

Dinner With Jesus Part 1

Let's Say Grace

Luke 5:27-32)

Memory Verses: Luke 5:32

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We live in a fast-food, drive-thru, microwave-meal culture. We eat on the go, at our desks, in our cars, and in front of our TVs. But in the Bible, meals were never rushed — they were sacred moments. They weren't just about eating food; they were about building friendship, showing honor, offering forgiveness, and sharing life.

In this new series, we're slowing down to see how meals in the Gospels were moments where heaven touched earth, where grace was served as generously as bread. We'll see Jesus eating with friends, strangers, outcasts, even enemies, and in doing so, showing us what His Kingdom really looks like. I truly believe that if our church would commit to opening our homes and our tables, the love of Christ and the Gospel message would spread in our community in ways that Sunday mornings alone never will be able to. Dinner is more than just eating... it's about fellowship, its about grace, its about love and hospitality.

When thinking about what to preach on I was confronted with one of the things I've heard time and time again lately. We need more fellowship. We need opportunities to come together as family. And while we can try to do that as best as we can in a Sunday church setting, I believe that perhaps grass roots old fashioned inviting people over for a meal might be the answer. We have to spend more time together in our homes. We have to form tighter bonds as family. It takes intentionality, it takes making time, it takes getting beyond the hassell and discomfort and just doing it. It's time we had dinner with each other. It's time we had dinner with Jesus.

This morning I want us to begin with one of my favorite meals in the Bible. I want us to focus in on the dinner where a tax collector named Matthew became a disciple. This is a story about grace and mercy. This is a story of redemption, not just spiritually, but also culturally. A traitor turned follower. An enemy turned friend.

For me, this story hits home. It's personal. I still remember a time when someone showed me grace I didn't deserve. I was a senior in High School. Though I had pretended to be this spiritual leader in the church and youth ministry, behind the scenes I was making every sinful mistake you could. And to be honest, I was pretty good at being two faced. I hid my sin well. But for some reason, my Youth Pastor, Big J, saw right through my charade. He knew what I was up to, and he could have

kicked me off the mission trip, out of the youth group, or ratted me out to my mom. But he didn't do any of those things. He chose to love me and forgive me and mentor me. Instead of shutting me out, Big J invited me in. There were many meals me and J got to share together. Pizza at Village Inn, Breakfast at The Bethlehem Pit Stop, Burgers at the now torn down, yet still famous Hickory Snack Bar. Those meals showed me that despite my shortcomings, he was my friend and that was never going to change no matter what. And his love and fellowship drew me back to Christ.

Many of you know what I'm talking about. One day someone invited you in when they could've kicked you out. They shared a meal with you when they should've shown you the door. Don't forget how powerful it is to extend grace.

Some of us struggle with grace because we've forgotten how much grace we've received. Not just from others but also from Christ himself. Others, outside of the church, tend to avoid people who are "too far gone" because they fear them. They fear that they can't ever change them so why try. But we can't be like them. If we are going to be a church that truly reflects Jesus, we've got to start where He started... with a meal, with grace, with an open seat at the table. The main point this morning is this: **Grace is a table that always has room for one more.**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see here is that... **Grace Goes Where Religion Won't**. Let's look at the first part of our passage in **Luke 5:27-28**. When I say religion I'm using that term as a system of man made rules and regulations. In **James 1:27** we see that real religion, that the father accepts, is when you look out for and care for the outcasts of society; the orphans and widows. Man made religion is often quite different. Man made religion says stay away from those who are outcasts, sinful and astray. Man made religion says shun the traitor and revile your enemies.

Of course, Jesus took a different approach. Look at **Matthew 5:44**. We are to love and pray for our enemies. We are to bless them. We are to show them grace. And that is exactly what Jesus does when he sees Matthew. **Watch this clip – Chosen: Jesus calls Matthew**. Jesus could have avoided Matthew, also known as Levi. He was a tax collector, a traitor, a Roman sympathizer, a sellout. In fact, in the clip you can see how Peter strongly urges Jesus to reconsider. He says, "don't you know who he is and what he has done." You can't call him to be one of us! **But get this church, grace doesn't keep a safe distance. Grace steps into the mess. Jesus will go the distance to reach each one of us. We must go the distance to reach each other. He doesn't care how evil or wicked or traitorous or unworthy we are. He loves us... he welcomes us. Peter was chained to a religion that said shun your enemies. Jesus was freed by grace to love his enemy. Do you see the difference?**

It reminds me of lunch in High School. Each table represents a rung on the social ladder. Let's just say my table was pretty low on the ladder. Even then, there were lower tables. Tables that only had one or two kids. The outcasts. From time to time I would be convicted to go sit with them and try to become their friend, but the thought of being ostracized like they were kept me from following through. But even now I know exactly which table Jesus would sit at. I know exactly who he would choose to befriend. Why can't we be more like him?

