



Come to the Table

a 9-day devotional on
lessons learned from
mealtimes with Jesus



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Lessons Learned from Mealtimes with Jesus

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Introduction

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As we approach this holiday season, we anticipate the things that inevitably come with it: gathering with friends and family, exchanging gifts and stories, and of course, the food. Whether you're a host or a guest, whether the table is made up of two people or twenty, or whether you'll be eating off of paper plates or whipping out the fine china, we can all agree that sharing a meal with loved ones is a major part of the season. Some of us may be excited about these meals, while others of us may not. You may be looking forward to your after dinner pie and coffee with Grandma Margaret or dreading a political discussion with Uncle Mark. Regardless of who you will find yourself at a table with this Thanksgiving or Christmas, I invite you to look at the people with whom Jesus shared his meals and how that should transform how we view ourselves and others. Jesus ate with both the tax collector and the Pharisee—the sinner and the zealous religious observer. Jesus' table is for everyone—it truly is one of acceptance and inclusion.

While everyone was welcome at Jesus' table, his messages to each group are very different. He preaches to the sinners that they matter, they can be forgiven, and they have a place at the table.

He reminds the Pharisees that a life that truly follows after the heart of God is a life that looks like caring for his people—not just following his rules.

My hope as we come together with our loved ones around the table is that we take the time to look toward the ultimate table of thanksgiving—Jesus' table. I pray that this holiday season, as we look down the table for the next thing to fill our stomachs, let us remember to take time to fix our gaze on the Ultimate Sustainer—the one who fills our empty hearts.

As we read through eight different mealtimes in the Gospel of Luke, let us remember and be grateful for the God who welcomes all to his table—the table where we eat and are fully satisfied, where we drink and are no longer thirsty, and where God lavishes us in his unending grace and mercy forever and ever.


author of *Come to the Table*

About Kayla Carthel

Kayla is a dog mom, future counselor, lover of all iced coffees, and devoted daughter of God. You can typically find her twirling in flowy dresses, listening to true crime documentaries, belting the Hamilton soundtrack, and redecorating the house for the millionth time (much to the consternation of her husband).

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Levi

*I have not come to call
the righteous but sinners
to repentance.*

LUKE 5:32

Read Luke 5:27-32

Levi was a tax collector for the Roman Empire. The same empire had oppressed and killed Levi's people—the Jews—and here he was, not only collecting money on the Romans' behalf, but actually benefiting from their oppression of the Jewish people. In this day, tax collectors were infamous for making themselves wealthy off the backs of their own people by collecting more than was owed to the government and keeping the excess for themselves. They were hated. They were despised. They were the lowest of the lows.

And yet, while Levi was hated and rejected by his own people because of his greed and thievery, Jesus loved him. Jesus still wanted to welcome him. And what happens as soon as Jesus calls Levi to follow him? Luke says that Levi leaves everything behind to answer Jesus' call (Luke 5:28). Levi then immediately threw a banquet and opened his house up to his own friends and to Jesus and his disciples. Predictably, Levi's friends were also tax collectors and sinners. While it makes sense that Levi would invite his own "community" to sit at the table with Jesus (after all, everyone else hated him), the Pharisees were not too happy

about this. They wondered why Jesus would spend this time with these people instead of them. They were the righteous ones, after all. They were the obedient ones. But they had completely missed the point in their quest to prove their own righteousness.

They were so focused on the fact Levi didn't deserve to be near Jesus that they failed to realize they themselves didn't deserve to be near him, either. Levi *obviously* needed to experience the love, kindness, and forgiveness of Jesus, but so did the Pharisees. The only true difference between Levi's dinner party guests and the Pharisees was that Levi's guests actually recognized their brokenness and need for Jesus.

Jesus explains it perfectly. He tells the Pharisees, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32 NIV). Jesus tells them exactly why he is here. He has come to heal the sick with the love of the Father. He wasn't saying or implying that the Pharisees didn't need forgiveness; of course they did! He was saying that the Pharisees didn't recognize their need for healing. They didn't recognize their need for the Healer. They thought they were good enough based on their actions, deeds, and behavior. But Levi understood the core of Jesus' message—he recognized that he was hopelessly sick without Jesus. He knew he needed the Ultimate Healer's touch to make him well again. Levi couldn't rely on his own goodness—after all, society had made him aware that he was *not* good. So instead, he put all his hope into Jesus' goodness. He turned away from his old life *immediately*, leaving everything else behind in order to follow the one who was offering him more.

