

Watch Where You Sit

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Preacher: Graham Smith

[0 : 0 0] So I want you to imagine with me today that you invite me to lunch. Now I know that might be difficult for some of you probably thinking I would never invite a South African for lunch.

But I want you just to imagine it, that you invite me for lunch. But that you are a very strict vegetarian on principle. That means you don't believe in the killing of animals for meat or for any other products.

Yes. And I arrive, you've invited a few other guests and you've taken out the carrots and the lettuce and all the other rabbit food and it's all sitting on the table. And then I arrive and the first thing I do is I produce this big massive pork chop and I put it on the table.

And while you're looking at me horrified with big eyes, I look at you and point at you and I say, you are a hypocrite because you're wearing leather shoes. And clearly an animal had to be killed in order for you to wear those leather shoes.

And while you're looking a little bit stunned, I then turn around and I look at your guests and I say, well, it's a very interesting lot of people you've invited. They're all likely to help you get on in life.

[1 : 1 0] I see you've invited your boss. That's always a good move. And, well, there's your rich neighbor. And, oh, I see there's old Aunt Sally. You definitely want to invite her because she's going to die soon and you want to make sure you're part of that world.

And I just want to, at that point, what would you think of me? Just let it sink in a little bit. What would you think of me? I then turn around and I look at your guests that you've invited and say, I've been watching YouTube.

I noticed you took the biggest sandwich and I've been counting how many cream donuts you've eaten. And it's now five. Just by the way, that would probably be Milen.

Milen's like here today, so I can say that. But what would you think of me? I'm guessing two things. I'm guessing you think that I was incredibly rude and you're wishing I had never invited a South African.

And the second thing is you're probably not likely to invite me back. But the truth is, this is exactly how Jesus behaved at this meal.

[2 : 1 8] This is exactly how his hosts would have thought and reacted to him. And I must be honest, this kind of shattered my view of Jesus. Because when I was a little kid, my family are not Christians.

They're not believers. They're still not yet. But we never went to church. But I did sleep over at some friend's house quite often. And they did go to church. So I went with them to Sunday school quite a few times.

And I remember walking into Sunday school and there was this massive mural of Jesus. This was my picture of Jesus. He was sitting in this beautiful green grass. And there was a lovely blue stream of water flowing by.

And he was sitting down in this beautiful white clothes. And there was a little lamb, which was perfect, sitting on his lap. And he had blonde hair and blue eyes. And to me, I just thought Jesus was always charming.

He was always tactful. And he was always nice. But the truth is, and this is one thing that we have to confront ourselves with today, is that Jesus deliberately provoked certain people.

[3 : 27] And the question we have to ask ourselves is why? Why would Jesus do this kind of thing? So let's look at this conversation. Let's look at this meal. It's held on a Sabbath. And it's the party, the banquet is thrown by a leading Pharisee.

A leader that looks like he's got it all together. He's respected in the community. But as we will find out, Jesus was more concerned about his heart.

And the first subject that comes up is that of healing. Now we must understand that our host had a certain idea about healing. And he got it from the law of God, which said he were to do no work on the Sabbath.

And therefore, I know that the meal that they were having was cold, because no one cooked on the Sabbath. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law got together, and they kind of made this list of what was work and what wasn't work.

And together, they decided that healing was work. So you couldn't do it on the Sabbath. So put that into modern context. If you're a child or you are sick on a Sunday, you have to wait until Monday to go and see the doctor.

[4 : 42] And so there's Jesus. He's sitting at this. And he knows, he knows that if he brings up the subject, he's going to horrify the host.

But we have to ask ourselves, at this dinner, there is a man with dropsy. Now how does a man with dropsy get invited to a lunch like this?

Now dropsy means that he had kidney failure and possibly heart failure. So he was retaining massive amounts of water. He was swollen. He just looked sick.

It was obvious to all that this was a man who was sick and suffering. And yet, he's invited to this meal. A meal hosted by a Pharisee. And according to Jewish culture, he was unclean.