The bottom line is simple. **Religion often draws lines to keep people out. Grace draws circles to bring people in.** Are you drawing lines or circles? Are you shunning or avoiding people that Christ would befriend or are you reaching into the mess with grace? **Grace is a table that always has room for one more.**

The second thing we should see here is that... **Grace Sits With Sinners Before It Stands To Preach.** Let's look at the second part of our passage in **Luke 5:29**. Notice that when Jesus called Matthew to follow him, he didn't immediately share the Gospel message with him or call him to repentance. He didn't take him to the synagogue... He took him to his house. I know this may sound counter religious... and it probably is to some degree... but the best strategy in leading someone to follow the Lord is probably not preaching first. It's more likely that they will be receptive to the message if they know that you genuinely care about their mess.

What do I mean? I mean, and we've talked about this a lot here at Stone Creek, we must earn the right to have deep spiritual conversations. Worldview breaking conversations need to be worked up to.. not sprayed like a drive by shooting! Our primary strategy as a church and as a people of God is to begin relationships, genuine relationships, in order to one day earn the right to tell them about the Gospel and have them actually consider it! I believe one of the most effective strategies in order to build relationships is to have a meal together. To sit at a table and tell stories and laugh at jokes and play games and get to know one another. Jesus clearly thought this too... this is why his very first step in leading Matthew was to have a meal with him. Perhaps this is why we have verses like **Revelation 3:20** where Jesus says, I stand at the door and knock... if you open we will have a meal.

Maybe we've made the Gospel to complicated. Maybe its as easy as saying yes to Christ and then getting to know him relationally. You know... like at a meal. The point is this... **The Gospel shouldn't be a drive-thru transaction. Rather, it should be a dinner invitation.** People should know that we care for them before they are required to care about what we know. Relationship comes first.

When I first moved to Danville I was living with a family who didn't

have good internet. I would have to either work at the church office or my preferred spot, Star Bucks. I went to Starbucks a lot. And I listened to the regular's stories. I didn't flaunt my Christianity, or tell people I was a preacher, or hand out tracts. I simply began relationships. Relationships that I still have to this day. One day at Starbucks one of the guys, a non-believer, leaned over to me and said, "you're not oke the other preachers around here... you actually like us before you try to fix us." And from that moment on we could talk about the Gospel as much as we wanted to.. which turned out to be a lot. Maybe we need to sit and eat before we preach. **Grace is a table that always has room for one more.**

The last thing we should notice here is that... **Grace Calls The Sick, Not the Self-Righteous.** Let's look at the last part of our passage in **Luke 5:30-32**. Jesus didn't come to hang with the religious and the culturally righteous. He didn't come to be popular with the cool kids. He came to call sinners to salvation. Again, religion says stay in your lane. Righteous on this side, sinners on that side. Jesus says... negative Ghost Rider, I came to cross lines. I came to buzz towers. **Hospitals don't turn away the bleeding just because they are messy. Thats why they exist. Jesus doesn't turn away sinners...that's why he came!**

And ge this... you can't call sinners if you don't hang with sinners. You have to be around sinners in order to invite sinners. Its that simple. And heres a big problem in the church today. Either we are like the Pharisees and aren't hanging around sinners cause we dont' want to be infected with their cooties, or we are hanging around sinners and not inviting them. God has placed you in your workplace... to invite sinners. God has placed you in your neighborhood to invite sinners. God has put you in your school to invite sinners. Why aren't you doing it?

Jesus has come to invite us. Look at **Romans 5:8**. Jesus didn't just come to invite, but he also came to pay the price. **Jesus' table is the only place sinners can find salvation.** **Watch this clip – The Chosen: Matthew's Meal.** Matthew was a sinner in need of a savior. In need of restoration and forgiveness and grace. And he found it at the table of Christ. You can too this morning. **Grace is a table that always has room for one more**

Application

A real meal makes you feel and helps you heal. Jesus ate a lot of meals with a lot of people we probably wouldn't. Jesus invited many people we would've probably ignored or shunned. Why? Because Jesus understood the power of Grace. Jesus understood the life transforming power of forgiveness and mercy. There is power in inviting someone to dinner. This week you have a challenge. Invite one person or family who is outside your normal friend group into your home for a meal. Spend time together, laugh together, and pray for one another and see what God does.

Grace is a table that always has room for one more.

Conclusion

In 1999, a small church in Fort Worth, Texas, was rocked by tragedy when a man walked into a Wednesday night youth event and opened fire, killing seven people and injuring others. Pastor Al Meredith, who led Wedgwood Baptist Church, stood before the shocked community just days later—not to condemn the shooter, but to extend grace. He told the media and his grieving congregation, “If the man who did this were still alive, I’d want to tell him about Jesus. I’d want to have dinner with him.” People were stunned. Here was a pastor whose church had been deeply wounded, yet his first instinct was to offer the very thing Jesus offered to tax collectors, lepers, and sinners—a seat at the table. He understood that grace doesn’t wait for people to clean up their lives before it’s offered. Grace goes out into the mess and says, “Come and see. Come and eat.”