



at the table

MEALS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

## COMING TO JESUS

**Sunday 27 February 2022**

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Jewish society had a highly codified understanding of the obligations of a host to their guests. There were rules for when you had to offer hospitality, what your obligations were as a host, what the guests' obligations were, what the invitation process was like; and then there were all the protocols when your guest arrived and preparing to eat:

1. The host would always have to extend gracious hospitality to their guests whether they were in the mood or not.
2. The host would have to wash the feet of the guests.
3. Kisses were exchanged.
4. The head of the guest was to be anointed with perfumed oil.

Also, interesting to note for the contexts of our passage today, that meals were a public affair. Houses in towns weren't at all like our homes - they were open spaces. You knew everyone's business, and it was common for people to be onlookers through the door or window to a formal meal - to crash the party, to listen to the conversations.

Given all this, you can now begin to see why the host would have been very selective about who they ate with. Dining together created a bond and so who was at the table was of utmost importance! Who you broke bread with revealed who you were wanting to be friends with, who you endorsed. The root of the word "companion" comes from the Latin, meaning literally to "bread together". And everyone in town would know.

So, Jesus says of Himself just before our passage, "*The Son of Man came eating and drinking*" (Luke 7:34). Jesus came eating and drinking. But that was completely acceptable in a

hospitality culture for a Rabbi or religious leader to do that - formal meals were civic spaces.

So, the problem was not that Jesus feasted, but whom He feasted with. In the second part of the verse, He says that people say of Him, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners... This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

So, the real problem we will see over and over again in the gospels is not that Jesus likes a good party, but who He likes to party with. And John Mark Comer says, "Jesus' Mission was to seek and save the lost and His method was to eat and drink with people. Jesus saved people one meal at a time!" So let's look at the characters in our story from Luke 9.

**Simon.** He is a Pharisee, a religious elite, highly trained in the customs and laws of Israel's life. A public figure and champion of right worship and right living, including hospitality. And, in public view, has invited Jesus to dinner. Can you see how that's a risk for him? See what that is saying? Simon is seeking Jesus too, he wants to get close to Jesus, have fellowship with Jesus, this contentious Rabbi - to understand Him. He is the only Pharisee willing to fellowship with Jesus.

At the other extreme of the social spectrum, there is **the woman**. She is a woman of the city and a sinner - she was a sex worker. Considered shameful, unclean, the last person a virtuous Pharisee would associate with. But she too is seeking Jesus.

Both are in a sense seeking Jesus, but both seek Jesus in very different ways at this meal and both come away with something very different because of the way they seek Jesus.

**How is Simon seeking Jesus?** Our passage gives us several clues:

- We know he is a Pharisee, connected, distinguished, intellectual. If you did our Safe Church training last week, you'd know he had knowledge and positional power.
- We know he is hosting Jesus; he is wanting to establish a relationship - which is actually quite brave.
- We also know, however, that he has not followed all the customs of being a good host. A host that was truly welcoming Him would know the customs of foot washing and anointing with oil - so there is an element of uncertainty in Simon about going too far with his hospitality.
- We know his internal dialogue is one of scepticism of Jesus - if he were a prophet. He is evaluating Jesus, not relating to Jesus.

So, you add that up and his responses indicate he is hospitable, but detached; curious, but guarded. He wants to have a good intellectual conversation about his specialty: righteousness and living under the Torah. Perhaps he's seeking to understand from this

Rabbi how he can be even more self-righteous than he already is.

**How is the woman seeking Jesus?** Did you notice we don't hear one word from her? She is not coming for a conversation. She is coming with a jar of perfume to do what Simon did not apparently do: anoint and wash the feet of Jesus. Jesus would have been reclining around a low table on cushions, on one elbow, feet behind. She comes into the room where they were eating, standing behind Jesus. And the plan would have been to bend down and perfume his feet as an act of hospitality, honouring Him.

