

The Table of Mission

Luke 19:1-10

In the harrowing true story behind the movie *Lone Survivor*, Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, the lone survivor of a brutal ambush in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan, stumbles wounded, dehydrated, and near death into a remote Pashtun village. What happens next is nothing short of astonishing. According to their ancient code of hospitality — called *nanawatai* — the sacred duty to protect a guest even at the cost of their own lives, the villagers took him in. They provide food, shelter, medical care, and armed protection, fully aware that sheltering an American could bring Taliban retaliation upon their entire community. When the enemy arrives demanding the infidel, the villagers refuse. **They fight for their guest.** They risk everything because, the moment they opened their home and invited him to their table, he became family. Their responsibility. Their honor.

That scene grips us because it taps into something innate and beautiful, namely the ancient power of radical hospitality. A table opened to an outsider becomes a place of refuge, healing, safety, and even salvation. This echoes the biblical command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31). It foreshadows the kind of welcome that changes eternities.

In our first message of this series, we saw **The Table of Grace**—how Jesus seeks out spiritual cripples like Mephibosheth and seats us at the King’s Table by grace alone. In the second message, **The Table of Fellowship**, we learned how that grace flows into real koinonia — shared life, discipleship, and divine visible love in the body of Christ. Last week in **The Table of the Home**, we saw how grace is lived out day by day in our families — through shared meals, prayer, discipleship, and love that shapes the next generation. We learned that ordinary meals can become sacred bridges between Heaven and Earth — places where God’s presence meets our everyday life, where heaven touches earth through hospitality, prayer, and gospel conversation.

Today we turn to the outward movement of that grace: **The Table of Mission**. This is the table we open to the world so that others might encounter the same Jesus who has transformed us.

Main Idea: The Table of Mission is where the grace we have received at the King's Table compels us to open our tables to others—especially to the outsiders, the broken, the despised—so that they too might encounter Jesus and be transformed by His grace.

This morning we are going to unpack Luke 19 together and see how Jesus turns an ordinary table into a place of extraordinary gospel power.

1. The Table of Mission Brings Grace Even to the Most Despised

First, we see that **The Table of Mission Brings Grace Even to the Most Despised**. Notice what stood out to Jesus above all the noise and the crowd, beginning in verse one:

“He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.”

Jericho was a prosperous, strategically located city — often called the “City of Palms” — sitting at a major crossroads and gateway to Judea. It was a wealthy commercial hub with bustling trade routes, Roman influence, and a large Jewish population. Jesus was passing through on His final journey to Jerusalem, where the cross awaited. The crowds were swelling. Everyone wanted to see the miracle-worker. Tension and expectation filled the air.

But Luke draws our attention with that focusing word, **“behold”** — a word the biblical writers often use to say, “Look here! Pay attention! This is important.” What does Luke want to draw our attention to: “... there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich” (Luke 19:2).

He was not just a typical collaborator with Rome—he was at the top of the food chain, the one who farmed out tax collection and took a massive cut for himself.

He had grown rich by extortion, betrayal, and squeezing his own Jewish brothers and sisters under the boot of pagan oppressors. To the people of Jericho, he was a traitor, a thief, a sell-out. He was small in stature (v. 3) but even smaller in reputation. The kind of man no respectable rabbi would notice, let alone eat with.

But Zacchaeus is curious enough to climb a sycamore tree just to catch a glimpse of Jesus. He's up there, hidden among the leaves, when Jesus stops directly beneath him, looks up, and calls him by name:

“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (v. 5).

Notice three things about this moment.

First, Jesus initiates. Zacchaeus didn't invite Him. Jesus invited Himself. Grace is not earned; it is given. Jesus does not wait for Zacchaeus to clean up his life, attend synagogue more faithfully, or make restitution first. He seeks the lost where they are (v. 10; cf. Luke 15).

Second, Jesus uses the language of divine necessity: “I must stay.” This same Greek word for “must” (*dei*) Jesus uses elsewhere for His mission. He said, “I must preach the good news” in Luke 4:43, and “the Son of Man must suffer” in Luke 9:22.

Staying at Zacchaeus' house was not optional. It was the very heart of the Father's will and the core of His mission.

Church, the Table of Mission is not a nice add-on to ministry—it is mission itself.

Third, Jesus calls him by name. In a culture where tax collectors were cursed, Jesus speaks identity and dignity. This is the same Jesus who called Matthew from the tax booth (Luke 5:27-32) and later ate with his associates, sinners and tax collectors, prompting the Pharisees' outrage: "*Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*" (Luke 5:30). Jesus replied: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*" (v. 31-32).