They wouldn't even go near him. And certainly no one would ever think of touching him. So the only thing we can work out is that he has been planted there. He's been deliberately invited because it says that they were watching Jesus to see what he would do.

[5 : 43] And Jesus knows what's in their hearts. And he asks them this question. He said, is there anywhere in the word of God that says I cannot heal him on the Sabbath?

And you know what? They remained silent. They couldn't answer. You know why they couldn't answer? Because the answer is no. There is nowhere in the law, the word of God, that says you cannot heal on the Sabbath.

So Jesus heals him. And, you know, I just, this is a moment for us, right? I think the first lesson we learn from the scripture today is that of tradition versus truth.

The tradition was you weren't allowed to heal on the Sabbath. But the truth was that you could. And let's just see. And we might think that only happened then, but it happens to us today.

Let me give you some examples. There was a tradition that Eve gave Adam an apple. But actually, the word of God doesn't say that.

[6 : 52] It says Eve gave Adam a fruit. Now, I don't know why someone picked on the apple. I like apples, right? I don't think it's a particularly evil fruit. Personally, I think it had to have been a durian.

Let's be honest. Durians can be pretty evil at times. But another one is Jonah. Like, tradition tells us that Jonah was swatted by a whale.

And I was very surprised to find that it doesn't say that. It says Jonah was swatted by a big fish. These are not serious, right?

But they are traditions. And maybe we should look at something a little bit more serious. There's a tradition that Christians don't go to certain places.

And I was 21 years old when I became a Christian. And I was at university. And I was happy in my sin. And at that moment, God stepped into my life.

[7 : 56] He had mercy. And He had grace upon me. He cornered me. And I couldn't get away from Him. And He just grabbed hold of me. And ever since that day, He hasn't let me go. But I was 21.

And I was still struggling with a whole lot of things as a new believer. And one day, I went for a run with a friend of mine who was discipling me.

And for me, that's a great place to talk about the things of God. I know some people, they like to sit down and have a cup of coffee and talk about the things of God. For me, let's go for a run. Let's get sweaty. Let's get the blood pumping through your veins.

And let's talk about the deep things of God. So there we are at about the five kilometer mark. I can't hold it in anymore. I have to ask him this question. I turned to him. His name was Michael. I said, Michael, can Christians go to nightclubs?

And I really wanted him to say yes or no, right? Because there's kind of a tradition that we just don't go to places like that. We don't do parties. And we don't do discos. And in his absolute wisdom, he turned to me and said, You know, Graham, it actually doesn't say anywhere in the Bible that you can or can't go to a nightclub.

[9 : 03] Does it? No. I always thought that's kind of what you guys do, right? And he said, well, it's not there. And he said, but I'll tell you what, Graham.

Next time you go, just before you go and ask Jesus, do you want me in this place? So this was an answer I wasn't even thinking about, right?

Just yes or no. But now I've got to speak to Jesus as well. And so it was all new to me. And anyway, I'm going out with a group of friends. And we all get out the car and say, I'll be with you guys in a second.

And I let them get out. And he closed my eyes and said, Jesus, do you want me to go to this place? And I got out of the car and I walked in. And I still paid the money, right?

And I paid the money. And within two minutes, he had given me his answer. And I turned around and I walked out the door and I never went back. And I had no desire ever to go back.

[9 : 59] It just wasn't where Jesus wanted me. Now, that might be very different for other people. But you see how tradition is often the exact opposite to what's truth.

And we need to make sure what we think is in the Word of God is actually in the Word of God. Because the problem is we can make big things small and the small things big.

And the danger is that when we do that, we get it all wrong, right? We get upset about the little things, which actually don't really matter so much to God. And so what Jesus does is he just smashes tradition with truth.

Okay. So, the Pharisee did what you and I have all done. We've made our own list of what is wrong and what is right.

And we've pushed it on other people. And I think it's very important that we look at how Jesus reacted to the situation, right?

