

## July 23, 2023 – Building Tables (Final)

- Main Point
  - *In the kingdom of God, we protest the building of barriers by building tables. (SLIDE)*
- I want to remind you what Jesus says the God of the Table is like.
  - Parable of the Lost Sheep (Picture on Screen)
    - Luke 15: 1 – 7
  - Parable of the Lost Coin (Picture on Screen)
    - Luke 15: 8 – 10
  - Parable of the Lost Son (Picture on Screen)
    - Luke 15: 11 – 31
      - I heard this recently.
        - In this parable, both sons leave the house.
          - One in rebellion.
          - One in resentment.
          - And the Father leaves the house to go after both.
          - This is God. God is love!

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- Big Question
    - If this is what God is like. If this is what the God of the table is like. If this is what kind of love has been lavished onto us. If God is love.
    - Why do I struggle to love others in the same way?
    - Why do we struggle to freely give others the same kind of love that has been extended to us?
  - Answer
    - It is hard!
    - We have been conditioned and formed to dehumanize ourselves and others.
      - Just think about how you talk to yourself sometimes. This leaks out to others as well.
    - To love our neighbor as our self, to love the Samaritan (the person or group we have been conditioned to hate) is clearly the command, we know this, but acting on this is a whole different thing.
    - Wouldn't it be amazing if God would shine a light on the person or group that we are called to love each moment of our life? This is exactly what he did for Peter.

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- Acts 10: 1- 22
    - Main characters:

- Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing centurion who was a Gentile
  - An outsider on the fringe of the community of faith.
  - He was willing to be instructed and guided.
- Peter, one of Jesus' disciples.
  - An insider.
  - A leader in the faith community.
- Both had received separate visions from the Lord.
- They both listened and obeyed. This is critical!
- Cornelius was approached in his vision by an angel of the Lord to send men to Joppa to bring back Peter.
- Peter's vision included a stern warning to "not call anything impure that God has made clean."

- Acts 10: 23 – 48 (Text Slide; NIV)

- The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along.
  - **Peter is modeling what a disciple does – says, "Lord, I do not know where you are leading me, but here I am!"**
- <sup>24</sup>The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup>As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup>But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."<sup>27</sup> While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.<sup>28</sup> He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup>So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"<sup>30</sup> Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me<sup>31</sup> and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.'<sup>32</sup> Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.'<sup>33</sup> So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."
- **As this narrative unfolds, notice how it goes back and forth from Peter to Cornelius, back to Peter, then to Cornelius.**
- **Both men have visions, both make speeches.**
- **Luke (author of Acts) is highlighting the dual nature of what is going on here.**

- Is this story about the conversion of a Gentile or the conversion of an apostle?
    - *Both* Cornelius and Peter need changing for God’s mission to go forward.
  - Notice how frequently houses and hospitality are mentioned in this story.
    - This contact between a Jew and a Gentile creates a table problem.
    - What is a seemingly ordinary question of “who can eat at our table,” is magnified in this story.
    - This is a scene where old divisions are being broken down. These men, who were once at odds – Jew and Gentile – talk in a home that Peter was unable to enter.
      - This is an incredibly warm scene created by Luke that shows us what is possible in the kingdom where God is leading both Cornelius and Peter – and us!
- <sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. <sup>39</sup> “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup> He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
- This sermon or speech by Peter starts with a confession.
    - This is a very vulnerable statement.
      - This is a Christian leader admitting his weakness.
        - I recently saw a post on IG where Carey Nieuwhof asks:
          - “Pastors, when was the last time you admitted to your congregation that you struggle with doubt, argue with your spouse, or worry about money? Transparency isn’t a weakness.”

