



EATING
AND
DRINKING
VGROUP
STUDY



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Eating and Drinking: vGroup Study

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Written by Jordan Hill.

Design, layout, and illustrations by Christopher Wilson.

JESUS AND THE SICK

Have you ever been out to a dinner or had a meal where things just got awkward? Maybe you had to go on a few bad dates (or several bad dates) before you met your spouse. Maybe you had a great meal with a special someone only to find out that when you got home you had food lodged in your teeth. Who knows how long it had been there? Maybe there was that one time when someone accidentally insulted your cooking. Or maybe there was that one time when light conversation over dinner with friends somehow devolved into strongly voiced disagreements about politics or religion.

Today, we are going to read a passage in Luke that might be the most awkward and most uncomfortable dinner party of all-time! Its participants were sure to need an antacid after they left this meal.

- What is the most awkward situation surrounding a meal that you've ever experienced?

In this week's study, we continue our exploration of some of the meal stories presented in the Gospel of Luke. Our meal story for this week occurs in what is known as the 'travel section' of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus and his disciples are slowly and methodically making their way toward Jerusalem. For Jesus, it will be his final journey to Jerusalem culminating in the events of the Passion week. The preceding verses set the context for this particular meal story.

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. ³³Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' ³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Luke 13:31-35

Jerusalem's future and Israel's ultimate fate depends on their response to the invitation to Jesus' kingdom feast.

¹One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ²And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" ⁶And they could not reply to these things.

Luke 14:1-6

Jesus is invited to the 'house of a prominent Pharisee' most likely for the traditional Sabbath meal following the synagogue service. Luke cues us into the tense atmosphere of the room. But even before the guests get a chance to be seated for the meal, Jesus presses into that tension.

- Who were the Pharisees?

- What was their status amongst the people and their role within the Israelite community?

- What was their relationship to the law of Moses?

- Why did these men often find themselves at odds with Jesus and his teachings?

- According to verse 5, how does Jesus justify his Sabbath healing of the man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body?

⁷Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit in

the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

¹²He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Luke 14:7-14

As the guests seat themselves for the meal, Jesus takes notice of 'how the guests picked the places of honor at the table'. In honor-shame cultures, like ancient Israel, feasts, banquets, weddings, and Sabbath meals were just as much a display of one's social status within the greater community as they were about eating a good meal or celebrating a milestone. Guests of honor were traditionally invited to attend, and the attendees would be seated at the table according to their social rank and distinction. If you were deemed worthy enough to be invited, where you were seated at the table spoke volumes about your social standing! As for the host, their guest list spoke to their honor as well as to their good standing (or not so good standing) within the community-at-large.

Jesus first addresses the dinner guests whom he has just witnessed jockeying for better seats at the table.

- Why would the guest be jockeying for better seats?

- What critique does Jesus offer?

Jesus' critique of the guests is not a stamp of approval for false modesty in these situations.

- Why would false modesty be no better in these instances?

Next, Jesus directly addresses the host of the party—the prominent Pharisee. He specifically critiques the host's guest list.

- Who does Jesus notice is missing from the guest list? (hint: v. 13)

- Is Jesus claiming that people should never host parties or meals for their friends & family? If not, then what is the main thrust of Jesus' critique?

Luke is careful to say that Jesus' words here are a parable. Jesus' words are not just good advice for attending or for hosting a banquet; there is a deeper spiritual take away meant to teach us something about the upside-down nature of the kingdom of heaven.

- What do these verses teach us about how social orders work in worldly kingdoms both great and small?
- According to these verses, how do people get compensated or rewarded in worldly kingdoms? As a result, who (or which people groups) often get left out because they have nothing to reciprocate?
- How does Jesus' kingdom (the kingdom of heaven) contrast to meals like this one hosted at the Pharisee's house?

¹⁵When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²²And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

Jesus' mentioning of the 'the resurrection of the righteous' in verse 14 spurs one guest to proclaim a blessing on those who would one day share in the LORD's heavenly banquet (i.e., everyone sitting at that particular table). Again, who is most likely sitting at this particular dinner table and who is not? In Jesus' eyes, this Sabbath meal, and what it represents, is the antithesis of the actual great heavenly banquet being prepared. Therefore, Jesus offers another parable as both a critique of the compromised version of Israel that the Pharisees and Jewish elite have built to advance to their own selfish desires as well as a revealing of who will actually be seated at the great heavenly banquet when Jesus is established as Israel's true king.

In the parable, the host sends out invitations to his feast. Once the feast has been made ready, he calls for those invited to come join the festivities.

- What happens at this point in the story?

- Name the three examples of invitees that ultimately reject the hosts call to join his banquet.

- What things can we infer about these invitees?

- While their excuses seem legitimate on the surface, why do you think the host found them insulting?

In response, the host sends out his servant a second time. This time to offer the banquet invitation to others.

- Who is the host now calling to join his feast?

- Do they accept or reject his invitation?

Because there is still room at the great banquet for more guests, the servant is sent out a third time.

- Who is the servant now sent to gather to the banquet as the parable comes to a close?

- In its first century context, what does this parable teach us about Israel, Jesus, and his kingdom?
 - Who is the host?

 - Who are the invitees that reject the invitation to the heavenly banquet?

 - Who are the invitees that accept the host's gracious invitation and will ultimately fill the host's banquet hall at the coming great heavenly feast at the end of the age?

This passage is a great example of the tension in the Gospel narratives between the sovereignty of God and human free will/choice. Luke does not hide from this tension nor does Jesus.

- How are those two things held in tension in this passage?

To summarize, remember that Luke 13:31–35 sets up the context for this story. Jerusalem—being used metaphorically to refer to the nation of Israel's ruling class, priesthood, and leadership—will ultimately reject Jesus as its king. Among those who reject the kingdom invitation of Jesus are people like the prominent Pharisee and his guest in today's story. They fight for worldly status and selfish earthly rewards all the while fostering a society of haves and have nots. Much to their dismay, the sick, the poor, and Gentiles alike will all have seats at the heavenly banquet table while they will find

themselves cast out by their very own rejection of Jesus as king.

- What lessons can we learn from these verses about the dangers of self-interest and self-exalting behavior?
- What kind of people do these behaviors create and cultivate? (think Pharisees)
- What kind of societies do these behaviors create and cultivate? (think this meal at the Pharisees house)
- Think about and discuss some ways that we at Vintage Church can have our church look and feel more like the heavenly banquet table than the meal table at the home of the prominent Pharisee.
- Today, Jesus is still king! And his kingdom invitation still stands! How does the Parable of the Great Banquet proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ?
- Present the gospel and offer an invitation to any group members to join Jesus' kingdom.