

The Theme of Table Fellowship in Luke – Acts
A Study Guide

I Had Been Hungry All the Years

Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886)

I had been hungry all the years-
My noon had come, to dine-
I, trembling, drew the table near
And touched the curious wine.

‘T was this on tables I had seen
When turning, hungry, lone,
I looked in windows, for the wealth
I could not hope to own.

I did not know the ample bread,
‘T was so unlike the crumb
The birds and I had often shared
In Nature's dining-room.

The plenty hurt me, ‘t was so new,--
Myself felt ill and odd,
As berry of a mountain bush
Transplanted to the road.

Nor was I hungry; so I found
That hunger was a way
Of persons outside windows,
The entering takes away.

Love

George Herbert

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack’d anything.
“A guest,” I answer’d, “worthy to be here”;
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes but I?”
“Truth, Lord, but I have marr’d them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”
“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.

Luke – Acts

The Theme of Table Fellowship

Study Guide Contents

Part 1: Commentary

Part 2: Leader's Notes

The Background	Key Old Testament Passages Involving Eating
Jesus at the Big Reception	Luke 5:27 – 35
The Real Host	Luke 7:36 – 50
Jesus Serves Up the Abundant Meal	Luke 9:10 – 17
Loving God at the Table	Luke 10:38 – 42
True Cleansing at the Table	Luke 11:37 – 54
Living Out Jesus' Table Fellowship	Luke 14:1 – 33
The Three Joyful Homecoming Feasts	Luke 15:1 – 32
Celebrating With Zaccheus	Luke 18:15 – 19:10
The Memories Preserved at the Table	Luke 22:14 – 20
Paradise Regained Around Jesus' Table	Luke 24:13 – 49
The Early Christians' Table Fellowship	Acts 2:41 – 47; 4:31 – 37; 6:1 – 15

Part 3: Manuscript

Commentary: The Theme of Table Fellowship

As a Bible teacher, I've often look for a way to make lessons memorable and practical. In general, I've found that attaching lessons to visual pictures is helpful. In particular, I've found that the theme of eating found in Luke's writings is quite powerful. Jesus seems to have used his 'table fellowship' practice as a visual picture for exactly that purpose: to make his lessons memorable and practical. 'Table fellowship' teaches particular values to the community of Jesus' disciples. Here is a high level summary.

Summary of the Theme of Table Fellowship in Luke – Acts

Old Testament motif of eating	→	Jesus' teaching on table fellowship	→	Values imparted to the church
				Inviting non-Christians
				Teaching the word
				Celebrating the lost being found
				Building community & unity
				Sharing wealth
				Recalling Jesus' death and resurrection
				Expressing present and future hope
				Telling the Christian story

Eating in God's presence is an Israelite ideal that refers back to the creational paradise. In the garden, God told Adam that he may eat of all the trees in the garden, save one (Gen.2:16). The sense of abundance cannot be missed. This begins an intertwined motif of God's true humanity enjoying God's provision, within a covenantal relationship. At Sinai, when 'Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank' (Ex.24:9-11). For Israel, eating in God's presence in this way denoted the enjoyment of God's covenant, now formally extended to Israel as a nation. David said that experiencing God's shepherding is like being fed in a luxuriant pasture: 'Thou dost prepare a table before me' (Ps.23:5). And Isaiah foresaw the restoration from exile and the renewed covenant with Israel in terms of abundant banqueting in God's presence: 'And the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain...(Isa.25:6)...Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend your money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance' (Isa.55:1-2).

For Jesus to eat with people, then, was his way of symbolically enacting the restoration to the new creation paradise he was accomplishing by his Cross and Resurrection. We count ten such meal scenes in Luke's Gospel.

(1) Jesus celebrates with Levi a great feast, inviting other tax collectors into his fellowship, teaching about the new covenant he is inaugurating (Lk.5:27-39). This meal scene is invitational: Jesus is 'fishing' for people, which he had recently discussed with Simon (5:1-11), inviting other tax-collectors, along with Levi, into his new community. This episode lays the groundwork for why the Pharisees accuse Jesus of regularly eating with 'sinners and tax-collectors' (e.g. 15:1-2). At this, the first such meal scene, the Pharisees and scribes ask two openly hostile questions: 'Why do you eat with sinners?' (5:30) and 'Why do your disciples not fast?' (5:33) Previously they had kept their critical reasoning to themselves (5:21-22). Now, however, they voice their hostility.

(2) Soon enough, a Pharisee named Simon asks Jesus to dine with him (7:36-50). Simon is the host, with Jesus as the supposedly honored guest. During this meal, an unnamed sinful woman enters the scene and begins to weep and wipe Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. In fact, she plays the role of host, and truly honors Jesus as a guest. In this meal scene, we see a Pharisee think private thoughts that Jesus knows supernaturally and confronts brilliantly. Since Simon doubts that Jesus is a prophet, Jesus shows him precisely what kind of prophetic stuff out of which he is made. He reads his thoughts and delivers a telling parable about two people who are forgiven to different degrees. Jesus then elevates the unnamed sinful woman over Simon the Pharisee, calling attention to the woman's attitude and posture of faith. Though he does not use these words, Jesus implies that she is the true host of the meal, and Jesus has now

reoriented his attention to the party happening between him and the woman. Jesus pronounces on her his *shalom* (7:50), the (new) creational blessing.

Jesus' table fellowship with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners had tremendous meaning – he was elevating them to his status circle and expressing his solidarity with them. Of great import is Jesus' defense of himself as a 'friend' of such people (Lk.7:34). This scandalized the Pharisees, of course, and meal scenes are always a source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Making this particularly ironic is the fact that the Pharisees, 'although they did not reject the priesthood or the Temple cult, in light of the priests' and the Temple's vulnerability to impurity, sought to renew Israel by shifting the locus of holiness to their homes. This resulted in a special focus on the purity of one's everyday food and of one's companions at every meal.'¹ Jacob Neusner observes that this zeal for ritual purity extended so far that the Pharisees viewed the tables on which they ate their meals as representations of God's altar in the Jerusalem Temple.² Although Luke mentions more than once that the early Christians had table fellowship with each other, we should not assume that this practice was for Christians only. It can be said with some confidence that table fellowship was one of the early Christians' outreach vehicles, as it was for Jesus. When we come across statements like, 'And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved' immediately after mention of the believers taking their meals together regularly (Acts 2:26-27), we should probably see the early Christians as continuing the practice of Jesus, extending table fellowship to 'tax collectors and sinners.' This suggestion will be confirmed by 14:1-24 and 15:1-32.

(3) Jesus supernaturally provides an abundant meal of bread and fish in the wilderness (9:10-17), giving his disciples a lesson on how he himself will provide for his own community through the apostles. This seems to be an important episode for the apostles, who have just returned from their short-term missions trip to Israel. By sending them out with authority to preach backed by spiritual authority over demons and disease, Jesus seems to be indicating that he is distributing his teaching and/or something of himself through the twelve. Just as they have distributed Jesus' teaching and healing power and return filled with joy, so they distribute bread to the five thousand and return, each with his own basket filled. Far from being depleted and spent, they are nourished by Jesus in ministry.

(4) After recruiting, sending, and debriefing the seventy, Jesus has a meal with Mary and Martha (10:38-42). The placement of this story seems strategic to defining what 'loving God' means. Luke has just positioned this material after the 'good Samaritan' parable, which is about 'loving your neighbor.' The two stories seem to be a way of answering the question being debated by Jesus and the lawyer about the two greatest commandments. Conceptually, the stories follow a chiastic form:

- a. Love God definition sought
- b. Love neighbor definition sought
- b'. Love neighbor redefined
- a'. Love God redefined

When placed in its cultural context, the episode becomes powerfully suggestive. Whereas the typical Jewish portrait of loving neighbor would have been a Jew loving a fellow Jew, Luke's portrait is that of a Samaritan loving a Jew, crossing a vast national and ethnic boundary. Similarly, whereas the typical Jewish portrait of loving God would be a Jewish man sitting in the Temple reading Moses, Luke's portrait is that of a woman sitting at Jesus' feet listening to his word.

The two lessons Jesus gives to the twelve and the seventy will recur after the resurrection. By feeding the five thousand, Jesus provides an early link to his meal with the Emmaus disciples after his resurrection (24:13-34). Luke makes the verbal links between the two episodes strong. Tannehill notes, 'The description of the Emmaus meal is closer to the feeding of the multitude than to the Last Supper in some details. According to 24:30 and 9:16 Jesus 'blessed' the bread...In describing both the feeding of the multitude and the Emmaus meal, the day is said to 'decline'...The same verb for 'reclining to eat' is used in these two passages... However, the most striking point of contact between 9:10-17 and the Emmaus meal is in the description of Jesus' initiation of the meal through a series of four actions...Jesus takes bread, blesses, breaks it, and gives it to his companions.' By doing this, Jesus anticipates the development in Acts where the Christian community shares meals together and is nourished by the exalted Jesus through

¹ S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship,' p.796.