When Jesus saw Levi, he saw Levi with the eyes of God. When Jesus saw Levi, he knew Levi needed the hope found only in God. When Jesus said to Levi, "Follow me," he was offering this hope to him. Jesus saw Levi for what he was—a precious child of God who was lost in sin. Jesus saw Levi's true identity—beyond his

greed and selfishness—and said, “He is mine.” And that claim had the power to transform Levi’s life forever.

In this world, there are many people just like Levi—people who are just trying to survive, people who are not looking for an encounter with Jesus. They actively engage in sin and refuse to change because they think they are benefiting from it. It can be so easy to get discouraged by people willingly living in sin. It can be easy to refuse to associate with those kinds of people. But Jesus called us to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19 ESV), so how can we serve these people? There may be people we are called to preach the Word to and others, like Levi, who need to be brought to our dinner table and welcomed as they are. They need to be brought into fellowship with Jesus and his disciples. They need a personal encounter with Jesus. They must find what (or rather who) is worth living for.

In this Bible story, we learn that Jesus chose Levi, a tax collector, to be his disciple. Jesus called a selfish, sinful man and raised him until he became Matthew. When we read this Bible story, let us remember that Jesus is still calling the Levis of today. How incredible is that? He is not looking for those who are righteous on their own but those who are looking toward Christ’s righteousness to guide them—that is our hope found in these words from the apostle Paul: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15 NKJV).

Let us never doubt our own need for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And let us use that knowledge to love others who are in desperate need of him.

Takeaway

Much like Levi, you are a sinner. And still, like Levi, you have been forgiven, called, and loved! How has that message transformed your life? How should this message move you to love others who have not heard it?

Simon

*Your faith
has saved you;
go in peace.*

LUKE 7:50

Read Luke 7:36-50

Another day, another dinner party. Luke 7:36 introduces us to our second dinner party where Jesus is the guest of honor. However, this dinner party looks a little different. The first dinner party was hosted by Levi, and his crew of fellow sinners were the attendees. This dinner is instead hosted by a Pharisee, and we can assume other Pharisees were the primary attendees. At our first dinner, we watched Levi as he left everything behind to follow Jesus, the Messiah. At this dinner, we watch Simon wrestle with who he thinks Jesus is. We watch as he questions if Jesus could be the Messiah or if Jesus is simply another prophet.

But while these tables may look very different, the message Jesus has to share is very much the same, and it is this: Jesus has come to sinners to offer forgiveness of sins.

Let's take a deeper look.

We know how concerned the Pharisees are with purity and appearances of holiness; after all, they arrogantly believe they are the righteous ones. So, it shouldn't be surprising the first

thing they say is, “Well, look what we have here. A woman of the streets” (paraphrasing by me). We see a “woman of the city” coming into Simon’s home uninvited. How embarrassing! How rude! Depending on what version of the Bible you are reading, you might think this woman is a prostitute, but all we know for sure is this woman is not supposed to be there. She’s a sinner. She doesn’t belong. Not only is she breaking the simple rules of propriety, but now, she’s breaking all social norms, too. She comes in and lets her hair down in a time when that act displayed a deep level of intimacy. It’s inappropriate in this context—in fact, it’s unacceptable. Who wouldn’t be offended by this? And then it gets worse.

She begins crying at Jesus’ feet, wetting them with her tears, then wiping his feet with her hair. And then she starts kissing them (really, the most unimaginable part to me). The Pharisees (and me a little bit) are horrified. Isn’t Jesus worried about how he will be perceived? Isn’t he worried about what people will think of him? Why is he letting this girl behave in this manner toward him?

Even Simon—who, as a religious leader, we assume would know better—is thinking these things. Simon assumes Jesus must not be a prophet because of the way he is allowing this woman to touch him. If Jesus were truly a prophet, he would know what kind of woman she was, and he would have nothing to do with her. He wouldn’t let her be anywhere close to him, let alone let her engage with him in such a manner.