[11 : 01] Tradition just offended him and he dealt with it straight away. But then he looks at the host and he gives him this other argument. He says, if your son fell in a well, would you not pull him out?

He said, this man has fallen into dropsy and I want to pull him out. He is suffering and I want to help him. And you know what? They couldn't answer. So, Jesus asked them a question that they couldn't answer.

And he asked them a question that they wouldn't answer. Now, when you do that, it kills conversation. Right? No one was talking after that. So, Jesus changed the conversation. And he said, let's talk about hospitality.

He said, I'm looking around at the people you've invited. Why did you invite them? Now, it's obvious that he invited them to get something from them.

Maybe it was to enhance his reputation. Did you see that I can get Jesus to my dinner? And all the other people that were there, same thing. He even tried to get something by inviting the sick man there.

[12 : 11] Try to use him as a trap for Jesus. Okay. There is a phrase in the New Testament that says, we are to be given in hospitality.

Now, the key word there is given. Right? Not to expect anything in return. And we have to ask ourselves, do we invite people that will honor our table?

That will maybe give us a little bit of a reputation boost? Maybe we'll open a door to a great business deal? Well, the question is, are we wanting to get something from people or are we wanting to give?

Let me put it to you another way. Are we using people or are we loving them? It's a question I have to ask myself.

And here's the real question. The real question is, do you want to be repaid by men or do you want to be repaid by God? And the most amazing thing to me about this passage is it actually tells us that God repays people.

[13 : 26] He's going to repay you for every meal that you've given that He knows about. That it was truly out of a sense of wanting to offer something. Not expecting something in return. So if you've done it for yourself, you will be repaid.

But you're going to be repaid by men in this life. And if you've done it for others, you're going to be repaid by God at the resurrection.

I tell you, God is probably the one you want to go for on this one. You know, this is very, very difficult for us. Because we live in Hong Kong.

Such a fast-paced, such an instant gratification society. Everything is instant, right? This week I had one of those little, I tried for the first time those instant capsule coffees.

And it was, this is it. This is better than Starbucks. Right there, instant. And we just have everything so instant. We want it straight away. We don't want to wait for anything. Jesus is saying, get an eternal perspective on things.

[14 : 28] I haven't forgotten about you. I know what I'm doing. And I will be the one who's going to repay you. Because you see, the future is more important than the present. We put so much emphasis on the here and now.

And Jesus is saying, think about the future. Think about the future. All right, at this point, things have gone very quiet around the table. And he said, right, we're going to talk about humility.

And he looks at the guests. They're turned now. And I've been to quite a few Chinese wedding banquets. And whenever you arrive, there's lots of flowers and everything is pink.

They just seem to love pink. There's lots of pink at a Chinese banquet wedding. And there's a list usually outside of all the people's names, right? And you've got to look at the list and find out where you've got to sit.

And obviously, the closer you are to the bridal table, that's more important people. And the further back you sit, that's obviously you're not that important. For some reason, I always find myself sitting far away.

[15 : 31] I haven't worked there or not yet. But in those days, there wasn't a list, right? You didn't have a list. You just walked in and they told you where to sit.

Now, it could have been that as Jesus walked in, he was the VIP guest at this lunch. And someone was sitting in his place. And it wasn't just a case of, excuse me, move over one seat.

Because they were all taken. And it could have been that someone had to be sent right to the bottom. Because every other place was now full. But Jesus says something so important right now that he says it on at least five other occasions.

He says those who exalt themselves will be humbled. And those who humble themselves will be exalted. After I had graduated from university, I worked for a German electrical engineering company.

So there you go, Mark. One for the Germans. And I was an intern. And I was being walked around the office by my mentor. And she was introducing me to the different people in the department.

[16 : 45] And also the different business units. And as we were walking along, she was chatting to me, telling me about the company. And she said, oh, there comes the CFO of the company.