² Jacob Neusner, 'Two Pictures of the Pharisees: Philosophical Circle or Eating Club?' *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (1982): 525-38.

the apostles' teaching. The early physical picture of that experience is painted here in the wilderness. Also, the motif of listening to Jesus' word that was prominent in the Mary and Martha episode will recur at the resurrection, both when the Emmaus Road disciples listen with hearts burning to Jesus unfold Moses and the Prophets, and also when the eleven disciples are gathered and Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. By saying that listening to Jesus' word is an important aspect of sharing table fellowship with him, Luke lays an explicit foundation for the teaching that is to occur at Jesus' table. The disciples will later exposit his teaching and his interpretation of the Old Testament over these community meals. What was implicit about the importance of Jesus' word at his table becomes explicit here in 10:38-42, and held up widely as a model later.

In two polemical situations at the table with the Pharisees (11:37-54 and 14:1-24), Jesus lays out his requirements for inward purity and social ethics, both of which the Pharisees do not meet. (5) The growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees takes a new turn when one Pharisee asks to have lunch with Jesus (11:37). The Pharisee makes a private observation about Jesus not washing ceremonially before the meal. Jesus in turn launches into a devastating verbal rebuke of the Pharisees' internal uncleanness. Let us interpret internal uncleanness narrowly to mean a bad motive for good behavior, we note that Jesus gives a much broader definition. He says, 'You disregard justice and the love of God' (11:42). They have both bad motive and bad behavior. The Pharisees are amiss regarding both horizontal and vertical relations. One of the lawyers pipes up at this point and claims to be insulted. That does not stop Jesus, however, who goes on to rebuke these lawyers who interpret the Law of Moses for getting it all wrong. They, in Jesus' opinion, have greater blame than the Pharisees, for they make the interpretations that the Pharisees then implement. The scene closes with rebuke lingering in the air.

(6) The next meal scene surprises us merely by the fact of its existence: Jesus still gets invited to these Pharisees' meals! To make matters more amusing, Luke tells us it is the Sabbath, so the stage is set for twice the usual conflict. True to form, Jesus wastes no time healing a man, pushing the limits of the Pharisees' interpretation of the Sabbath again. In addition, Jesus comments in some detail on the roles the Pharisees were playing at these meals: guests, hosts, and invitees. Speaking about being *guests*, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for focusing these meals and parties on themselves, whereas if they had really understood how table fellowship functioned as a symbol of the kingdom banquet, they would have understood these events as occurrences of a wedding feast (14:8). The focus should properly be on the married couple (in fact, in Middle Eastern culture, on the groom), not on the guests. The Pharisees fundamentally misunderstand the kingdom banquet; it is a wedding feast honoring the groom, not a time to honor themselves. What kind of person would go to a wedding feast as a guest and call attention to himself? The same kind of person who thinks Jesus' kingdom is not about Jesus but himself.

Next, Jesus turns to his host and delivers a challenge about being a *host* for the kingdom: 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (14:12-14). Since the host has fallen far short of this, there was probably an awkward silence until one person courageously tries to break in with a bland, neutral statement he thinks everyone can agree on: 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' To which Jesus effectively says, 'And you're not going to be among them because of your poor excuses' (14:15-24). Being an *invitee* to the kingdom feast doesn't make one a participant: You still need to show up to the feast. Jesus has just laid an ethical foundation about being guests and hosts for the kingdom that we will see the early Christians follow. Their meals would embody these teachings. Luke follows this section, significantly, with Jesus warning the multitude that a real disciple hates his own mother and father, etc. and even all his material possessions (14:33). This is a serious warning, but it makes sense in the context of Jesus' disciples needing to be hosts who display the inclusive, generous and sacrificial ethic of their master's kingdom banquet. Throwing parties for people who cannot pay you back will surely challenge your concept of community and drain your wallet. Yet this became the practice of Jesus' disciples.

Immediately following (6) is (7), an occasion where the Pharisees criticize Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners (15:1-2). Their critique prompts Jesus to tell the three famed parables of the lost (15:3-32). Jesus says in all of those parables that the best way to describe the rejoicing in the heavenly realms over the return of the lost is a celebratory community banquet. This gives us further insight into Jesus' table fellowship practice: meals are seen by Jesus not only as evangelistic events but as events celebrating a lost person being found. Especially poignant is the fact that the younger brother in the third

parable had been eating with the pigs; by coming home, he eats festively with his father and the whole village community. He was celebrating the tax collectors and sinners while the Pharisees were standing at the door, grumbling. Jesus, especially in the parable of the two lost sons, challenges the Pharisees to come into the house and join the celebration. (8) Then Jesus welcomes Zaccheus into fellowship with him at his home, implicitly with a meal (19:1-10). Zaccheus, the man who is 'short in stature' and climbs a tree like a child, is contrasted with the rich ruler, who has appeared just before Zaccheus (18:18-30), who would not become a child to enter the kingdom community (18:15-17). Luke utilizes the theme of sight in the rich ruler – Zaccheus sequence as well, and we will discuss this episode in more depth below.

Of these episodes, the sixth and eighth interact substantially with Luke's theme of wealth, while the seventh does so to a lesser extent. In the three parables of the lost, Jesus portrays material possessions being used in celebration of the lost returning to God through Jesus' ministry. During the sixth meal scene, however, Jesus radically redefines the role of a 'host' in his service to align with his role in opening up the kingdom to all. This inclusiveness necessitates large expenditures on behalf of the poor and others who cannot pay the host back. The 'poor,' etc. are not metaphorical placeholders for others generically. In other words, this teaching is not merely aimed at our motivations (e.g. just invite friends of your same socio-economic circle without expecting anything in return), but our actual practice (e.g. invite people who really cannot pay you back, who might be socially awkward for you to host). Doing this consistently means that entering the kingdom bears a significant real cost (thus, the two warnings about counting the cost in 14:25-33) culminating in the warning that Jesus has come to claim all a person's material possessions (14:33). Jesus teaches that his disciples are to host meals that include people who are marginalized by society. Likewise, during the eighth meal scene, Jesus celebrates a meal with Zaccheus in connection with Zaccheus' public announcement that he will give away half his wealth and pay back by a multiple of four anyone whom he has wronged. Zaccheus, incidentally, probably expects not a short line of claimants outside his door eager to take him up on that offer. After all is said and done, he probably won't be left with much! Thus, Zaccheus is one who is eager to reconcile his strained relationships for the sake of the kingdom; he is eager to generously help the poor; he is one who allows Jesus to claim all his possessions. In these meal scenes, we see the theme of money interacting more and more with the theme of table fellowship. In Acts, we will see a thorough convergence of the two themes.

The ninth and tenth table fellowship scenes bracket the Cross and Resurrection accounts, lending them symbolic depth. (9) In the upper room, Jesus introduces the idea that his disciples will internalize his own body and blood. By doing so, they are entering a 'new covenant.' The resurrected Jesus later clarified this union with himself as actually happening by the Holy Spirit indwelling the believers. What are the effects of this spiritual internalization of the crucified Jesus? On the Cross, Jesus grants to the penitent revolutionary³ communion with him in 'paradise.' This statement, unique to Luke, is no haphazard pronouncement. It underscores the achievement of Jesus' death and resurrection: restoring rebels to paradise with God.

Associated with the Resurrection, (10) two of Jesus' disciples on the Emmaus Road experience the reversal of the fall in the context of a meal.⁴ The gender of Cleopas' companion is unspecified, allowing us to wonder if this companion was Cleopas' wife, Mary. This reminds us of Adam and Eve walking with God. Rather than losing fellowship with God, however, these two disciples gain it. Rather than failing to believe and live by God's word as Adam and Eve decided, they eventually gain insight into it and believe. In fact, their hearts burn as they internalize God's Word. In the context of eating, they have their eyes opened, in a phrase that deliberately echoes Adam and Eve's eyes being opened by eating in the fall. Only this time, rather than having their eyes opened to a fallen self-awareness, they are opened instead to perceive Jesus; they perceive him as he breaks bread, suggesting how we are to understand not only the communion sacrament and what it points to: the internalization of Jesus himself. Whereas Adam and Eve realized they were naked, the disciples are eventually clothed with power from on high. Whereas Adam and Eve were to spread from Eden over the whole earth to proclaim their rule over it, the disciples of Jesus are commanded to spread from Jerusalem over the whole earth to proclaim Jesus' rule over it. The intertextual links to the Genesis account cannot be missed.

Hence Luke uses meal scenes not only to tie his work together literarily, but also to sound out the main melody of his composition. Jesus has brought about, in some sense, an undoing of the fall. He is making restoration, the paradisaal state of fellowship with God, available, and this not just for Israel, but for

³ not a common thief, see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p.

⁴ I am indebted to N. T. Wright for pointing this out in *The Challenge of Jesus*.

all humanity. This achievement occurred at the Cross and Resurrection. By emphasizing a 'new covenant' in the upper room on the night of the Passover, Jesus placed a new interpretation of deliverance on top of the traditional meaning of the Jewish Passover. Was he speaking of deliverance out of the kingdom of darkness, Satan's domain? Very likely that is included in Jesus' meaning, but the most natural contrast to a 'new covenant' is an 'old covenant.' Jesus is speaking of delivering people from the 'old covenant' and into the 'new covenant' in some parallel way to how the Israelites were delivered out of Egypt. So rather than celebrating a physical deliverance from Egypt, Jesus' disciples will henceforth celebrate a spiritual deliverance from the old covenant itself. Hence we have sufficient ground here to link Jesus' upper room statements to Peter's later teaching, 'Through him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses'... 'a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear' (Acts 13:39; 15:10). Jesus eclipsed the memory of the exodus deliverance with his own act of deliverance.