Here’s the failure in this line of thinking: Jesus is so much greater than a prophet, and he is able to perceive not only the heart of the woman but the heart of Simon, as well. Jesus sees the true intention behind this woman’s actions. He sees her desire for repentance and the acknowledgment of her brokenness. In her profound humility, she washes the most undesirable parts of his body (covered with dust and dirt from a long day of walking) and gives up her most valuable possession at his feet. She sacrifices

her pride and lays down more of her reputation. This is purely an act of love.

Simon is so concerned about what this woman is doing that he fails to see his own sin. This woman's sin is glaringly evident. Everybody knows who she is and what she has done. But unlike Simon and the other people in the room, this woman knew the depth of her sin. She was aware that she was a sinner and was broken over it. It is this that leads her to the feet of Jesus. It is this that leads her to the forgiveness of her sins found only in Christ. Not only does this woman find freedom in her tender act for Christ, but through those same actions, she shames Simon as a host. Where Simon failed to fulfill the essential duties of a good host, this woman fulfilled those obligations and so much more.

The uninvited woman—the unwelcome woman—was a person just like any of us. She was a sinful person in desperate need of grace. Everyone knew it. She knew it. And Jesus knew it. But Jesus turns what could have been a deeply shameful moment into an invitation to grace. He knew that grace was not out of her reach. And because she believed that grace was possible for her, too, she approached the throne of Jesus, and there she was found.

We can easily be the Simon in the room. We can easily refuse to invite someone to sit with us at the table of grace because we assume they are already too far gone, and we believe they have done too much to receive the very same grace we have been offered. The story of Simon and this sinful woman should serve as a reminder that Jesus' grace is for everyone. No one is unwelcome at the table of Jesus.

Takeaway

Describe a time when you were so overcome by the mercy and forgiveness of God that it moved you to tears. How can you intentionally and purposefully humble yourself before God today?

Feeding the Five Thousand

*They all ate and were satisfied,
and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of
broken pieces that were left over.*

LUKE 9:17

Read Luke 9:10-17

One Thanksgiving Day before dinner, my parents made me go to a food kitchen to serve a Thanksgiving meal. And when I say they made me, I mean it. I did not want to go outside on a blisteringly cold day and serve people food. I wanted to gorge myself on food, watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Puppy Bowl, and take the best food-induced nap of my life. Yet I was told if I didn't go and serve, I wouldn't get to eat, so I went. While I wouldn't say this moment changed my life, it did change my perspective.

I grew up in a household where food was never scarce, and I never had to worry about where my next meal would come from. My friends loved coming to my house after school because we had all the "good snacks." Dinner was always homemade, and there were always leftovers. I didn't think twice about why our fridges (yes, multiple) were always full, our pantry had all the good

snacks, and my mom always had ice cream Drumsticks waiting in the freezer for my dad.

My dad, in particular, has vivid memories of going to bed hungry as a child. These stories began to creep into conversations as we got older, and I realized that maybe my parents' lives hadn't looked exactly like they do now. And maybe this—the knowledge of what it means to need and not have—was the primary motivator for our always-stocked kitchen and our visit to a food pantry on a chilly November afternoon.

As we turn to the “Feeding the Five Thousand” (NKJV) story in Luke 9, it probably feels familiar—maybe even too familiar. After all, it only appears in every single gospel. But I think this story of Jesus multiplying the loaves of bread and fish is still very applicable here and now in the twenty-first century.

Jesus' actions, in the context of this time, would have resonated with the crowds that gathered around him. These people were overworked and vastly underpaid. They were familiar with hunger, and their children were too.

But as for me? I really cannot relate. I have *never* been that hungry. I have never had to wonder where my next meal was going to come from. So then, where is the power of this miracle—the challenge, the message, the hope—for me?

In that time, food was a gift, not a guarantee. To prepare food for someone else was to show them love, hospitality, and generosity. To sit at a table with someone demonstrated camaraderie and friendship. In some places in the world, food is still a gift; there are people who do not have enough, and they certainly don't have freezers full of Drumsticks. In fact, many people are still food insecure in these modern times.

