

6 – Open Your Heart and Your Home

Mark 2v13-17

Read Mark 2v13-17

Historical Context/retelling of the narrative:

- Jesus teaching by the sea. Teaching them. Jesus' popularity was rising. He was highly sought after and people wanted to hear what he had to say.
- Jesus passed by a tax collector booth (think IRS or a toll booth where you would pay your taxes...Levi is traditionally known as Matthew (from the account in Matt 9:9).
- Levi was a Jewish tax collector for Herod Antipas. He was located at Capernaum, the first site of importance around the northern end of the Sea. The kind of tax collector that he was labeled him with murderers and robbers. Jewish sources distinguish two types of tax officials:

1. Income tax officials
2. Poll tax officials

The poll tax officials were placed near ports, bridges, and state roads. Levi was most likely a poll-tax official and these collectors were the most despised for they were the greatest of extortionists at the time.

- Not only was Levi a tax collector, but he was Jewish which meant that he was taking advantage of his people, his family, his tribe. Local law excluded people like Levi from being a witness in court (because clearly he is a liar), was excommunicated from the synagogue (was too evil to worship with others), and in the eyes of his community his disgrace was extended to his family (he was the "black sheep of the family).
- In addition, Levi probably knew the fisherman who were with Jesus because he had taxed them, and most likely, taken advantage of them at some point. Think about what that would do to the group dynamic of those following Jesus. Levi/Matthew was an outcast of the greatest sort.
- And Jesus sees this outcast, approaches him, and calls him to follow. Think about the raucous this would have caused among the people. This was a scandalous move, one that Jesus would have known would leave him questioned - causing problems with the good religious folks at the time.
- Not only does Jesus call one who would be labeled as a degenerate, but we need to pay attention to the radical response of Levi - he immediately gets up

and follows Jesus. Mark gives us a short account of this scenario, yet what we are to pay attention to is the type of person Jesus called and the response of Levi to the invitation of Jesus.

- Not only was Levi leaving his pretty lucrative gig, but he was joining a group of people, Jesus in particular, that would have been so unlike him. Think of the courage that Levi exhibited in order to follow Jesus. It couldn't have been comfortable for him. He was prob judged by people's hearts and outwardly questioned and ridiculed.
- So Levi picks up and follows Jesus without any reservation. The scene then moves to Levi's house, where he invites Jesus and all of his friends to come and celebrate together. Levi's friends were not good religious people. His community was made up of other tax collectors and "sinners."
- "Sinner" wasn't necessarily used by Mark here in the way we think of it today. "Sinner" was a technical term used by the Pharisees (the religious elite) for a class of people who we regarded as inferior b/c they showed no interest in the scribal tradition. "Sinners" were the common people of the day who possessed neither time nor inclination to behave and hold the law like the Pharisees. Basically, a "sinner" was anyone who did not endorse or uphold the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, thus were regarded as outcasts and looked down upon by those who abided by the law.
- "Tax collectors" and "sinners" denotes some of the most despised classes among the people of the day.
- Here we see Jesus dining, "reclining" with them, eating and drinking with the outcasts (from the perspective of the Pharisees).
- This bothered the religious folk, begging them to ask the question "Why does Jesus eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Notice here how they ask this question of the disciples, not directly to Jesus...
- This moment is reminiscent of a prior interaction with the Pharisees in Mark 2v5-11 where Jesus verbally answered their complaint (which was in their heart), showing that he knew the contents of the heart, not just what was spoken!
- Jesus responds with a traditional proverb that was well known at the time "the healthy have no need of a doctor, but rather the sick." With the Pharisees recognizing this maxim as legit, he went on to parallel his own ministry in this way saying that it was his responsibility to sit at table fellowship with the despised common people who actually needed him. Jesus outwardly displayed his love for the outcast, specifically the tax collector and any other sinner.

- You see, when Jesus broke bread with those far from God, he was extending to them a real relationship with God himself. It is at the table where the peace of God is extended to all! Mark's narrative here precisely demonstrates the forgiveness of Jesus toward all - the meal was an extension of the grace of God and an anticipation of the final supper when the Messiah will sit down with all of us sinners in the Kingdom of God - Rev 19v6-9.