Christian communion is also tremendously symbolic because of its antecedents in the literature of ancient Israel. In the Joseph story, Joseph is imprisoned and then exalted on high, but while imprisoned is associated with a baker who then is killed (echoing bread being broken) and a cupbearer who goes free (echoing wine being available). This has echoes to the Jesus story, where Jesus is 'imprisoned' in a sense, and later exalted on high, but only after making available bread that is broken and wine that runs free for all. More importantly, we believe, in Christian communion, a new humanity is pictured eating from a new source of life. Communion draws out in symbol the mysterious act of internalizing the crucified and resurrected Jesus, or more precisely, having him within oneself by the Spirit. The act of eating the bread and wine symbolizes internalizing Jesus (by the Spirit) to be free from the Mosaic Law's condemnation, thus reentering paradise with God, which is itself, elegantly enough, symbolized by eating. A Jew 'under the Law' and a Gentile 'in Adam' must both internalize the crucified Jesus and rise with him. The fact that believers in Jesus have internalized Jesus' death and resurrection by the Spirit therefore allows them to see in communion a reminder that they are part of a new humanity, a one body, that enjoys the new covenant blessings with the God of Israel who is also the Creator-Redeemer God of the world.

That the early Christians believed that the exalted Jesus was somehow present with them when they gathered, especially when they observed the Last Supper, is well accepted. However, early Christian meals had theological and social implications above and beyond the liturgical communion practice, which most church traditions have not upheld. Snapshots of early church life shown in Acts revolve around meals. While the phrase 'breaking of bread' probably refers to the specific observance of the Last Supper (e.g. Acts 2:42), in order to express the unity of their community life, observance of the Last Supper itself was probably only part of an actual meal. They took 'their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart' (2:46).

More significantly, these meals appear in the context of sharing and redistribution of economic resources. Luke observes that 'all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need' (2:45-26). The earliest Christians appear to have taken seriously Jesus' call to be a new community. The historic Christian virtue of hospitality seems to be a direct result of this ethic, as do reconciliation (interpersonally and ethnically) and redistribution of wealth. The conceptual basis for redistribution is laid in fairly simple terms: If all believers eat from the same kingdom banquet table, not physically but conceptually, sharing wealth is akin to someone asking another believer across the table to 'please pass the bread.' This unity seems to have made a positive impression on the population, for the community was continually expanding. Probably, as we saw with Jesus, the early Christians used meals as their outreach vehicle as well. The outcome of this inclusive table fellowship is that 'the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.'

Luke shows us that the apostles initially managed the money and table fellowship in the earliest Jerusalem community. Three mentions of this practice are evidenced consecutively. In 4:34-35, 'For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.' In 4:37, Barnabas sold a tract of land, 'brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.' And in 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira attest by way of negative example to the sale of property and the distribution of its proceeds. Thus, the earliest Christians practiced the redistribution of resources within the Christian community; the trusted apostolic leadership managed this broad table fellowship because handling the community's money was a serious matter. Judas, the last money-handler, had lacked integrity and been a traitor. Luke says that he had acquired a field (1:18), doing precisely the opposite of Jesus' teaching and

practice of separating Israel from its ancestral land. The apostles, by contrast, did not keep any of it for themselves. Earlier, Peter and John claimed, 'I do not have silver and gold' (3:6). The apostles were handling the collection and daily distribution of resources across these few thousand people peppered throughout the city, a formidable task.

What happens when disunity threatens the church's table fellowship? We get a glimpse of this in Acts 6. The ethnic and cultural divisions present in the wider Jerusalem society begin to affect the Christian community. Following the appointment of Stephen, one of the seven, mention is made of a Hellenistic 'Synagogue of the Freedmen' made up of Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians, and Asians (6:9), an odd peculiarity giving us insight into the context of the early church. Why would a synagogue exist in Jerusalem? Synagogues were formed for Jews who were away from Jerusalem, especially during the exilic time period when the Temple did not exist. Yet according to some scholars, a total of ## synagogues existed in first century Jerusalem while the Temple stood, which is a bit astonishing. Apparently, Hellenistic Jews were not totally embraced by the native Hebrew community and power structures. After a few generations, the influence of Hellenistic culture(s) on Diaspora Jews was probably significant. Perhaps some intermarriage (while enslaved?) had given them different physical characteristics; they surely had different accents, languages, dress, and customs. If Jerusalem dwellers looked down upon Galileans, identifying them by their accents, how much more did they feel similarly towards Hellenistic Jews from beyond the land? Those differences were apparently palpable and relevant in a context where ethnic purity was valued. Any reading of Acts which criticizes the early Jerusalem church for delaying its outreach to the Samaritans and Gentiles needs to do so cautiously and sympathetically, if at all. Judaism was not monolithic, and ministry to the Jews was not without its own ethnic and cultural challenges. Luke himself does not express any criticism of the earliest Christian community for delaying its outreach to the Gentiles, so any such criticism pushes beyond Luke.

Divisions from outside the church become divisions within in Acts 6. Being native Hebrews, the apostles were probably less informed about the Hellenistic widows in the community. In a rapidly growing community, their information network must have simply been 'who they knew.' An oversight was bound to happen. When it does, it falls along the same ethnic and cultural lines that exist in the broader Jewish world. The oversight is unintentional, but it nevertheless replays realities with which people were already very familiar. The apostles acknowledge the validity of the Hellenistic complaint, as opposed to ignoring it, getting defensive, or squelching the ethnic minority's voice by impugning their motives. They then recognize that the management of the church's table fellowship has become larger than what they could handle. The translation, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables' (6:2) is unfortunate. Such wording gives the impression that the apostles took orders and served meals. In reality, it was much more than that. Such wording also gives the impression that the apostles disdained the job in favor of the more 'spiritual' tasks of preaching and praying. Nothing could be further from the truth: The job was a vital one to the whole community, in fact it was the very expression of their community life together, and the apostles were taking it very seriously in delegating it to the seven deacons. The apostles open seven vacancies for the whole community to fill, the criterion being that the seven men must be full of the Spirit, trustworthy to manage the community's money (unlike Judas Iscariot), and good representatives of the community (6:3). These seven were presumably responsible for some teaching at community meals. This move meets with divine approval, as Luke adds, 'The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith' (6:7).

Table fellowship continued to have significant implications for the early church. When God gives Peter the vision to include Cornelius the Gentile in the covenant community, He uses the motif of food and eating, reversing the kosher laws for Peter (Acts 10-11). Nothing could have been clearer as a message to go eat with the Gentiles. Similarly, table fellowship was the hot issue in Galatians 2. It was the expression of the unity of believers, and as such, can probably be taken as the dominant image for the social vision of the New Testament.

As an example of how powerful this theme is in encapsulating multiple values, let me address one basic question being considered by scholars: Does it matter in regards to exegesis and application whether we position 'table fellowship' within the Hebraic theme of eating or the Hellenistic motif of the symposium? Yes, on several levels. First, however strong an awareness Jesus himself may have had of the Hellenistic symposia, he seems to have retained a stronger commitment to the Hebraic theme of eating. In fact, the Hebraic awareness seems to stir the most controversy with the Pharisees. At the same meal setting where Luke mentions the various roles of host, guest, etc. of the symposium (Lk.14), the Hebraic

awareness of the meal as a symbol of the eschatological kingdom of God still provides the basic grist for Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees that they are not entering the kingdom.

Second, if we exegetically situate Jesus in a Greek symposium whenever we find him eating with sinners in Israel, we do lose some of the power of the theme for other purposes. If we adhere to the scholarly definition of the Greek symposium as the time of talking and drinking that *followed* a banquet, or perhaps even independent of a banquet,⁵ then we lose the *act of eating* with ordinarily unwelcome guests as a symbol of God's kingdom. The Hebraic meal scene symbolically demonstrates at least four actions at once: God invites people to Himself (symbolized by the initiative of the host inviting others to a meal), one enters the kingdom by internalizing Jesus (symbolized by the eating of food), one enjoys lost paradisaic communion with God (also symbolized by the food), and those at the table serve each other (the guests are honored by the host serving them). If the symposium is not actually the meal, then we weaken our own ability to critique social dynamics and evangelize at the same time. This is so because technically, the symposium is only a time of socializing after the meal. A Hellenistic guest, by merely participating in a socially adjusted Greek symposium, would not see a symbol of how to enter the kingdom since the host offering food (which symbolizes God offering Jesus to us) is no longer emphasized. She only sees the symbolic effects of the kingdom (a change in social dynamics at the table), and that only partially (a host with no food is a diminished portrait of the God of Israel). The symposium does not symbolically express *entering* the kingdom by *internalizing Jesus*. The force of Luke's writings is therefore weakened, as would be the evangelistic thrust of the Christian praxis of meals.