Contrarily, in many middle-class (and up) homes, food is rarely viewed as a gift; it is an expectation. We tend to treat it recklessly and without care. Many of us can open our fridges and exclaim

we have nothing to eat while looking at a fully stocked fridge. We can throw away leftovers because “no one is going to eat them anyway.” We can let things go bad and toss them out, knowing that replacing them is just a quick trip to the grocery store or an online order on Amazon Fresh away. Three meals a day feels like a promise.

I'm not judging anyone—it's not necessarily our fault that we behave in the way we do. We live in a culture of extreme access and excess, and Jesus' feeding miracles were intended to speak abundance into a culture of scarcity. We live in abundance—so much so that it scares us. We are scared of eating too much or too little. Some see food as an idol, some see food as an enemy, and some see food as an addiction. But God meant it for a different purpose.

So then, how would we respond if Jesus performed this miracle right now? Would we break bread with our fellow believers and pass the basket? Would we allow ourselves to partake in his generosity? Would we savor the goodness of his generosity and mercy? Or would we respond hesitantly? Would we eye our neighbor to see how much they took before we got our own portion? Would we nibble on our food in order to keep up appearances? Would we gorge ourselves until we couldn't eat anymore? What would be our story?

When Jesus fed the masses, people sat down together, taking only what they needed so that everyone got enough. There was no mission of scheming, hoarding, or quantifying how much one had compared to others. There was no need to clamor or beg for more. Instead, the point was to simply enjoy the Lord's provision in the company of other believers. Abundance didn't have to lead to gluttony; it didn't have to lead to greed. Acquiring food didn't have to be a source of fear or shame. Meals didn't have to be spent in isolation.

And then, *they all ate and were satisfied* (Luke 9:17 ESV). They were full. They were content. They weren't stuffed. They weren't still a little "snacky." They weren't still hungry. What would that be like? To be satisfied like this? To sit down and trust that God will satisfy our physical hunger, even when it seems like he is working with so little. What would it be like to operate under such boldness?

When Jesus fed the five thousand, he satisfied their physical and spiritual needs. He gave them the nourishment they needed. He took the people's small resources and the disciples' doubts, and he performed a miracle with both. With all these things, he created enough; in fact, he created more than enough. And surely in our lives, when we feel inadequate or like what we have to offer seems too small, through Christ, it is enough. When we faithfully bring him what we have, with open hands, he will make it more than enough.

In the end, Jesus' feeding miracles were his self-revelations. He *gave* bread because he *is the Bread of Life*. He satisfied the hunger of their bodies because he knew that he, too, would satisfy the hunger of their spirits.

If you feel like you are operating with little, know that God can do much with it. If you are looking to fill your insatiable hunger, know that only God can satisfy you. Know that nothing is impossible for him, and he will take care of you. Trust him.

Takeaway

Jesus is the God of "more than enough." It's not about what or how much you can bring to the table; it's about what he can do with it.

Mary and Martha

*Mary has chosen what is better,
and it will not be taken away from her.*

LUKE 10:42

Read Luke 10:38-42

I would not say I am a neat freak, but if someone is coming over, I will at least clean up a little bit. The toilets get scrubbed, the dishes get washed, and the unfolded laundry gets hidden behind a closed door. But when it comes to holidays, there's no question of how much effort is going into my home. Indoor and outdoor décor all gets changed, the doormat gets a little festive, the throw pillows get replaced, and the scents of the candles get switched. So, whenever I read this passage of Scripture, I get a little indignant on Martha's behalf. Like, hello Jesus, of course, she's trying to make everything look nice. . . . It's not every day you host a feast for the Messiah.

If the God of the universe came into my home for a meal, I can't say I wouldn't react any differently than Martha. I can't say I wouldn't engage "Super Clean Mode Kayla" and rush around the house with a list of all my to-dos trailing behind me. Shoot, I probably would have asked Jesus if he could come back next week

as this week was really busy, and I would want everything to be *perfect* for him.

When Martha demands that Jesus tell Mary she needs to help out, most of us have a gut reaction of agreement. We are lurking behind Jesus, waiting for him to call out Mary, rubbing our hands with glee. But then he does the complete opposite.

