, of course, this all needs wisdom.

Self-awareness about, you know, temptation is important. But, to bring this kind of, this is like a personal thing for me. I know that when when I first became a Christian, I started following Jesus like ten years ago, I distanced myself from my friends.

Perhaps for good reason to begin with. But that initial maybe good reason slowly moved into fear about what if I have the conversation with them that I don't want to have.

Because my views have changed on X, Y, and Z. said. And it's only now in the last two years that that bridge has started to be removed.

[19 : 43] To bridge the gap and to be able to rekindle those friendships. It was fear in me of them that led to isolating myself from, they're different, they don't follow Jesus, that led to me isolating myself.

And it, truth be told, I think it has long term damaged the witness of what it means to follow Jesus with them. It can happen in friendship groups like that, it can happen in churches, in cliques, people that are different that we would fear hanging out with.

It's the fear of contamination, it isolates, it isolates. What we realise from reading this is it's not just those sat with Jesus that need him, but the Pharisees need Jesus too.

they both need life-transforming good news. I think what's wonderful about the good news is that we might read this and think it just sometimes comes across as another thing that we need to tick off on the Christian to-do list.

But the gospel is this, it's not simply try harder to love when we find it hard, the good news is that God himself has solved the problem of contamination for us.

[21 : 09] God himself has solved it. So it's not simply try harder to love. This is the good news that they need to know and we need to know and we need to remind ourselves is the good news is that Jesus is the one who is contaminated.

contaminated. It's that the heart of the gospel is that Jesus is contaminated with our spiritual sickness and there is the reverse infection, the reverse contamination in the opposite direction because we're contaminated with his holy life.

We receive his holiness from head to toe. He's infected with our deadly, toxic, sinful life and we're given his holiness.

It's what the apostle Paul meant when he said that he would become sin for us and it's the reason because he was infected with a deadly, sinful life that's why he dies because it would kill us if he didn't take it.

The spiritual doctor who comes to heal trades places and receives a terminal diagnosis. You see, the Pharisees feared contamination by association but Jesus' holiness was too powerful for that.

[22 : 27] Yet his love, his love led him to choose contamination with sin by substitution, by exchange. And Jesus doesn't just touch our sin, he becomes it.

Jesus becomes it and it's that he chooses isolation from the father so that we would never be isolated from him.

Jesus' love for people means in his life he's willing to be associated with sinners, even the very worst. His perfect love drives away fear.

His love means a willing contamination so that he's cut off. It's not just the good news for them but it's the good news for us.

We might fear, we might fear that in our life, we might fear what that association might do with other people, we might fear not being pure enough or clean enough.

[23 : 35] the reality is what the gospel shows us is that we never were but we get healing and cleansing and purity and holiness from the blood of the Holy One. It's tremendous good news because not only does it reshape our actual lived experience, our actual future but it also transforms day by day as we absorb it, it impacts the way that we live because now knowing that that's true we can live in light of the view of the cross and when it comes to thinking about hospitality something very powerful takes place because what it means is that Christian hospitality is an encounter with people who are contaminated with the Holy Jesus.

You remember when we started, the place we started off with, was that there's an opportunity to consider doing something possible to be able to sit at table with anyone without prejudice or ill thought or the reverse without inferiority complex.

We're connected to Jesus, our holy, pure, clean saviour. We've been positively contaminated with his holiness which means we are a holy people because the Holy Spirit of God dwells within us. It's like you think of an electric extension cable plugged in and it's like that. When you plug it in however far the extension cable reaches that's how far you get from the original source of electricity.

We're plugged in to Jesus and we're an extension of him in the world and it's surging through us at maximum voltage. The church, the body of Christ, that's us.

[25 : 27] which means you just think this when you meet with anyone to share food with or whenever you sit down with anyone. When you sit down with someone's body, you are sat down with them.

It's not you're sat down with the whole person. Well, when somebody sits down with the church, with the body of Christ, they're sat down with the presence of Jesus because the head's not disconnected from the body.

Hospitality is a holy act. It is a holy thing to be the presence of Jesus and to sit at a table with someone.

You think how that elevates eating with people as the church. This is no longer just a meal. This is a holy discipline. It's elevated beyond.

It might think we're going to have church lunch in a bit and we think there'll be kids running around and it seems loud and loads of stuff going on. But we're doing something that's holy because the body of Christ is eating together.

[26 : 48] With the head, Jesus is there present with us. hospitality is a holy act. It's a holy act.

The Spirit radiates love, patience and welcome through us because people encounter the presence of Jesus in you. And what it really means is you can't actually sit down with anyone.

it means that the things that are destructive, the cliques, the in crowds, that have a destructive impact in church can vanquish, can be gone.

But also it changes how we view everyone because instead of defining people by what's different, instead of defining people by bad choices or their politics or their views on the environment or something about them, instead of even the reverse of feeling inferior to other people's, what it means is that when we come, we realise that everyone is in the same boat, so to speak.

We're all in need of love rather than each other's fearful avoidance in here or out there. People have real lives, real problems and need a real saviour.

[28 : 11] When we began we thought about that dirty plate contaminating the clean one. That's the world logic and it's the logic of fear but the gospel flips the stack because of the cross we're not the dirty place, the dirty hoping to be accepted.

We've been made perfectly clean in Christ and now filled with his spirit, we're the clean ones and by his incredible grace when you press your life against the lonely and the broken, the contamination flows from you to them.

It's a contamination of grace, hope and love. You don't make them dirty but you extend the welcome of the one who can make all people clean.

let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you that of your holiness, we thank you that you invited us to eat with you.

we thank you that we were not worthy to sit at your table and in many ways it would be right for us to feel inferior to sit with you but you've never viewed us like that.

[29 : 47] But yet you have raised our profile because you've given us a holiness that we didn't deserve and you've cleansed us from our sin. And so we now, the church, the body of Christ, are holy in you.

And so I pray that we would absorb that understanding of who we are, that there is a label, an identity marker written on us that says holy people.

And I pray that you'd elevate the understanding of what is going on when we're eating with one another, when we're eating with anyone, that when we do it in that vein, thinking of the gospel, embodying the gospel invite, that when we engage in that it is a holy act.

Elevate that into our minds and by the power of the Holy Spirit would you work in our hearts to where when it seems hard and impossible, would you, we pour ourselves to you and ask that you would help us and bless us and equip us and build us up so that we might be that to one another and to a community that needs Jesus.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.