Third, the notion that table fellowship exclusively drives Jesus' overall teaching on money and relationships – a claim sometimes made out of a concern for social justice by Joel Green, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Halvor Moxnes – is an overstatement. To be sure, there was social elitism played out in the symposium, so it is true that Luke's writings landing in a Hellenistic environment would have some powerful *social* implications: It would cause Hellenistic Christians to seek out the typically unwelcome and seat them at places of honor. There is no ground, however, for making Luke's theme of table fellowship the driving factor behind the theme of wealth. Jesus' teaching on wealth and the poor also emerges out of an engagement with Israel's historic and literary interaction with their own land traditions. Thus, Jesus is really calling for all to disinherit themselves – whether they are rich or poor – from their traditional sources of material wealth. Correspondingly, we cannot make the reversal of the social hierarchy in meal settings tantamount to Jesus' total teaching on the poor or towards them. Under this subordination, various scholars take Luke's writings to require a reversal of an unfair distribution of wealth, where the rich give to the poor (which I heartily endorse) and the poor *merely receive* (which I do not). One difficulty with this view is that table fellowship was not only an exclusivistic practice among Christians alone. It was a significant and general form of outreach as well, one that required resources even from the less endowed in the church.

However interesting the parallels may be with the Hellenistic symposium, Luke's table fellowship is fundamentally a Hebraic concept. This is not to say that the Hellenistic symposium should not be critiqued for being unjust. It absolutely should, but only as its own situation after Luke's text is properly understood. Just as there are hierarchical social taboos around the meal scene in virtually every culture that should be challenged because of and with Luke's writings, so the Greek symposium is such a one. But saying that behind Luke's theme of table fellowship lays the historic institution of the Greek symposium is simply exegetically inaccurate. It exaggerates the historic impact of Hellenistic culture in Israel, especially upon the mind of Jesus. It drains away the significance of the Jewish Passover as the backdrop to Jesus' upper room meal. It causes us to lose clarity into the meaning of true table fellowship, when we see in the other person's eating a symbolic lesson about internalizing Jesus by the Spirit. And it detours our theological thinking: Social ethics are most firmly derived from foundational truths about Jesus' death and resurrection within Israel, not elsewhere.

⁵ Michael Vickers, *Greek Symposia* (Joint Association of Classical Teachers: London, 1978). See also S. Scott Bartchy, 'Table Fellowship' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1992), p.796. See also D. E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 613.

The Background: Key Old Testament Passages Involving Eating

Gen.2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden, eating you will eat."

Ex.24:9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. 11 Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

Ps.23:5 Thou dost prepare a table before me.

Isa.25:6 And the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain, a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine. 7 And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death for all time.

Isa.55:1 Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why do you spend your money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.

Foreground Action: Jesus at the Big Reception

Lk.5:27 After that he went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." 28 And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow him. 29 And Levi gave a big reception for him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them. 30 The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" 31 And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." 33 And they said to him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but yours eat and drink." 34 And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? 35 But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days."

Reflection

1. What have you imagined Jesus' parties are like? Do you relate to the idea of Jesus going to or throwing great parties?

Questions

2. Who is Levi? What is a tax collector? How does Levi make money?
3. What does the rest of the Jewish community think of Levi?
4. Why are there so many tax collectors in attendance at Levi's reception?
5. Imagine the lavishness of this banquet. Describe it in a few words
6. Why do the Pharisees not like this scene?
7. Why is eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners such a big deal? Recall the Old Testament passages above.
8. Perhaps there is some of their attitude in us today. Do you grumble when you see Christians associating with certain people? Who is not welcome to eat at your table? Who is not likely to be your dinner guest?
9. How could Jesus be moving you in the direction of inviting them over, or inviting them out?
10. Contrast the Pharisees with Jesus in terms of their attitudes towards fasting and banqueting.
11. When will the disciples fast? Why? Do they break their fast?
12. Have you ever celebrated your spiritual birthday? Who would you invite if you did?

Foreground Action: The Real Host

Lk.7:36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing his feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet he would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 Turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with perfume. 47 For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then he said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49 Those who were reclining at the table with him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Reflection

1. Take a piece of paper and sign your signature on it. Then, put the pen in your other hand and sign your name again. Which signature represents the real you?

Questions

1. Which person in the story is more like the real you: Simon the Pharisee or the sinful woman?
2. Compare and contrast the 'sinful woman' to Simon the Pharisee. Who is named, who has what role, how they feel about Jesus, how they approach him, etc. Who is named in the story? Who is not? What does that mean about social prominence?
3. How would Simon the Pharisee describe himself?
4. How would the woman describe herself? What has her life likely been about?
5. What was the alabaster vial of perfume worth? If she was a prostitute, would she have used it for her profession?
6. Note: When did women typically let down their hair? On their wedding night, for their husbands only. What does it mean that she lets down her hair in public to wipe Jesus' feet?
7. Why is she so emotional at Jesus' feet?
8. What kind of tensions does her presence cause at the gathering?
9. Simon thinks Jesus is ignorant of the woman's character and background. He's guessing that Jesus doesn't know. What's the irony of the situation?
10. What does Jesus' parable show? How does Jesus turn the tables on Simon?
11. Trace the theme of welcoming through the story. Who welcomes who?
12. Why has Simon not treated Jesus with due respect and honor as a guest? Who does he think should be honored?
13. How does the woman take the role of the host?
14. What does Jesus want both of their identities to be built around? Being forgiven, and loving him.
15. Why is Simon's self-concept so attractive and yet so dangerous? Why does he refuse to believe Jesus? What's in it for him to continue in unbelief?
16. How would you describe the faith of the woman?
17. Are you a \$5 sinner or a \$5,000,000 sinner? What would help you love Jesus more and know his forgiveness more?

Foreground Action: Jesus Serves Up the Abundant Meal

Lk.9:10 And when the apostles returned, they gave an account to him of all that they had done. And taking them with him, he withdrew by himself to a city called Bethsaida. 11 But the multitudes were aware of this and followed him; and welcoming them, he began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. 12 And the day began to decline, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But he said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 And they did so, and had them all recline. 16 And he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving to the disciples to set before the multitude. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

Questions

1. Focus on the crowd
 - a. Why do so many people follow Jesus?
 - b. How do they get fed?
 - c. What might they have thought of the Old Testament Scriptures of eating and this experience?
 - d. How does Jesus supernaturally and abundantly nourish us, while we are wandering and in the wilderness?
 - e. What can you ask from him in a specific situation that is tough, where you feel like you don't have enough to keep going?
2. Focus on the disciples.
 - a. Note: Where are the apostles getting back from? A short term missions to Israel. What does Jesus seem to be seeking in withdrawing?
 - b. Why do the disciples tell Jesus to send them away? Are they being insensitive, or self-centered?
 - c. Why does Jesus challenge them to get them something to eat?
 - d. If you were one of the disciples, and you see the 5000, how would you react? Overwhelmed.
 - e. How do the disciples try to work it out at first?
 - f. So what does Jesus do?
 - g. What did the disciples experience as they distributed the food? What must their reaction be like? As they turn their heads and watch Jesus, what do they see? What strikes them? What is this like for them?
 - h. After everyone is finished eating, what is each disciple left with? As they see each other carrying a full basket, what might they be thinking? How are they feeling emotionally?
 - i. The night before he was crucified, Jesus was in the upper room with his disciples. He broke bread there. What did the bread symbolize? It symbolizes Jesus himself.
 - j. What does this show us about Jesus' vision of bringing others into table fellowship, to eat in God's presence? That Jesus will provide spiritual and emotional resources for us even as he commands us to serve others and draw them to the meal.
 - k. When we recognize an opportunity for us to serve in the power of Jesus, are we afraid of running out of our own emotional or spiritual resources? How is this passage an encouragement and a challenge to us?
 - l. When we serve others at Jesus' table, or bring others to Jesus' table, do we experience more or less of Jesus within us?

Foreground Action: Loving God in Table Fellowship with Jesus

Lk.10:25 And a lawyer stood up and put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And he said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Jesus gives the parable of the good Samaritan) 38 Now as they were traveling along, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to his word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Questions

1. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind? Is it appropriate to put these two passages together?
2. What is Mary doing while in table fellowship with Jesus?
3. Note: Was that a typically male or female thing to do in that culture? Male. How is it that Jesus breaks gender roles here to empower Mary?
4. Why is Mary doing what she's doing?
5. What is Martha doing? Why?
6. Imagine someone who is traditionally in authority over you trying to get you to do other things. Imagine Jesus shielding you from that. What does this feel like?
7. What does this episode reflect about what Jesus wants while in table fellowship with us?
8. Who feeds who at Jesus' table?
9. Why is this a gesture of love on Jesus' part...To Mary? To Martha?
10. Imagine yourself sitting at the table with Jesus, engaging in conversation with him while he explains himself and God's love to you. What does this feel like?
11. What are some things that distract you from this?

Foreground Action: Jesus' Demand for True Cleansing at the Table

Lk.11:37 Now when he had spoken, a Pharisee asked him to have lunch with him; and he went in, and reclined at the table. 38 When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that he had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. 39 But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. 40 You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. 42 But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. 44 Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it." 45 One of the lawyers said to him in reply, "Teacher, when you say this, you insult us too." 46 But he said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. 48 So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 For this reason also the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, 50 so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation. 52 Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering." 53 When he left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question him closely on many subjects, 54 plotting against him to catch him in something he might say.