In love, he calls out Martha, saying, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42 ESV).

After reading this for the first time, my takeaway—leading to my initial indignation—was that Martha’s service was unimportant; but this isn’t what Jesus said. That thought largely misconstrues Jesus’ point. Jesus clearly shows his heart for service and that it is an important part of his ministry. But still, he says Mary chose the better thing. What does this mean?

I want to point out something pretty significant here. Jesus does not reprimand Martha for being too busy, nor does he demand she sit down immediately. Instead, he calls out her worry and anxiety. He sees her—her desire to please, her fear about not doing enough for the Son of God—and acknowledges how she is feeling, but he also reminds her there is something more important at hand. And that important thing is him.

The funny thing is Jesus wants your *presence*, not your *perfection*.

We don’t find Jesus when we run around trying to prove ourselves to him. Instead, we find Jesus when we sit down at his feet and simply listen. This, he says, is the very best thing. This is the thing he says cannot be taken away from us. Basking in his perfection is much better than trying to generate our own. This is what he reminds Martha, and this is what he wants to remind us.

Martha felt like she needed to prepare a meal for Jesus. She felt like she had to be the hostess of all hostesses, but what she really

needed was to listen to him and be with the Holy of all Holies. So Jesus lovingly explained to Martha this was what mattered most. He wanted her to know him, listen to him, and get what she needed from him. This was more important than anything Martha could have done for Jesus.

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things” (Luke 10:41 NASB). I can hear him say this to me, too: “Kayla, Kayla, you are worried and distracted by many things.” Maybe your name also fits into this space. “____, _____, you are worried and distracted by many things.” Jesus is calling us out in the most kind and loving way possible. This is Jesus hitting the pause button on our frantic efforts and saying, “Come. Sit. Be still with me. Stop being so consumed with the world and start being consumed with me.” What will your response be?

Takeaway

Don't let the things you do *for* Jesus pull you away from being *with* Jesus. Have you chosen to let yourself be consumed by the to-dos of the world, or how have you chosen what is better? How can you make an active choice to go after the better thing?

Clean
hearts over
clean hands

Did not the
one who made the
outside make the
inside also?

LUKE 11:40

Read Luke 11:37-54

The holiday season can bring out the worst in us. I have vivid memories of family members fighting right before we left to go to an extended relative's house. There would be a shouting match, tears would be shed, and then we'd all have to dress up and put on bright, happy faces to go and interact with our family.

I think this happens in a lot of families. We go and put on our Happy Family Faces to appear put together and composed. We want to look good, and more so, we want people to *think* we look good.

But behind that façade is the real us. The hidden us. The us we don't want anyone to see.

That's the story behind this meal.

The Pharisee calls out Jesus for not washing his hands before his meal. If I were Jesus, I would be serving heavenly side-eye. But instead, Jesus does something different—he invites the Pharisee to take a seat (so to speak).

He calls out the Pharisee as a reminder that the Pharisee's religious ritual is not about spirituality; it is about show. It was an effort to present himself as a holy person, rather than genuinely striving to be holy. But that's not what Jesus wants. He doesn't want you to fake perfection by hiding behind a mask. He knows you—the real you—even the parts of you that you try to hide.

Jesus starts here: “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness” (Luke 11:39 NIV). Oof. Jesus is basically saying, “What you are doing publicly says nothing about the state of your heart.” He doesn't do this as a way of shaming the Pharisee but as a reminder that God wants a relationship over strict adherence.

He wants to remind you that he cares about both the inside and the outside. “You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?” (Luke 11:40 NIV). Sometimes I think we need to ask ourselves this question more often. “You foolish Kayla, did God not create you both inside and out?” So why then, do we think that God is solely concerned with our outward actions? Or worse, why do we believe that God doesn't care about where we are internally so long as we are doing the “right” thing externally?

It can be incredibly easy to assume that the label “hypocrite” is reserved for other people. The Pharisee is easily labeled as a hypocrite because he's obnoxious about how he demonstrates his so-called faith. Yet, the struggle against hypocrisy lives in all of us. The tendency to hide behind good deeds and a façade of perfection can seem like the easier choice than fixing the things we know are keeping us from a close relationship with God.