This pattern begins early in Jesus' ministry. In John chapter 1, when two of John the Baptist's disciples ask, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Jesus doesn't give directions. He doesn't say, "I live on the Northwest side of the city." He says, "*Come and you will see*" (John 1:38-39). And they did just that. They went and spent the day with Him. Afterwards, one of them (Andrew) immediately went and brought his brother Simon to Jesus.

This is the bridge of the Table of Mission. Jesus didn't just tell people who He was — He showed them. He ate and drank with sinners. He sat at their tables. He opened His life and invited them into His presence. As Andrew reminded us last week, Jesus came not just to seek and save the lost — He came eating and drinking. He showed them the kingdom through ordinary hospitality and real relationship.

Beloved, our mission is the same. Yes, we are called to go and tell. But we are also called to invite people to "come and see." Most of the time we have to earn the right to speak into people's lives. That right is earned around the table — through shared meals, listening ears, consistent love, and genuine presence. Without that foundation, our words can ring hollow.

As the Apostle Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 13:1-2:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

We can have the right doctrine, the right arguments, and even the right invitation — but without love that opens our homes and our lives, it profits nothing.

The Table of Mission is where we say with Jesus, “Come and see.” We open our tables, our living rooms, our imperfect schedules, and our hearts — and we let people encounter the real Jesus through real relationship.

It’s important to note here that this invitation — **“Come and see”** — echoes throughout Scripture as a powerful bridge between curiosity and encounter, between words and relationship. After Jesus said it to His first disciples and they went and spent the day with Him, Philip used the same words with Nathanael. Nathanael was skeptical, saying, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” But Philip didn’t argue or try to convince him with clever arguments. He simply said, “Come and see” (John 1:46). He invited Nathanael to move past his prejudice and encounter Jesus for himself.

The Samaritan woman did the same. After her life-changing conversation with Jesus at the well, she ran back to her town and said, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29). Her invitation led many in her village to believe. And even today, the Spirit and the Bride say “Come” (Revelation 22:17), calling a thirsty world to the water of life.

Again, the table of Mission is where we say with Jesus, “Come and see.” We don’t just tell them about Him. We invite them to see Him in the way we love, listen, and live.

Even with very little—a temporary lodging—Jesus opens what He has. The Table of Mission often starts in imperfection: a small apartment, a messy kitchen, a busy schedule. The power is not in the perfection of the setting but in the presence of Jesus at the table.

Brothers and sisters, who are the Zacchaeuses in your life? The coworker everyone avoids? The neighbor with the messy reputation? The family member who betrayed trust? The person whose politics,

lifestyle, or past makes your skin crawl? The Table of Mission requires us to look up—literally and figuratively—and say, “I must have you over to my house. Come and see what the Lord has done.” Not because they deserve it, but because His redeeming love compels us and enables us to see the grace potential in others, even those the world loves to hate.

2. The Table of Mission Produces Radical Generosity and Repentance

Second, we see that **The Table of Mission Produces Radical Generosity and Repentance**. Look at what happened when Jesus sat down at Zacchaeus’ table. Something miraculous happens at that table in Jericho. We don’t get the full transcript of the conversation, but we see the fruit:

“And Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold’” (v. 8).

Jesus didn’t deliver a three-point sermon on finances. He simply sat at the table, shared a meal and opened His heart. There, the grace of Christ did its convicting, transforming work. Greed gave way to generosity. Theft gave way to restitution. The man who had spent his life “taking” now overflows in giving—half his goods to the poor and fourfold repayment (far beyond the Old Testament requirement of Exodus 22:1).

This is what happens when people encounter the real Jesus at the table. Transformation is not primarily informational; it is relational. The table becomes holy ground.

The story of Rosaria Butterfield illustrates this powerfully. A tenured English professor, radical lesbian activist, and vocal critic of Christianity, she was researching an article against the “religious right.” Then a pastor and his wife, Ken and Floy Smith, invited her to dinner. They didn’t argue or preach at her. They listened. They loved her as a neighbor. Week after week, the table became the bridge.

What started as research became the context for her conversion, eventual marriage to a pastor, and a powerful ministry of hospitality to the LGBT community and others.

As she famously wrote, “The gospel came with a house key.”

Think of Levi (aka, Matthew) again. Jesus calls him from the tax booth and then hosts a great feast in his house with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:29). The table becomes the launchpad for mission.