Questions

1. Would you invite Jesus to a dinner you were throwing? Why or why not?
2. Why did the Pharisees focus on being 'clean'?
3. So, what did it mean for some Jews to be 'clean'?
4. How is it possible to be 'clean' on the outside but full of robbery and wickedness on the inside?
5. What are some external actions or behaviors that supposedly mark out a 'clean' person in your cultural group?
6. Why was it easier for the Pharisees to neglect larger commands while being strict on smaller commands?
7. What public prestige do the Pharisees get for their behavior?
8. Note: What was the role of the lawyers (hyper-Pharisees)? They interpreted the Scriptures for the Pharisees. What are the burdens the lawyers placed on people? What truly constitutes a burden? How could Jesus' commands be more comprehensive and yet 'lighter'?
9. Why did Jesus place the guilt of prophet-murder on his generation? What was the consequence on them?
10. What is the 'key of knowledge'?
11. What did the lawyers and Pharisees fail to enter?
12. How did they hinder others who were entering?
13. How is it possible for us to hinder others from entering?

Foreground Action: Living Out Jesus' Table Fellowship

Lk.14:1 It happened that when he went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching him closely. 2 And there in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they kept silent. And he took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. 5 And he said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" 6 And they could make no reply to this. 7 And he began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." 12 And he also went on to say to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." 15 When one of those who were reclining at the table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" 16 But he said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' 21 And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' 22 And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 23 And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"

25 Now great multitudes were going along with him; and he turned and said to them, 26 'If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. 33 So therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.'"

Questions

1. Being guests at the kingdom banquet
 - a. Who are the Pharisees? Lay out what we know about them. Specifically, try to define what kind of spirituality they had, and what they thought of others who weren't Pharisees.
 - b. How did the Pharisees party? What might it have felt like to be at a Pharisee party? (1) 'a red-carpet affair' where photographers and journalists take pictures of famous celebs going to a party; (2) a hob-nobbing party, etc.
 - c. Compare that to a wedding banquet. Have you ever been at a wedding reception party where you sat on the outside edge of the tables? How did that feel?

- d. But was there still some kind of joy you had?
 - e. Can you imagine a person who goes to a wedding as a guest and then tries to take center stage???? What kind of person is that????
 - f. Notice that you can break down the passage into three roles. Guests, hosts, invitees. What attitude does Jesus want guests to have, according to v.7-11? What wrong attitude did the Pharisees have *as guests*? Why?
 - g. Why do the Pharisees think that they should take center stage at their parties?
 - h. How does thinking of themselves as a guest at a wedding put them in their place?
 - i. Reflect: When we think the kingdom is about **us**, and about getting recognition **for ourselves**, what happens to us? Shallow spirituality, bad motivations, people-pleasing, craving public roles, not taking opportunities to care for difficult people that are less visible. How might you be more genuinely free to serve others if you really did not seek recognition from within the church community?
2. Being hosts representing the kingdom banquet
 - a. Jesus said this (v.12-14) to his Pharisee host, in public. How do you think he felt?
 - b. What wrong attitude did the Pharisees have *as hosts*?
 - c. Note: Does this happen in families with gift-giving, or taking each other out to restaurants? You kind of mentally keep track of who's paid what, in order to get a similar gift for them later, or take them out to a similarly priced restaurant? Doesn't it seem so perfectly normal to do this?
 - d. According to v.12-14, what kind of hosts does Jesus want at parties?
 - e. Would the phrase 'consciously inclusive' describe the host Jesus likes? Can you think of a few other phrases?
 - f. What would it be like if you threw parties like this (v.12-14)?
 - g. How is eating with someone more than just serving them from behind a soup kitchen counter?
 - h. Reflect: Why does Jesus care so much about how we party? Jesus sees this eating/banquet/feast/table scene as a foreshadowing of the kingdom of God, where the ultimate banquet is coming. Jesus hates bad parties because they paint bad pictures of the kingdom. His parties are inclusive because his kingdom is inclusive. Exclusive parties are bad!
 3. Being invitees to the kingdom banquet
 - a. How uncomfortable must the Pharisees have felt after v.14?
 - b. Note: Where is the man in v.15 trying to take the conversation? This is a totally bland, neutral comment. He's trying to rescue the party from the awkward silent tension Jesus has just caused. 'This is something we can all agree on! Right, Jesus?' It's as if he's trying to strike common ground after a very awkward disagreement. Where does Jesus take it in v.16 and following.? Essentially he says, 'Well, you're not one of them.' He makes it worse!
 - c. According to v.16-23, What wrong attitude did the Pharisees have *as invitees*?
 - d. What kind of excuses are these really? What attitude do the invitees in the parable have? That being invited means that you can go at any time.
 - e. Does being invited mean that one actually goes to the banquet?
 - f. What do you think of these excuses? 'I just bought a new car, and I need to test drive it.' The married one sounds reasonable, on the other hand, but then again he could bring her.
 - g. Reflect: These are silly reasons, and Jesus is saying that actually all your excuses are silly. They're lame excuses. Leave your land behind. Bring your wife to the party if you have to. But COME! Otherwise you won't taste of his dinner!
 - h. Why does Jesus tell us to 'count the cost' in v.25-33? Because we are to use our resources to serve the downtrodden, without expecting anything in return. Boston's BIG DIG was foolishly planned, and it makes us look stupid. Likewise, people who try to be a part of the kingdom without counting the cost first are foolish.
 - i. What about v.33? Why does Jesus want all our possessions? Does that have to do with hating your father and mother, etc.? Does that have to do with throwing parties for people who can't repay you? What does that mean for you?
 4. Describe Jesus' definition of table fellowship in the kingdom of God from the point of view of guests, hosts, and invitees. How must our definitions change in accordance with his?
 5. Emphasize: Why does Jesus get upset with bad parties? Because they don't portray the kingdom correctly! Bad parties paint bad pictures!

Foreground Action: The Three Joyful Homecoming Feasts

Lk.15:1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” 3 So he told them this parable, saying, 4 “What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ 7 I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

Lk.15:8 “Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Lk.15:11 There was a man who had two sons 12 and the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.” And he divided his living between them. 13 Not many days later the younger son sold all he had, journeyed to a far country and wasted his property in loose living. 14 And when he had spent everything a great famine arose in that country and he began to be in want. 15 So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country and he sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he would gladly have eaten the pods which the pigs ate and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s servants have bread to spare but I perish here with hunger. 18 I will arise and go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you 19 and am no more worthy to be called your son; make me a servant.’” 20 And he arose and came to his father. And while he was at a great distance his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to the father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son.” 22 And the father said to the servants, “Bring the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hands and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and make merry 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found.” And they began to make merry.

Lk.15:25 Now the elder son was in the fields, and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing 26 and he called one of the boys and asked what this meant. 27 And he said to him, “Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he received him with peace.” 28 But he was angry and refused to go in so his father came out and was entreating him. 29 But he answered his father, “Lo these many years I have served you and I have never disobeyed your commandments yet you never gave me a kid to make merry with my friends. 30 But this son of yours came who has devoured your living with harlots you killed for him the fatted calf.” 31 And he said to him, “Beloved son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to make merry and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found.”

High Level Questions

1. What are the ratios in these three stories? Does that matter?
2. What might it have been like at one of these three celebratory parties?

Questions, v.1-7

1. Who are the tax-collectors and sinners?
2. Who might the religious establishment regard today with equal hostility?
3. Why is one sheep out of a hundred so valuable to a shepherd?
4. Why is one person so valuable to God?
5. What must the shepherd endure to search for the lost sheep?
6. Why does the shepherd lay the sheep on his shoulders? What is that like for the shepherd?
7. Why does the shepherd want to celebrate? Why is he filled with joy?
8. Why does the community want to celebrate? Because the entire family clan has an interest in the sheep.
9. What kind of celebration is this?

10. Is Jesus celebrating?
11. Why are the Pharisees not celebrating?

Questions, v.8-10

1. What is the woman searching for?
2. Note: Why is one coin out of ten so valuable to her? It is part of her dowry inheritance, and is often worn on a necklace as a set. So the loss is more than the value of a single coin. A set of things belongs together. One person lost pains God more than the loss of that person; it is that something which should have been complete is somehow made incomplete. Reflect on the significance of a person to God.
3. Describe the intensity of the woman's search. Why does she keep sweeping?
4. The woman wants to celebrate when she finds the coin. What kind of celebration is this?
5. How is a woman's valuing of her inheritance a small representation of God's love?
6. Jesus says that there is joy in heaven over a repentant sinner. Do we normally think of heaven celebrating? As a joyful place?
7. Do we share in the joy in the heavenly realms over a lost person being found when they come to Christ?
8. What do the following literary structures reveal about the main point of the parables? (In a chiasm, the main point is the center-most point)

Questions, the Younger Son

1. We've dealt with one out of a hundred (sheep), and one out of ten (coins). What's the ratio now? One out of two (sons).
2. Note: What's the setting of the story? A farming home out in the country. Again, it's important to point out that this is a small village. It takes place in community.
3. Note: What does it mean that the younger son demands his inheritance from his father? He wants him dead. Cultural notes: A man named Dr. Kenneth Bailey, who has spent almost twenty years studying people in small villages from all over the Middle East, from Morocco to India, from Turkey to Sudan, tried to get to the bottom of this. He's conducted interviews that typically go like this:
 - "Has anyone ever made such a request in your village?"
 - "Never!"
 - "Could anyone ever make such a request?"
 - "Impossible!"
 - "If anyone ever did, what would happen?"
 - "His father would beat him, of course!"
 - "Why?"
 - "This request means -- he wants his father to die!"