But here's the thing: Outward observance of God that does not engage the heart is a relationship built out of obligation, not grace. It's a relationship built on the foundation of what we can do rather than what he has already done. And sometimes, that just feels easier than confessing our own sin and brokenness. But in reality, there is nothing we can do to fix ourselves.

The message for those who feel like a hypocrite is this: There is hope for you. There is freedom for you. You don't have to do all the right things to be loved by Jesus. You don't have to be someone you're not so that people will have a good spiritual opinion of you. Stop focusing on what people think about you and instead focus on how God feels about you.

No amount of hand washing, or good deeds, can make us holy enough for God. It is only Jesus—his love for us, his death for our sins, his resurrection and defeat over death—and our belief in him that can bring us into the presence of God. It ushers us into the presence of the God who cares for us, who delights in us, and who loves us deeply and intimately.

Hypocrisy creates an outer shell based on performance. It keeps us away from truly embracing the ways and heart of God. It keeps us from experiencing the fullness of his forgiveness. It keeps us from understanding the depth of our need for him. Jesus wants us to know him, he wants us to trust him, and he wants to approach his throne through confession, worship, and prayer. He doesn't want us to act like people who know him; he wants us to become people who know and love him.

Takeaway

You don't have to pose as spiritual; God sees you where you are and loves you as you are. Stop focusing on presentation and start focusing on repentance. Choose a clean heart over clean hands, because that's what matters most to God.

With Zacchaeus

Jesus said to him,
 "Today salvation has come
 to this house, because this
 man, too, is a son of
 Abraham."

LUKE 19:9

Read Luke 19:1-10

This story can read much like the first one we read with Levi. We see another tax collector making a profit off his fellow brethren's backs. But I think there is more to learn from this. Let's take a look.

What I love about this passage is that it calls out some interesting characteristics of Zacchaeus: namely that he is short. So short, in fact, that he had to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus passing through Jerusalem. It's hard for me to imagine a grown man climbing a tree to get a peek at a "celebrity of the day," so I can't imagine what people at this time thought. This had to be a little *improper*; it had to be a little *scandalous*. I'm sure people were whispering and nudging each other.

But still, Zacchaeus climbed the tree, despite his stature and what the people of his day might have thought of him. This story would have been a lot different if it had read, "Zacchaeus tried to

take a glimpse of Jesus, but he was far too short to see him, and everyone would make fun of him if he climbed the nearby tree, so instead he turned around and went back home. He was hoping Jesus would come back through Jerusalem again, and maybe he would get a chance to see him.” If this was the story written in Luke 19, more than likely, Zacchaeus would have missed the opportunity to meet with the Lord altogether. He would have missed the chance to have a radical encounter that would change the course of his life forever.

We can all get caught up in our limitations and use them as excuses for why we can't draw near to the throne of grace. When we feel that tug in our spirits or that stirring in our hearts, we are quick to shut it down with the reasons we can't come close to God.

Sometimes it can look like this:

- *I have too much on my plate to spend time with him.*
- *I can do it tomorrow.*
- *I just don't have the motivation right now.*
- *I'm just not getting anything out of the Bible right now.*
- *Life is just too busy.*
- *I get too distracted.*
- *I will do it when I have more time.*
- *I'm not as good as her/him at XYZ, so I'm going to let them do it instead.*

Does any one of those sound a little like you?

Maybe we need to shine a spotlight on these statements and see them for what they really are: excuses. These excuses are hindering you from drawing close to Jesus and experiencing his nearness. Had Zacchaeus simply let his height deter him from seeing Jesus, he would have missed out on all the blessings that were to follow.

But Zacchaeus didn't let his stature become an obstacle to getting a glimpse at Jesus. He found a way to overcome that limitation. And what do we see happen next? Jesus takes notice and responds.

He sees Zacchaeus sitting up in the tree and calls out to him. This short, clearly sinful tax collector was noticed by Christ the Redeemer.

Maybe it's time to let your obstacles become opportunities to engage with the Lord. Maybe it's time to trust that God will bless your efforts to experience and be near him. It may not happen immediately like we see in the story, but we know that Jesus will make himself a home in our hearts if we invite him in.