- Peter's confession is followed by a speech.
  - WE know by his speech that the purpose of God's vision to Peter is now clear – it was not just about food; it was about people!
    - The vision to Peter reminds us that left to our own devices, we are unable to know what or who is clean or unclean.
  - Peter goes on to make a bold claim that Christ's Lordship is not something to be proved merely from the Torah or the Prophets, but from the experience and faith of the Apostles.
    - One commentator summed up in this way.
      - "This is the way it is sometimes in the church. If Jesus Christ is Lord, then the church has the adventurous task of penetrating new areas of his Lordship, expecting surprises and new implications of the gospel which cannot be explained on any other basis than our Lord has shown us something we could not have seen on our own, even if we were looking only at scripture. This does not mean an undisciplined flight of fancy into our own bold new ideas or the pitiful effort to catch the wind of the latest trend in the culture under the guise of seeking new revelation. Rather, it means that we are continuing to penetrate the significance of the scriptural witness that Jesus Christ is Lord and to be faithful to divine prodding. Faith, when it comes down to it, is our often-breathless attempt to keep up with the redemptive activity of God, to keep asking ourselves, "What is God doing, where on earth is God going now?" (SLIDE)
  - <sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speaking in tongues<sup>[b]</sup> and praising God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." <sup>48</sup> So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.
    - Peter's new awareness that the Gentiles were welcome, is confirmed by the Spirit descending on Cornelius and his family.
    - This creates a reality that the author of this new plot twist is God.
    - There is no confusion now about the Gentiles being able to be baptized. Peter makes the point in verse 47 that no one can forbid baptism of the Gentiles after the Holy Spirit has already landed on them.
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- Main Point
  - *In the kingdom of God, we protest the building of barriers by building tables. (SLIDE)*
- What can we learn from this passage?

- *#1: Christians posture themselves to listen and when they hear from the Lord, they obey.*

- This is what both Peter and Cornelius did. Don't miss this part of the story.
- Andy Stanley – “You have no idea what hangs in the balance of your obedience!”
- When God says to build a table, we build the table.
- Christians always go first!

*In the kingdom of God, we protest the building of barriers by building tables.*

- *#2: Christians build tables with the expectation that they will be expanded.*

- Thanksgiving Story
- We live in eager expectation that God is up to something, and that something is usually a who!

*In the kingdom of God, we protest the building of barriers by building tables.*

- *#3: Christians confront their bias and prejudice.*

- It's not enough to just love our neighbor. We must ask “Who is our Samaritan?”
- Peter receives a new vision of who is welcome in the Kingdom and he shifts his posture.
- He admits he was wrong and acts.

*In the kingdom of God, we protest the building of barriers by building tables.*

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- What is one thing we would want you to do after this series!? – How can you practice “building tables?”

- JOIN A LIFE GROUP – We want everyone to be in community. We want everyone to experience building a table.
  - Current member of a group.
    - Ask yourself what kind of table has been built.
    - Does it need to expand so someone else could be invited and made welcome.
  - Considering Leading.
    - Sign up to build a table and be a leader to start a community where the kingdom of God can break out.
  - Not in a group.
    - Ask the Lord if stepping into a community of people trying to experience transformation is for you.
- **PRACTICE TIME: With any new practice, sometimes we need a coach to help us take a first step.**

- Let's practice "building a table" right now.
- It's a lot easier than we think.
- One of the habits we practice is most Sundays we stop service and greet each other.
- This is not just so that we can shake hands and say hello.
  - We do this because it reminds us that we are in a body.
  - We are interdependent on each other.
  - We need each other.
  - We are rehearsing what it looks like to be in heaven; with all the nations.

**Invite the church to stand and greet each other. (Band comes out)**

- **The rest of the story.**
  - Chapter 11
    - The word gets out that Gentiles are welcome at the table of the Lord.
    - Peter is criticized by believers, so he tells them the whole story of what happened.
    - Once they heard him out and got the real story, scripture tells us "they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."
  - Church, this is our posture.
    - **In the kingdom of God, we protest the building of barriers by building tables.**
    - We also CELEBRATE and PRAISE God when someone – even "the other" – receives salvation that leads to life.

- As we praise God in this moment, and prepare ourselves for communion, I want to leave you with this verse.
  - **Galatians 3:26 - 29**
    - *<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

**Let's worship together.**

- Communion

- "I want to welcome you to the table of the Lord"
  - The table of the Lord has an overflow or abundance of grace and forgiveness.
  - The table of the Lord is a table that is open to everyone.
  - The table of the Lord is a table where everyone is equal – the thing we have in common is a need to be forgiven and to be reminded that we need to be forgiven.
- **I Corinthians 11: 23-26**
  - <sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."
    - **The body of Christ.**
  - <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
    - **The blood of Christ.**
- Prayer