In these small villages where the culture hasn't changed much over the years, people say the same thing. There is no way any son would be so disrespectful as to ask his father for his inheritance. And back then, in Jesus' day, when things were maybe even stricter, when the father was the undisputed head of the house, and when his word was law, this was unimaginable. This is not teenage defiance in twentieth century America where the father says, "No allowance for you." This is a culture where the father could punish with death. Fathers in Israel, according to Deuteronomy, were allowed to take their defiant, disrespectful children to the city gates and gather a crowd to stone that child to death. And yet here we have unbridled selfishness coming out of a young man who essentially says, "Dad, I wish you were dead, because I just want the money coming to me. Give it to me now."

This scenario is so impossible to the Middle Eastern mind that Bailey says, "To my knowledge, in all of Middle Eastern literature (aside from this parable) from ancient times to the present, there is no case of any son, older or younger, asking for his inheritance from a father who is still in good health." (Poet and Peasant, p.164). What do you think this father will do? At the very least: Explode, beat his son silly, and then send him out to the fields, right?

4. What is the younger son throwing away?

5. Note: What does it mean that the older son does not step in to mediate the conflict? The older son had a responsibility according to the culture of his time to step in and try to resolve the conflict. It's not proper for a son to fight with his father, and so the rest of the family, namely this older son, was supposed to become a mediator. But what did he do? Nothing. Apparently, he just stood by while the father took everything he had and gave it over to his sons. The younger son pockets his share, and the older son stretches out his hands, too. The younger son committed the active sin, saying that he wished his father was dead. But the older son committed the passive sin, standing by being aloof, wearing a long face while he also took what he wanted. He rejected his father too. It's subtle, but it's there.
6. What does it mean that the father does not immediately and severely punish the son? Both sons? Either he is the wimpiest father on the face of the earth, or he's insane, or his love for his son runs so deep that even when there is no changing his son's mind, he wants his last act to be an act of kindness; he wants his son to remember that the last look on his face was a look of sheer love.
7. What is the younger son's loose living?
8. Does Jesus describe what that loose living was?
9. What's important to Jesus in the story? The repentance, not the sin.
10. Were famines unusual in the Middle East? No.
11. Who does the Jewish younger son depend on? A Gentile
12. What animal does he feed? Pigs.
13. What is poetically grotesque about what the Jewish younger son does for work?
14. Does anyone care about him?
15. In a famine, what's more important, pigs or people?
16. Could the younger son be saying, "I guess what goes around comes around."
17. Compare what the younger son gave up vs. where he is now.
18. How does he plan to get back to his father?
19. What is his admission?
20. Is it hard to say, "I have sinned"?
21. What else could the younger son have blamed? The weather, his untrustworthy friends?
22. Jesus says "when he came to his senses." Literally in Greek it is "but having come to himself." In the Bible, the person who comes to herself or himself is the person who realizes who they really are, and what they've really done, and how much they really need forgiveness and a chance to start life over with God at the very center of life. Why do we think "finding yourself" is about running away and throwing off all restraints and indulging yourself?
23. What were the younger son's last words to his father? Can he hope to be a son again? The best he can hope for is to be hired as a servant and rent a room and be treated as a second class citizen. That is not humility. That is the best possible case. Notice that he thinks he can work his way back into being accepted. An amazing thought considering the insult he's dealt his father.
24. What was the last expression he saw on his father's face?
25. If the father sees him while he's still a speck on the horizon, what does that mean about his father's eagerness to see him?
26. What does the father feel in his heart?
27. Could the father increase the distance between himself and his son by marching back into the house and closing the door? Why would that have been a reasonable response?
28. How does the father close the distance between himself and his son?
29. Note: Why does the father run? Because of his joy and love, true. Also, because he knows what would happen to the son. Bailey says that the son will probably be mocked by a crowd from the community. As soon as he's close enough to be recognized, he'll be slandered by the whole town, and a mob will gather on either side of the road back to the house. As the son walks back with his head down, he'll have all kinds of nasty things said at him. They might even throw stones or push him... He'll run a gauntlet to get home. So the father looks at the rest of the village and knows the rejection and shame his son will face at the hands of a mob like that. What the father does in the homecoming is to protect that boy.
30. What does an old man running look like?
31. Note: How socially acceptable was that? In the Middle East or the Orient, a nobleman with flowing robes never runs anywhere. To do so is humiliating. Ben Sirach said, "A man's manner of walking tells you who he is." Aristotle said, "Great men never run in public." But what this father does is surely pick up his robes in public, bares his legs in public, and runs in public. He draws all the attention to himself in the most self-

humiliating thing a dignified man could do. He runs. All his neighbors must have said, "What is going on?" This father runs the gauntlet that his son should have run. He takes all the shame on himself.

32. The younger son was hoping to see pity on his father's face. What does he see?
33. What are the five action verbs the father does? What does that tell you?
34. When the son does speak, how does it compare with that he had rehearsed?
35. What does the father order for the son?
36. Whose robe is that?
37. What does the family ring enable the son to do? Carry on business for the family.
38. What do the sandals mean? That he is higher than the barefoot servants. He is an honored son of the family.
39. What does the fattened calf mean? The best veal! A rare meal.
40. Why is the father so publicly joyful?
41. Note: It may interest you to know that there is a Buddhist story much like this. A son leaves his father, shames his father, and then comes back home. He asks to be made a paid servant in his father's house, and his father accepts. He is not restored to full membership in the family because the father wants to test his loyalty. Tell me if that wouldn't be a justifiable thing for the father to do? But will this father act the same way?

Questions: The Older Son

1. What indications of the older brother's character have we had so far?
2. Did he share in his father's hurt over the departure of the younger son?
3. Did he share in his father's inheritance when he distributed it?
4. Did he want his father dead?
5. What does that mean about his relationship with his father?
6. What duty has the older son already failed in?
7. How does the older brother react? Is he joyful?
8. Does he have the right to be angry?
9. Has he talked to his father?
10. How many assumptions has he made about the situation?
11. What does he do, in public?
12. What does that mean, in terms of publicly disagreeing with his father in front of guests?
13. Might it be a reasonable response for the father to order him inside and beat him later?
14. But what does the father do?
15. But what does the son do?
16. In his speech, how many times does the older son say "I" or "me" or "my"?
17. Where is the older son's focus?
18. How does he know the younger son has spent the money on prostitutes? Does he really know?
19. How does he separate himself from his brother and his father? By saying, 'this son of yours.'
20. How does the older son view his father?
21. Does he have the attitude of a servant or a son?
22. What duty does the older son accuse the father of failing in?
23. What duty does the older son keep failing in?
24. Reflect: I might have said: "Listen, you spoiled brat, who pays for your clothes, your rent, your food, your bed, and the roof over your head? If I pay you a salary, you pay me for everything!" But the father doesn't say that at all. He could have won the argument easily. But even after this extreme public insult, the father swallows the humiliation and reaches out in love to this angry son. "Dear child." Then he reminds him, "You're more than a servant. You are a full heir of my house, if you don't reject it." Verse 31: "You have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours." That's the outrageous thing about this older son. He is a full son, but he wants to be just a hired field worker.
25. How does the father try to reunite his family? By saying 'this brother of yours.'
26. Who is dead to the father?
27. What does it mean to be lost and dead? Found and alive?
28. Why is the father perhaps a bit repetitious with the older son? Because this older son is also dead and lost. He also needs to recognize how much his father loves him. The father knew about this rejection, even before it was made visible in public. Nevertheless, the father is doing everything he can to be merciful to this older son, to be gentle, and to show him publicly how much he respects him.
29. Then, the story ends. What happens? We don't know.

30. Who does Jesus want to finish the story?
31. Who is at the table with Jesus? Sinners and tax-collectors. Younger brother types.
32. Who is outside of the house refusing table fellowship? The Pharisees. Older brother types.
33. Who has been lost and is now found, beginning to live? Those at the table.
34. Who is still lost and dead? Those outside the house, not at the table.
35. How would the Pharisees have completed the story?
36. Note: What would make it complete? Compare the older son's central points to the younger son's central points. That corresponds to the final response of both sons. The younger son returns to the father, but the older son does not.