In reading this passage, I believe we as disciples of Jesus learn to be like Jesus in three distinct ways:

I. As disciples of Jesus, we open our hearts to everyone especially those far from God. (MARK 2v13-14).

- A. Jesus' heart is open to everyone. This is the very character of God from the beginning of time.
 - 1. Isaiah 49v6 "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
 - 2. God's heart, best expressed in the person of Jesus, has always been that all people might come to know him - especially those far from him!
- B. Jesus invited questionable people to follow Him who would intentionally upset the religious group dynamic. The irony was the self-righteous folks, the ones who "knew God" had hearts closed to others.
 - 1. Levi was a very unlikely candidate for Jesus to ask to be his disciple. Yet, Jesus' heart was always for people like Levi, in particular those in the margins, those far from God.
- C. *Jesus wants to transform our propensity to have a closed heart, and give us a compassionate heart, especially for the outsider.* The religious leaders were eager to hear Jesus preach but not willing to sit at the table of relationship. If you distance yourself from the outcast, you distance yourself from Jesus.
- D. Is your heart open to those God has placed around you, especially those who are far from God?

II. As disciples of Jesus, everyone has a seat at our table (MARK 2v15-17).

A. *As disciples of Jesus, we understand that wherever we call home, particularly around the table eating and drinking, is a place where we see the inbreaking Kingdom of God.*

1. We open our homes (shared life around the table) because in doing so we live the love of Jesus.

B. The home - eating and drinking around the table - is a place where the heart of God for EVERYONE (the broken, the hurting, even the self-righteous) can best be seen!

1. It's where we experience true "fellowship" - koinonia - participation in life is experienced.

2. *Food matters. Meals matter. Meals are full of significance. "Few acts are more expressive of companionship than the shared meal. . . . Someone with whom we share food is likely to be our friend, or well on the way to becoming one."* Tim Chester.

3. The word "companion" comes from the Latin "cum" ("together") and "panis" ("bread"). One scholar says, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."

4. Luke 7v34 says, "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking..." Eating and drinking was not Jesus' mission, but it was his *method* of achieving his mission! People around the table!

5. The Messiah, the King of all, was experiencing table fellowship (community around eating and drinking) with outcast and ignorant common people. This was in fact a sign of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. God's new kingdom was on display in a radical way - with diverse and broken people sharing the forgiveness of the Messiah TOGETHER!

6. This put on display the heart of God for the world. There is a parable in Matthew 22 where Jesus depicts a great eschatological banquet that would include all people. What Jesus put on display, all the time, was that meals here on earth are significant signposts of the united fellowship that will one day be!

7. *Who ate with who* was of huge importance in the ancient world (and that's still part of many societies today - and if you think you are more evolved, think about the last time you got to pick who you sat next to during an open seating meal. How did you choose your seat

and who you sat next to?). For Jews, there was the matter of clean and unclean food laws, and for many folks in the first century, social networks and classes were built around who was included or excluded from the table. *Who you ate with MATTERED!*

8. Thus for early Xians, the importance of eating together as a sign of unity in Jesus was highly visible and very significant.

9. It still is today.

C. So the meals of Jesus represent something bigger. They represent a new world, a new kingdom, a new outlook. But they give that new reality substance. Jesus' meals are not just symbols; they're also application. They're not just pictures; they're the real thing in miniature. Food is stuff. It's not ideas. It's not theories. It's food, and you put it in your mouth, taste it, and eat it. And meals are more than food. They're social occasions. They represent friendship, community, and welcome.

D. In 2v15, it was the Messiah sitting at the table with the outcasts, and the mention of Jesus in v15 suggests that Jesus himself is the host of this time, not Levi!

E. The significance of this whole story is centered around the table, Jesus the Lord - the most significant - eating and drinking with the least significant.

F. In v17, the call of "sinners" into the Kingdom suggests that the basis of table fellowship was *messianic forgiveness*, and that the meal itself was an anticipation of the messianic banquet to come - Rev 3v20, 19v6-9, Matt 8v5-13

G. *Around the table, eating and drinking, is often where disciples are made and the mission of God is lived out.* As with Jesus, he was not only modeling for his disciples an open heart toward everyone, but he was showing them how they might love people into the Kingdom of God - through the table. This was the Kingdom of God drawing near.

III. Disciples of Jesus open their hearts and their homes to those far from God.

A. Jesus' came for those in need, inviting them to share at the table with him - an expression of love toward those unlike himself.

1. I really do believe that one of the greatest apologetics of our cultural moment is through the act of hospitality - being able to sit across the table from people who we don't have anything in common with, sitting across the table from our enemies, from those who look,

think, feel, and believe different than us. When you can sit across the table from someone and share a meal, you share the love of God toward others in perhaps its most tangible form!!! It's critical to the mission of God - he came for the sick, the lost - of which we all have been or are right now!