And she said to me, this is genuinely, she whispered in my mind. She said, he's not very good at his job. But he sells himself very well. You can learn from him. So, I don't know.

I don't know why she said that to me. But anyway, so we walked up and we met him. And within the two minutes interaction, he was very friendly. But within the two minutes, I chatted with him.

He told me that he had just been to a meeting where obviously the colleagues were pretty useless and didn't really know what to do. But he had been the savior and put it right. And if I could please excuse him, because he was on the way to another meeting of people who were also incompetent to put that situation right.

And then he left. And about, and he did. He exalted himself and it worked for him. He was the CFO of the company.

[17 : 49] But about four years after that, the CFO was arrested for fraud. He had been ciphering money off the company accounts into his own personal bank account.

And he was led off the premises of this company with handcuffs and escorted out by the police in front of all the employees. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

And those who humble themselves will be exalted. And you see, we tend to exalt ourselves in one of two ways. One way is we push ourselves up. We talk ourselves up.

We say and do the right things and make sure that we see him doing them. But another way that we exalt ourselves is to push people down. If we can make other people look bad, it makes us look good.

Just as I was going through this, I was thinking about my office, right? And just where I'm working this week and in every little conversation we're having, this is happening, right? This exalting of ourselves and humbling others.

[18 : 55] But God says, let me take care of it. How about you take the bottom seat and let me exalt you? Let me look after you. My grandfather died before I was born.

But my mom always told me this story about him. She said that whenever there was a bowl of fruit on the table, by the way, South Africans have good fruit. There was a big bowl of fruit.

My grandfather would always take the worst piece, the piece that was bruised, a little bit rotting. And everyone asked him, why do you take the worst piece? Everyone else takes the best piece first.

Why are you taking it? He said, if I don't have this one, someone else will have to have it. And he was expressing humility through choosing a piece of fruit.

See, because humility can involve sacrificing something in order that others might have. My grandfather did it with a piece of fruit. Maybe we need to think about the way we express humility.

[19 : 57] It can be giving up your seat for someone else. But it can also mean how we spend our time with people and who we choose to spend our time with.

We can express our humility in many ways. But in this story, I kind of look at it and I pick out four characteristics of Jesus that just seem to shine through.

Because Jesus is the hero of the story. And I know he's the hero of every story. But he really is the hero of the story. Because there's four characteristics of his that come out.

And actually they come out through the whole New Testament. But here they are. Number one, his knowledge of people. Jesus knew what was in people's hearts.

He knew what they needed long before they even told him. And he walked into that meal. And he knew that one person was suffering physically. But he also knew one person was sick in his heart.

[20 : 59] And he also knew that there were a whole lot of guests there that were just filled with selfish ambition and selfish thoughts. His knowledge of people. The second thing I see about Jesus is his concern for people.

You know, some people know, but they don't care. Jesus knows and he cares. From the moment he walked into that dinner, he dealt with the suffering he saw.

He dealt with a sick man's suffering. He dealt with spiritual pride and tradition because he was concerned. The third thing I see about Jesus is his generosity towards people.

Isn't Jesus generous? You know, the word is give. Give. Jesus gives. Jesus gives. Healing. Jesus gives.

Correction. Jesus gives. Rebuke. And you know, we can be, me, this includes me, we can be very grateful for Jesus' generosity, for his healing in our lives.

[22 : 08] But maybe we're not so grateful when he corrects us. Jesus gives. Another thing we need to think about is this Pharisee invited people to a dinner.

And they could possibly, he would give them food that could sustain them for, could sustain life for a couple of hours. But Jesus is so much more generous than that. He's offering a meal, not just to a select few, but to everyone.

And he's just not offering something that will sustain you for a few hours. He's offering himself, which will sustain you for life, welling up to eternal life.

That's generosity. Jesus is offering himself. And the fourth thing I see about Jesus in the story is his freedom from people.

You know, just as I read the story, I wonder if I could resist that offer of popularity. You see, all Jesus had to do to be popular, he just had to go to that meal, sit down, enjoy it.