Literary Structure: Chiasm

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. There was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father,
"Father, give me the share of property that falls to me."
And he divided his living between them. | A son is lost |
| 2. Not many days later the younger son sold all he had,
journeyed to a far country
and wasted his property in loose living. | Goods wasted
in loose living |
| 3. And when he had spent everything
a great famine arose in that country
and he began to be in want. | Everything lost |
| 4. So he went and joined himself
to one of the citizens of that country
and he sent him to his fields to feed pigs. | Clings to a stranger |
| 5. And he would gladly have eaten the pods
which the pigs ate
and no one gave him anything. | Total rejection |
| 6. But when he came to himself he said,
"How many of my father's servants have bread to spare
but I perish here with hunger. | Self-recognition 1
I am perishing |
| 6. I will arise and go to my father and say to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you
and am no more worthy to be called your son; make me a servant.'" | Self-recognition 2
I have sinned |
| 5'. And he arose and came to his father.
And while he was at a great distance his father saw him
and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. | Total acceptance |
| 4'. And the son said to the father,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you
and am no more worthy to be called your son." | Clings to his father |
| 3'. And the father said to the servants,
"Bring the best robe and put it on him
and put a ring on his hands and shoes on his feet. | Everything restored |
| 2'. And bring the fatted calf and kill it
and let us eat
and make merry | Goods used in
celebration |
| 1'. for this son of mine was dead and is alive,
he was lost and is found."
And they began to make merry. | A son is found |

Literary Structure: Chiasm

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Now the elder son was in the fields, and as he came and drew near to the house
he heard music and dancing
and he called one of the boys and asked what this meant. | Older brother
outside |
| 2. And he said to him,
"Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf
because he received him with peace." | Your brother safe
A feast |

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 3. But he was angry and refused to go in
so his father came out
and was entreating him. | Father entreats |
| 4. But he answered his father, "Lo these many years I have served you
and I have never disobeyed your commandments
yet you never gave me a kid to make merry with my friends. | Complaint 1:
You don't pay me |
| 4'. But this son of yours came
who has devoured your living with harlots
you killed for him the fatted calf." | Complaint 2:
You bless him |
| 3'. And he said to him, "Beloved son,
you are always with me
and all that is mine is yours. | Father entreats |
| 2'. It was fitting to make merry and be glad
for this your brother was dead and is alive,
he was lost and is found." | A feast
Your brother safe |
| [1'. And he remained outside at the door of the house
refusing the music and dancing
and rejecting not only his brother, but his father as well.] | Older brother
outside |
37. The Pharisees would have judged the older son for staying outside and humiliating the father. But who was staying outside of the house, outside of table fellowship with Jesus?
38. Who did the Pharisees realize they were judging?
39. Did Jesus love and respect the sinners and tax-collectors while telling the story?
40. Did Jesus love and respect the Pharisees while telling the story?
41. Reflect on the father. He is patient, responding to rejection by caring even more deeply. He grieves the loss of his child nostalgically, always wanting us to come back to him. He publicly humiliates himself in order to protect his child. He publicly lavishes love on those who do come back to him, showing great respect for his children even when they disobey him. When did God publicly humiliate himself? At the Cross.
42. Now, who are you in this story? Are you like the younger son? Or the older son?
43. Reflect: Joy is a recurring theme in each of the three parables of Luke 15, of which this is the third. The shepherd finds his lost sheep and says, "Rejoice with me." The woman finds her lost coin and says, "Rejoice with me." The father finds his lost son and says, "Rejoice with me, beloved child." Discuss again how you can better understand God's joy and God's heart.

Foreground Action: The Rich Ruler and Zaccheus

Lk.18:15 People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. 16 But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 17 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' 18 A certain ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 19 Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 20 You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.' 21 He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' 23 But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' 26 Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' 27 He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.' 28 Then Peter said, 'Look, we have left our homes and followed you.' 29 And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.' 31 Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For he will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, 33 and after they have scourged him, they will kill him; and the third day he will rise again.' 34 But the disciples understood none of these things; and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said. 35 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. 36 Now hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was. 37 They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. 38 And he called out, saying, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' 39 Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' 40 And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to him; and when he came near, he questioned him, 41 'What do you want me to do for you?' And he said, 'Lord, I want to regain my sight!' 42 And Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.' 43 Immediately he regained his sight and began following him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.

Lk.19:1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' 8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' 9 Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

Questions: Rich Ruler

1. What have you heard said about this passage? (Get all the excuses out there. Typically, this passage is taken as a contrast between legalism and grace, or about simply 'being willing' to give money away, or other individual issues).
2. The Infants/Children:
 - a. Why do you think Jesus praises 'infants' and 'children'? What characteristics of infants seem commendable?
3. Out of the rich ruler, the disciples, the blind beggar, and Zaccheus, who is childlike? Who is not?
4. The ruler:
 - a. Who is this 'certain ruler'?
 - b. Note: What did he probably rule in? A Jewish synagogue.

- c. Who does he think Jesus is?
 - d. Why do you think he asks about eternal life? An internal need is he aware of? Or is he just testing Jesus?
 - e. How is he not a child? Notice he regards himself as not being young any more. 'Since my youth,' which sounds long ago.
5. Notes: Digression on the Law and Jesus:
- a. What's the problem with trying to hold onto wealth and the Mosaic Law? It's incompatible with Jesus' agenda because it is from Israel's old life. Mosaic Israel (a stationary community tied to its land) needs to transition to Messianic Israel (a mobile community not tied to financial security) and become new. WE KNOW where Jesus is headed with his community, and he wants this man to be a part of it. But wealth gets in his way.
 - b. Let this point sink in, because it's not how we are used to thinking about the Law and Jesus. 'In Israel, what was appropriate until then was appropriate until then. Now with Jesus, everything changes.'
 - c. Think about American culture. How important is it to be financially secure? VERY!
 - d. What would this rich ruler be able to give his kids if he followed Jesus?
 - e. Notice also that in the Ten Commandments, 'honor your father and mother' is followed by 'that it might go well with you **in the land.**' Jesus is calling this man **to disinherit himself from his old community.**
6. Community level applications:
- a. What is so surprising about v.29? Why doesn't Jesus just say, 'I tell you the truth, if you've given up all that, you've got me!' We do have him, but we also have 'house and wife and brothers and parents and children.' In other words, we inherit a new family. We become a part of a new community.
 - b. This challenge is not so much about individualistic struggles with materialism as it is a challenge to join a new community, Jesus' community. And Jesus wants his community to be a radical one. That's why he demands everything of this man. It's just like Luke 14:33, where Jesus says, 'No one can be my disciple who does not give up all his (or her) possessions.' The reason is because Jesus calls us into a new community, where wealth is meant to be shared and be used strategically.
 - c. Why might Peter remind Jesus in v.28 that the disciples have left homes and followed Jesus? He wants to be validated? He wants to be affirmed as being in God's will?
 - d. What is Jesus' response? That you can't outgive God. You are entering a new community where people will be an extended family to you, and (hopefully) help you. And you will inherit much more in the next age.
 - e. How do you join a new family? As an infant. Jesus wants this rich ruler to join his kingdom family as an infant in it.
7. Individual heart level applications, in case you want to wrestle with that:
- a. How can you more deeply love financial sacrifice? It is one of the distinguishing marks of Christians in contrast to the world.
 - b. The issue is not just 'being willing to give,' but 'being **eager** to give, being **glad** to give.' You should be disappointed if you don't get a chance to give. How can you cultivate more of this attitude?
 - c. If you feel the need to be financially secure and stable, pray that God would work in you to remove that.

Questions: The Jericho blind man and Zaccheus

1. Note: The fact that the blind man outside Jericho is healed of physical blindness suggests that someone inside of Jericho will be healed of spiritual blindness.
2. Note: Romans didn't pay their tax collectors. They assumed their tax collectors would extort from the people in order to 'get paid.' Zaccheus is an arch-tax-collector. Think of a pyramid scheme, where you make money from people under you.
3. How was Zaccheus regarded?
4. Why didn't anyone help him see Jesus?
5. Who normally climbs trees?
6. What might have discouraged Zaccheus from climbing the tree? Internal and external factors?
7. Why does Jesus greet and dine with Zaccheus? What does it mean when Jesus 'eats' with someone?

8. Note: How does Zaccheus show that he's been 'born again,' as 'an infant'? He climbs up a tree, something only children did. Thus, Zaccheus is showing that he is a child, like the 'infant' of 18:15-17. He has inherited the kingdom through a new birth. And second, he redistributes his wealth, which the rich ruler could not and did not do. He tries to make peace with those he's hurt and remedy structural problems.
9. Note: Does Zaccheus expect a long line of claimants at his door, saying they want four times back? Surely he does. He was bracing himself for it! It's probably why he only gave half of his money straightaway to the poor. He's not just saying the other part just to sound nice in theory. He probably has wronged people and will need to pay back four times as much.
10. Reflect: How come Zaccheus could let go of his wealth while the rich ruler could not? Zaccheus is the drug dealer who pimps his own community but hates himself for it. The rich ruler is the socially 'legit' wealthy establishment person who is tied up with his money. Do we see ourselves as Zaccheuses or as establishment people? That will affect how we feel about our ill-gotten wealth (especially in America).
11. How can modern day Zaccheuses demonstrate the new birth?

Foreground Action: The Food of the Table

Lk.22:14 When the hour had come, he reclined at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And when he had taken a cup and given thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And when he had taken some bread and given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 And in the same way he took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."...28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials; 29 and just as my Father has granted me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Questions

1. RECALL THE THEME SO FAR.
2. What did Passover symbolize in Judaism? Deliverance out of bondage in slavery in Egypt. Start of the old Mosaic covenant. It was meant to cause remembrance and appreciation.
3. How does the bread symbolize Jesus' body? Jewish unleavened bread was pierced and had stripes, as Jesus would be pierced and have the stripes of the whip.
4. How does the wine symbolize Jesus' blood? Wine comes from crushed grapes. Jesus' blood would flow because he would be sacrificed.
5. Jesus was bringing humanity into a new and deeper deliverance, from sin and evil and death. He was going to squeeze the self-centeredness out of the fallen humanity that he was wearing by going to the cross. Hebrews 5:8 – 9 reads: ⁸ Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.' He perfected a new humanity in his resurrection, where he took on a fresh, God-drenched humanity.
6. The bread and wine are meant to be taken inside one's body. In what sense are we supposed to internalize the dying and rising of Jesus?
7. STATE: Notice that in the biblical story, sin and evil and death came through eating – the eating of the forbidden fruit. In a sense, healing and restoration and life with God comes again through eating – not just eating the communion, but eating or internalizing Jesus' death and resurrection!!
8. Earlier, Jesus spoke about being clean on the inside. How can we become clean on the inside?
9. Communion can only be taken by professing Christians. Discuss the logic of this.