Takeaway

Don't let an opportunity to encounter the Lord pass you by. Take action. And watch how God will move.

the Last Supper

But I am
among you as
one who serves.

LUKE 22:27

Read Luke 22:14-34

My church does communion every Sunday, so I almost feel like an expert on the Last Supper passage. I don't just hear about it during Holy Week, but I regularly interact with this piece of Scripture weekly. Does it feel weird to talk about it around Thanksgiving? Yes, but I think there's so much we can learn from this.

The Lord's Supper marked the beginning of Jesus' preparation of the disciples for future life in the kingdom of God. He knew that he would soon depart from this world. And so, he begins to prepare his disciples. Jesus does two things in this passage that I want to call out:

First, Jesus washes Judas' feet. Yes, I know he washes all the disciples' feet, and we can look to Day 2 of this study to truly understand the significance of such an act. But I want to take a minute to focus on the act of Jesus washing *Judas Iscariot's feet*. Judas, the one who would betray him. Judas, the one who sold him for a pittance of thirty pieces of silver. Judas, the one who walked alongside him but never truly believed in him and called

him Rabbi instead of Messiah. And yet, Jesus knowing that Judas would betray him to his enemies, he still washed his feet.

If we knew that someone close to us would hurt us in such a way, would we be able to humble ourselves to do such an act of service? I think it would be pretty difficult, if not impossible. But God says this in Matthew 5: “You shall love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 NKJV).

Jesus lived this out. And I think he would like us to do the same, as tricky as it sounds. While feet-washing may not be a typical action now, there are still ways we can love our enemies, the people that have hurt us, and the people that feel impossible to love. Despite knowing what was to come, knowing that in a matter of hours, this man whose feet he had washed would go on to hurt him in the most profound way possible, Jesus did not treat Judas any differently than the other disciples. How do we treat those who have hurt us? Do we have this same mentality?

While we know who the betrayer of Jesus is from the very beginning, the twelve apostles do not. When Jesus mentions that his betrayer is among the Twelve, the disciples “began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this” (Luke 22:23 NIV). I like Matthew’s addition to this story: “And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:22 KJV).

The apostles, despite loving Jesus and following him for almost three years of ministry, still questioned whether it would be them that betrayed him. They looked at him and said, “Is it me, Jesus? Am I the one who will betray you?”

Dear Christian, I want you to hear this. Do not underestimate your own potential to betray Jesus. Those who walked closest with him were not even so secure. Even Peter, who boldly professed that he would never leave the side of Jesus, denied him in the

face of adversity. We are no better than them, and we are no stronger than them. We, too, will have our own moments where we choose sin over Jesus—an act that sends him to his death just the same. This is the lesson I hope you learn today.

My hope is that you begin to ask yourself this question a little more often: “Is it me, Jesus?”

When you are sitting in church on Sunday, and you think, “Man, so-and-so would be so convicted by this message.” Take a moment, and say to yourself, “But is it me, Jesus? Is it me that needs to hear this word from you?”

When you hear a message about the importance of forgiveness, you must not sit in your self-righteousness and say, “Oh, I know someone that really could have used this message.” Instead, ask, “Is it me, Jesus, that needs to hear this message?”

A bit of self-reflection never hurt anyone. Though we are secure in the salvation of Jesus Christ, we can always strive to grow closer to him and learn to hear what he has to tell us. We can always listen for the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit when he is trying to speak words of conviction into our life.

We should strive to have the mindset of the apostles, who were quick to ask if they were the ones who would betray Jesus. We should remember that our sins are no better than the sins of Judas. We may not have betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, but we can be quick to turn our loyalty to anything but Jesus. Let us continue to ask ourselves, “Is it me, Jesus?” in hopes that he will continue to answer, and through those conversations, our wandering hearts will be more firmly bound to him.

Takeaway

The Holy Spirit is your friend. Listen for his gentle whisper of conviction. Are you giving the Holy Spirit space to speak in your life? How can you make room to listen to the Spirit?

The Road to Emmaus

*And their eyes
were opened, and
they recognized him.*

LUKE 24:31

Read Luke 24:13-35

I would be remiss if I didn't mention how hard the holidays can be for some. Some look forward to this time with great longing and joy, while for others, it can be a time filled with loneliness, sadness, and grief.