In our church context, this means moving beyond Sunday mornings. It means inviting the divorced dad who sits in the back row to your dinner table. Hosting a neighborhood cookout and listening more than you talk. Welcoming the immigrant family or the person struggling with addiction. Our tables should be places where shame is replaced by dignity, where questions are welcomed, where the Holy Spirit convicts through ordinary conversation and shared bread.

Brothers and sisters, this is not another church growth strategy. This is a gospel necessity. When we grasp the grace of Christ in our own lives, we see that this is not optional, but something we must do. Maybe you’re taking this message to heart and our asking, where do I begin?

Here are a few practical moves you can make?

- Start small: Pray and invite one person or family this week.
- Ask good questions: “What’s been heavy on your heart lately?”
“How can I pray for you?”
- Share your testimony humbly—not as a hero, but as a fellow recipient of grace.
- Pray before, during, and after the meal. Invite Jesus to the table.

Remember the Pashtun villagers in the *Lone Survivor* story. Because of their radical devotion to hospitality, when the enemy arrived

demanding the infidel, they refused to hand him over. They fought for their guest.

Church, is there a regular guest, an outsider, a Zacchaeus in your life that you are willing to fight for at your table? In a day when many people fight *with* others at the table or talk *about* people at the their tables, our homes must become outposts for the Kingdom — places where we fight *for* the souls of those Jesus came to seek and to save.

This kind of fighting love is exactly what the Table of Mission looks like. And it calls us to live with eternity in view.

3. The Table of Mission Calls Us to Live in Light of Eternity

This brings us to our final point: **The Table of Mission Calls Us to Live in Light of Eternity**. Look at the bigger picture Jesus paints in this story. After Zacchaeus' transformation, Jesus declares in verses 9-10:

“Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Jesus didn't just bring salvation to Zacchaeus — He brought it **through the table**. That meal became the place where grace met greed, where repentance was born, and where a notorious sinner became a generous son of Abraham. The table was the bridge between a life of taking and a life of giving. The table was the place where Zacchaeus moved from being lost to being found.

This is why we live with eternity in view. One day we will sit at the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb. And I wonder if the greatest joy in that moment, the greatest way to honor Christ, will be to look around and see someone else sitting at that table because Jesus used *you* to bring them there. Because you opened your table. Because you welcomed the Zacchaeus in your life. Because you lived out the Table of Mission.

We open tables now because we live in light of the ultimate table—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9). Every meal shared in Jesus’ name is a foretaste and a signpost of that coming feast, where every tribe, tongue, and nation will sit together, redeemed and reconciled.

James Bell has written insightfully: “The future will belong to churches willing to become smaller, stranger, deeper, and more serious. Less interested in cultural relevance. More interested in spiritual formation. Less interested in platform building. More interested in discipleship. Less interested in winning arguments. More interested in producing people who actually resemble Jesus.”

The Table of Mission shapes that kind of church. It produces people who resemble Jesus—gracious, hospitable, mission-minded, generous. It counters the isolation of our culture. In a world of screens and suspicion, the table says, “You belong here. There is room.”

This has deep implications for our church family at Midwest Bible Church. As we pursue family discipleship, devotion to the fellowship of the saints, and outreach, let the table be central. Host prayer gatherings around meals. Invite new believers to your table for encouragement and gospel conversations. Use your homes as outposts of the Kingdom or whatever space God gives you, make room.

We also remember that hospitality costs. The Pashtun villagers risked their lives. Zacchaeus risked his wealth and ridicule. Jesus risked rejection and paid for our sin on a cruel cross. The Table of Mission will cost us time, money, comfort, and sometimes safety. But the reward is eternal.

Conclusion

The Table of Mission is not complicated. It begins when we open our tables—our homes, our lives, our imperfect resources—and say to others, “Come and see.” The grace we have received at the King’s Table is too good to keep to ourselves. Jesus came to seek and to

save the lost. He still does that through ordinary tables opened in His name.

Beloved, let's heed the call of grace. Let's move beyond just listening to good sermons and embrace the way of Jesus. Let's respond to this call to radical hospitality — not as a good suggestion, but like Jesus did — as a gospel necessity and with great urgency. Don't procrastinate. Schedule your obedience. Put it on the calendar. Send the text. Open the table. The time is now.

Let your lives reflect the open, welcoming heart of God so that at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb we will see people sitting at that table because your life became a channel of the restoring grace of Christ, to the glory of His name.