2. *Jesus fully accepted the "tax collectors and sinners," taking the initiative to seek them out! Jesus didn't tell people they had to believe a certain ideologies before they could sit at the table with him. They didn't have to believe the right things before they could belong in relationship with him. It was at the table where the truth of Jesus was put on display - done in the context of loving community, eating and drinking together.*

3. *Belonging most often leads to believing!!!* How often do people feel like they have to clean themselves up before they come to church, or meet with Jesus, etc...He always welcomed people in their mess and with their mess! He invited them to his table. They belonged!!!

B. Jesus didn't expect the sick to become well by themselves, but He also didn't intend on them staying sick - as we well see in this story.

C. There were two character responses juxtaposed in this story to Jesus' open heart (his full acceptance!!!) and the forgiveness he offered to the lost and broken:

1. *Levi (tax collector) response vs Pharisees (religious elite) response*

2. Levi responded by OPENING HIS HOME. He opened his life to Jesus and was willing to let Jesus lead him! He followed him!

3. The Pharisees condemned Jesus - falling into self-righteous hypocrisy, not opening their hearts or their homes.

D. To open your heart is to see everyone as a human being, made in the image of God, desiring to see them reconciled to their creator.

E. To open your home is to open your life - to share life with those far from God as a way to show the love/shalom of God to a world desperately searching for Jesus, yet missing him.

F. To open your heart and your home is to allow God to use the person he is making you to be - and your very life - for those who are lost and in need of Jesus.

***BI - The openness of our hearts and homes are critical to the mission of Jesus.

IV. Final thoughts to consider...

A. No one gets left behind...

1. Illust: WP trips and making sure everyone is accounted for before we take off - we don't leave anyone behind.
2. That's the church: the place where no one gets left behind. There's a place at the table for everyone.

B. How might we show grace to those far from God while living in a culture devoid of grace?

1. We are in constant competition with others trying to get ahead, to make something of ourselves. Or we live in insecurity, trying to prove ourselves. As one cultural critic put it "we live in a culture of spite in which we hold grudges, envy success, and protect ourselves."
2. In this culture our shared meals offer a moment of grace. A sign of something different. A pointer to God's coming world.
3. 'Life in the kingdom,' says Peter Leithart, 'demands that we adopt a new set of table manners, and as we observe this etiquette, we become increasingly civilized according to the codes of the city of God.'
4. Around the table we offer friendship and celebrate life. Our meals offer a divine moment – an opportunity for people to be seduced by grace into a better life, a truer life, a more human existence.

C. Who is Jesus inviting you to open your heart toward today, particularly someone far from God?

D. How might be Jesus calling you to open your home (your table) to others?

E. Who is Jesus calling you to love through ordinary hospitality as a sign of the in-breaking Kingdom of God?

F. I'm not suggesting you add anything to your already busy schedule. You eat at least 21 times a week...if you like to eat and you love Jesus then you can do "mission." Grab coffee with another Christian on the way to work, eat with your colleagues at lunch, have a neighbor over for dinner - better yet, have the neighbor over for dinner with another family from church - that way they can see the love of Jesus put on display within the family of God - They will know you are disciples of Jesus by your love for one another. You can show the love of Jesus to others and share his goodness with those God brings to your table.

- G. *Don't start with a big programme. Don't suddenly think you can add to your church budget and begin. Start personally and start in your home. I dare you. I dare you in the name of Jesus Christ. Do what I am going to suggest. Begin by opening your home for community ... You don't need a big programme. You don't have to convince your session or board. All you have to do is open your home and begin.* Francis Schaeffer
- H. Jesus came...not to call the righteous, but those outside the family, those in need of a Savior. As Luke says, the Son of Man came eating and drinking...and has invited us to the table with him! He's given us a way to become part of his family and released us to help others do the same!
- I. *Our invitation to the feast of God comes at a price: the precious blood of Jesus his Son. We are outsiders, enemies, excluded. But Jesus takes the judgment we deserve. He becomes the ultimate outsider – pushed out of the world onto the cross; forsaken by his Father. As a result we become insiders, friends, included. The invitation goes out to all.* Tim Chester

V. Baptism

- A. The best part about today is that we get to hear stories of people coming and sitting at the table with Jesus, receiving his forgiveness and grace, and choosing to follow him like Levi.
- B. Jesus has invited all of us to the table. He invites all people to follow him, to leave their past life (the old life, the life before Jesus) and receive the gift of new life in Jesus. This new heart we will witness today through stories - stories of those who like Levi, have chosen to follow Jesus, receiving his forgiveness and choosing to follow him.