No one wants the holidays to hurt, and we want it to be a time of gratitude and a time of celebration. But sometimes, that's not the way things go.

The story of Luke 24 serves as a reminder of hope when things don't go according to plan.

The story opens with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, shrouded in despair. They had been hoping that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would redeem Israel (Luke 24:21). But their hopes were dashed when the Jewish religious leaders crucified Jesus. They were going home dejected, despondent, and disappointed. They were still in shock. They didn't understand why God had let them down. Jesus was supposed to be the promised Messiah; he was supposed to be the one who brought forth peace to all people. And instead, he had died; and even

worse, his body had gone missing. I can identify with the pain that comes with unmet expectations, although maybe not to the same extreme. And perhaps you can too. When our expectations are wrong, it is easy to be disappointed by God. It is easy to feel like he let us down. We thought that he would move in a certain way, but then he didn't. We thought we were being faithful and trusting in his Word's promises, and still, we didn't see fruit. We thought we were praying according to his will, and yet he didn't answer. God did not show up as we had hoped, which can feel like God not showing up at all.

The disciples felt that sorrow deeply on the road to Emmaus. But their story doesn't stop here.

The disciples are so consumed with their own troubles that they don't recognize that the person walking alongside them was Jesus himself—no longer dead, no longer in the grave! Yet, Jesus doesn't reveal himself at this moment. He simply asks them what is troubling them. And he *listens*. He *listens* as they lay down all their burdens, fears, and worries. He *listens* as they grumble and groan about what had happened. And then he provides them comfort by explaining the Scriptures.

And then they invite him in. And as he breaks bread with them, their eyes are opened to him, to Jesus—the Redeemer and Messiah they had been praying for all along! Their expectations had not been met, but what God had in store for them was far greater than they could have imagined. This is our hope, dear Christian.

Maybe you are dreading this holiday season with family because of the deep wounds they have inflicted.

Maybe you are dreading this holiday season, as it will be another one spent alone.

Maybe you are dreading this holiday season, as it will be another one spent without a child of your own in your arms.

Maybe you are dreading this holiday season, as it will be another one spent sick and waiting for healing.

Maybe you are dreading this holiday season, as it will be the first (or another) one without a dear and precious loved one.

Just as the story of these two disciples does not stop in a place of grief, neither does yours.

God, in his perfect timing, allowed the disciples to recognize Jesus at precisely the right moment. God, in his perfect goodness, did not allow the disciples to suffer in grief and doubt a moment longer than necessary. God was faithful to his disciples. And he is faithful to you.

Jesus is going to meet you on your road to Emmaus, where you are feeling lost and alone and maybe a little disappointed by how things have come to pass. And he's going to listen to your troubles and, through his Word, provide clarity on how he is moving. He's waiting for you to invite him into the home of your heart, and then he's going to open your eyes to see his glory.

Hope did not stay buried in the tomb. It rose again with him and it now lives with us—in us. So, this holiday season, let us cling tight to it; let us hold fast to the hope he has given us, “for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23 ESV). He will see you through this pain to the end, dear Christian. Of this, I am sure.

Takeaway

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, you are not traveling alone in your grief and doubt. God is with you. Are you seeking him on your solemn journey?

A Note

Whatever table you encounter this holiday season, whether it be a table of fellowship or a table of loneliness, a table of sorrow or a table of joy, may you always remember that you have a seat at God's table. May you remember that you have already been seated at the greatest table with the King of Kings and that you always have a place with him. May you remember to pull up your seat at his table, feast on his bread of truth, drink from his cup of righteousness, and bask in the blessing he has set before you.

Lord, we thank you for always giving us a seat at your table. We thank you that our seat has nothing to do with our merit or what we can bring to the table. Our invitation into your presence is solely based on you. Your love has set the table before us, your mercy has saved us a seat, and your grace continually extends out an invitation, even when we are at our most unworthy. Thank you for making a way for us to have this seat next to you. Thank you for the gift of grace that you continually bestow upon us. Help us to walk in the new identities you have given to us through your mercy, and may you help us open our tables to those you would like to invite into your fellowship.



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