Foreground Action: Paradise Regained Around Jesus' Table

Lk.24:13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but him they did not see." 25 And he said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures. 28 And they approached the village where they were going, and he acted as though he were going farther. 29 But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he had reclined at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, he began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us on the road, while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how he was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. 36 While they were telling these things, he himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and he took it and ate it before them. 44 Now he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of my Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Questions

1. Who were these two disciples? Cleopas and another, possibly Mary his wife.
2. Why do they not recognize Jesus? What's wrong with their sight?
3. What was the 'story' they were trying to live in?
4. What was their definition of "redeem Israel" in v.21?
5. What does Jesus call the two disciples? What should they have known, according to Jesus?
6. What should their definition of "redeem Israel" have been?
7. What does Jesus have to do in order for them to recognize him? (Scripture) Why do we need to be reminded about the whole story of God? We are often selective about how we read Scripture. Examples...
8. Why did they recognize Jesus in this instance? What happens to their eyes?
9. What Old Testament verse is quoted in v.31? What is the soundtrack/background music playing?

Soundtrack/Background Music: The Fall into Self-Centered Sight

- Gen.3:6 And she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked...

10. Discuss the parallel. What's going on here?

The Fall	The Restoration
Two people, a couple	Two people, probably a couple
Walking with God	Walking with Jesus
Knowing Him	Not recognizing him
Eat what was forbidden	Eat what Jesus encouraged them to eat
Their eyes were opened	Their eyes were opened
They focused on themselves	They focused on Jesus
They disobeyed God's word and 'gained wisdom'	They understood God's Word and gained true knowledge
Fell into separation from God	Reunited with God
Recognized they were naked	Clothed with power from on high
Could not eat with God as freely as before	Are encouraged to have table fellowship with God and eat with God often
Commanded to spread over the earth to proclaim their rule over it	Commanded to spread over the earth to proclaim Jesus' rule over it

11. So as these two later retold their story of meeting Jesus on the road, what would they have recognized? That Jesus was welcoming them into his story, and that their story suddenly became a brilliant example of Jesus' new creation.
12. What did Jesus promise the thief on the Cross (unique to Luke's Gospel)? 'You will be with me in paradise.' What was Jesus doing on the Cross and Resurrection? New creation, not just 'forgiveness.'
13. So when Christians eat, what does that symbolize?
14. What elements of the previous table scenes are reflective of paradise being restored?
 - a. abundance
 - b. forgiveness and peace
 - c. listening to Jesus' word
 - d. cleansing and true purity
 - e. new ways of thinking about being a guest, host, and invitee
 - f. inclusion and transformation
 - g. internalizing the work of Jesus as communion recalls for us
 - h. experiencing restoration from exile.

Illus of Luke 24: Evelyn Davies' poem (response to Henry F. Lyte's poem on Luke 24)

Abide with us, the nightly shadows fall
 The road is lone and rough for one and all;
 But Thou, a Stranger here, wilt lost Thy way,
 So come and be our Guest until 'tis day.

'Abide with us!' Oh, do I hear aright
 That you will give me shelter for the night
 And welcome me, as Guest, within your home?
 Oh, happiness, I'll bring you to my throne!

Come in! We fain would entertain Thee now,
 And chase that look of sadness from Thy brow;
 Foolsore and weary, Thou with Thy long walk,
 Abide with us, and let us freely talk.

I will come in and gladly stay with you;
You know not yet, My children, what you do.
My heart is always yearning for that word
'Abide with us' – which I have just now heard.

So in the calm of that blest evening hour
Those two disciples learnt the secret power
Of close communion with their unknown Lord
Whom they before had seen – but now adored.

O Jesus, come, and likewise with us stay,
We'll give Thee welcome on Thy lonely way
Our lives at Thy disposal we will place,
With acts of love, Thy sorrow deep to chase.

Abide with us, and treat us as Thy friends;
Thus may we for past coldness make amends;
Our door to Thee be always open wide;
Come in, and ever with us now abide!

Thus may we know Thee really as Thou art,
As friend with friend learns each the other's heart.
Within our doors reveal Thyself the way;
Lead us to heaven, at eventide, one day.

Foreground Action: The Early Christians Practicing Table Fellowship

2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. 36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Questions

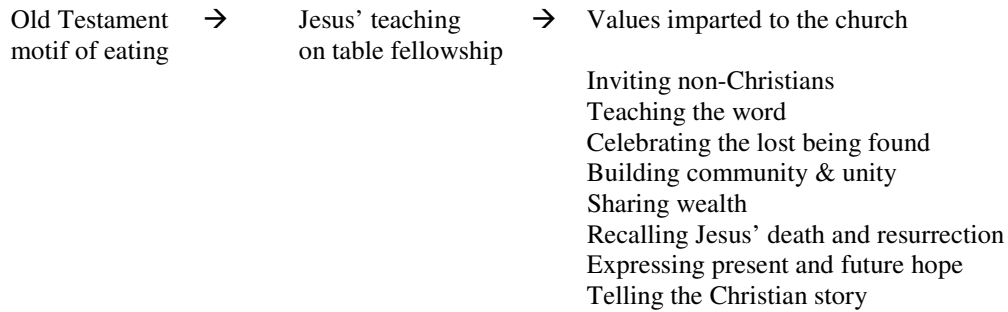
1. If you were a part of this community, what might it have felt like?
2. What's challenging about this?
3. What's attractive about this?
4. Notice how they eat together? What does that seem to mean here? It's more than communion!
5. Why did Barnabas sell his land?
6. How do you sense the teaching of Jesus behind all this?

6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. 8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. 10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. 13 They put forward false witnesses who said, This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us. 15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

Questions

1. Start with v.8-15. This is the conflict Stephen runs into. Let's try to understand the world of Jerusalem outside the Christian community. Notice that there is a Synagogue of the Freedmen, in Jerusalem. Why is there a Synagogue in Jerusalem?? A synagogue was formed when you couldn't get to the Temple, like after the Babylonian Captivity. You needed 10 Jewish men. But why would you need a synagogue in Jerusalem?? These are Jews who are culturally different from the 'pure Hebrews.' Perhaps they looked different, having lived for generations in Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia.
2. Who had the power in Jerusalem? The Hebraic Jews or Hellenistic Jews? Hebraic. So what did this mean in terms of ethnic and cultural tension? Lots of tension.
3. (optional) They were maybe trying to assimilate, but were kept out of power by the establishment. So what do they do to Stephen? They accuse him of violating the establishment. They are immigrant assimilationalists! They are very serious about the Temple and the customs.
4. Point: There were lots of tensions between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews. So when we look at the tensions in the Christian community, it's easy to understand why the Hellenistic Jewish Christian widows were 'overlooked.'
5. Let's set up the scene more: How was the food distributed? Land and wealth were sold and brought to the apostles (ch.4). The apostles bought food. How did they know where people lived? By word of mouth, relational networks. Since the apostles were from the Hebraic Jews and not from the diaspora Hellenistic Jewish community, they knew the Hebraic widows better. What kind of systemic problem does this create? The imbalance of power in the world causes an imbalance of power in the church. Tensions in the world create tensions in the church. Ethnic and cultural division in the world cause ethnic and cultural division in the church.
6. What does this show about table fellowship at this point? It had become a matter of economic redistribution.
7. Did the apostles demean 'serving tables' in order to favor 'preaching' and more 'spiritual' activities? No. Table fellowship was a central feature of their community life, and an expression of their unity and care for one another. In fact, they needed to have so much integrity to handle all that money. Remember Judas Iscariot was the first money carrier. A better translation would be that the apostles did not want to 'manage the table fellowship.' It was a complex system of receiving money from the community, having absolute integrity in buying food with it, and then distributing it to the community where there was a need. 'Table fellowship' is a huge responsibility! They honor it by saying that they need 7 men devoted to it full-time.
8. How could the apostles have responded differently? They could have said, 'Well, the problem is that you minorities are angry!' Defensively. Instead, they acknowledge the truth of the Hellenistic minority complaint.
9. How do the apostles take risks in their leadership? By allowing the community to choose the seven. By admitting they were wrong, that they had blind spots.
10. Notice that the seven deacons have Greek names. They were probably all Hellenistic Jews. Why is this surprising? No Hebraic Jews on the committee. It's amazing if the whole community agreed and selected these men.
11. How do you sense Jesus teaching on table fellowship behind these practices?
12. Why has the church given up on redistributing financial resources and food within itself?

Summary of the Theme of Table Fellowship in Luke – Acts



1. Who is welcome at Jesus' table?
2. When we invite people into fellowship with us, are there any people who we tend not to invite to eat with us?
3. What attitude is required of guests at Jesus' table?
4. How abundant is Jesus' table?
5. What does Jesus feed us at his table?
6. What does the breaking of bread and drinking of wine at the table recall?
7. How joyful is the atmosphere at Jesus' table?
8. What is the celebration about?
9. What is required of hosts at Jesus' table?
10. Who is the real host at the table?
11. What is his perspective at the table?
12. What do we listen to at Jesus' table?