The alabaster jar was a tiny vile made of a precious stone called Alabaster. The jar was expensive. It had a long thin neck holding expensive pure nard and with a wax stopper which would keep the liquid in but let the scent out. It was often hung around the neck, a very expensive and precious commodity. Not something you pour out!

This jar was also precious because it was a symbol of her work in the sex trade. Your fragrance was your calling card, as would have been her long untied hair - again, another indicator of her availability. She is used to approaching men in the street, but as she approaches Jesus, her heart breaks. And she begins to sob deeply, a flood of tears wetting his feet. She then grabs her hair and wipes the tears off, kisses them, and then pours out the perfume.

Her seeking Jesus looked:

- Brave - she knows how she is viewed and yet she appears to be more concerned about the opinion of Jesus than the opinion of others.
- Vulnerable, heart exposed, emotionally naked - her tears reveal her deep ache for true love, true healing.
- Honest - her honesty and desperation manifested in generosity, to do something beautiful, respectful, not anointing the head but the feet.
- Costly - the alabaster jar, when you break it, is a one-time deal (there was no superglue).
- Whole hearted - it's an offering of her whole self, her whole heart.

See how great the contrast is in the two seekers? When Simon sees her act of devotion he is offended - he says to himself, "oh, that's disgusting! She is touching Him. Why would He let her touch Him? He can't be much of a prophet..." You see, his inner thoughts expose his offended heart; and Jesus says, "ok Simon, you want to have an intellectual talk? Let me talk to you..." And He tells the story in the story:

*"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one*

*who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said." (Luke 7:41-43).*

And what is the purpose of the story? To show Simon why he has not brought his heart to dinner, and why she *has*. That there are two responses.

One person thinks his debt is not that great; the other thinks the debt is overwhelmingly great. But both people had an unpayable debt; neither had anything to offer; both needed the same forgiveness of their debt. And, by the way, the debt doesn't go away - somebody *else* has to pay it for you. It still costs. The extent to which you can realise you have been radically forgiven your debt, and the extent to which you can admit you are utterly lost without that somebody paying for you, is the extent to which you are prepared to respond with your whole heart - to love much.

Jesus is saying, "Simon, don't you see it? 'Cause I sure feel it... You are cold and aloof and cynical, and only vaguely open to me because you don't really know the depth of your own sin and self-righteousness. You don't really know how much you can be forgiven. And so I'm getting your attention, but not your heart. But *she* has come without the mask, without the spiritual ego; with a heart laid bare, and a motive to honour me as a host truly honours their guest..."

*"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." (Luke 7:47)*

This story teaches us that how you come to Jesus affects how you come away from Jesus. She 'got it', and went away from that dinner forgiven and loved. Simon didn't 'get it', and went away with a lecture and some pretty hard feedback because he thought he could come to Jesus and God on the basis of his merit, and all that left him with was a shallow, distant association with the Saviour of the world.

There is a direct connection between how you see yourself and how you come to Jesus. The more you feel pretty confident in your performance - like you have believed the right things, prayed a prayer, gone to church, served in a ministry, been moral - the less you will come seeing Jesus as your only Hope. Confident only in the cross, not in your knowledge or service or morality, brings about humble devotion.

I look at Simon and see myself in there from time to time - publicly welcoming, but inwardly aloof. Looking hospitable, but failing to honour Jesus, as Jesus should. Wanting to engage the intellect, but no further. Perhaps hoping to get more from Jesus, but unprepared to let it get too out of hand. It's really easy to offer up *a part* of our lives, but keep the rest contained, off limits... I wonder, have you ever come to Jesus this way? I have. Jesus is very happy for you to come for a conversation. But what He most wants is your heart.

So where is your heart today? Do you want to pour out your whole life in costly worship? Or do you mostly want something from Him? You will love Him to the extent that you have a revelation of the impossibly great debt you owed and that He paid. You receive it all by faith in Him, not in yourself.

I think this is an invitation to come to Jesus just as you are, but with all of you.

Bring your whole heart... To surrender all...