[23 : 17] And he could have healed the man with droxy the next day. Jesus would have had a whole new group of friends. Jesus would have been extremely popular amongst the religious leaders.

But you see, Jesus is not bound to what man's expectation of his enemies. He's not, he's completely independent of what we think of how he should behave.

He deals with it. Totally free. And just thinking about these four things, in it, I see the cross. Because God knew his knowledge of people.

God knew the state that man would get himself into. God knew that we would mess up and totally defy him. But God was also concerned about it.

He was so concerned that he did something about it. God is so generous that he gave his only son. God knew that he would have been able to do something about it.

[24 : 17] And when we come to the cross, we come and experience real freedom. That's the story of the cross. And so, I'm going to stop now.

But just to conclude the story, I think we might see someone who's aggressive and rude, and we just don't know why. And I asked us to think about this question at the beginning.

Why did Jesus behave that way? And you see, Jesus is actually putting his finger on much more important issues. And he's not going to ask us, you know, if we always said our please and thank yous.

If we always did what was seemingly the right thing in front of people. He's going to ask much deeper questions. He's going to ask you, what is the state of your heart?

How did you respond to him? Did you always seek to get? Or did you want to give? Did you use people?

[25 : 19] Or did you love them? Here's the big question. In Sunday school, the curriculum that we have now, there's always called the big question for the day.

For me, this is the massive question. It comes down to this. When I look at it, I need to ask myself, who am I at that table?

Am I the host? Who might look like I've got it all together on the outside, but the truth is, my heart is really sick. And I need Jesus.

Am I one of the guests? I'm only really thinking of myself. What I can get, and that I can get it now. And I don't really care who I push on, but I'm going to get it.

Or am I the sick man, who's being used by other people, who's suffering? Or am I Jesus, who's bringing the kingdom of God to those who need it?

[26 : 24] And if I'm honest with you, sometimes I can be all of those people, but I know which one I'm the least of. Who are you at that table?

And I want to leave you with this, because for me, this is the most encouraging thing, is that just a few chapters later, which would have been a few days later, Jesus' disciples who would have been there, they would have known what was said, they would have known how Jesus interacted with this Pharisee, they themselves start arguing who is the greatest, and who should sit next to Jesus, just a few days later.

And you know what? The most amazing thing to me is that Jesus, he doesn't give up on them. He doesn't throw them out and think, man, I picked the wrong guys, I need to start again, let's get them out.

These guys just don't get it. No, he's not like that. Jesus is incredibly patient with these guys. And you know what? The disciples finally learned, they finally learned that actually the way up in the Christian life is the way down.

The way to life is through death. When they got that, when they got that, when they allowed, when they saw Jesus for who he really is, and they really allowed Jesus to work in their lives, Jesus managed to turn those men into some of the most amazing men who have ever walked this planet.

[27 : 48] And you know what the most encouraging thing for me today is? Is it's the same Jesus that was able to change those men and turn their hearts around and turn their priorities around and make the men who were prepared to die and lay down their lives for the king and the kingdom.

That same Jesus is the same Jesus who works in my life and it's the same Jesus who can work in your life. because like that Pharisee, I need him. Like that sick person, I need him.

Thank you so much for listening. I think you've all been very patient, especially listening to a South African. But thank you. I'd like to close and I'd like to pray for us.

But just before I do, I just want to remind you, let's look at Jesus, right? Just look at him and look what he does with people. Lord Jesus, thank you that you are the God and the creator of all things.

Lord, I thank you that you are a king and you are a humble king. Lord, I pray for the church of Watermark. I pray for the body of Christ that we will be a people that look to you.

[29 : 03] We will be a people that see our need and our dependence on you. We will be a people that love you and by loving you that we will in turn love other people, Lord.

Father, I pray for us that as we go out into the weak, Lord God, that we will realize that you are for us. And Lord Jesus, where we humble ourselves, it is you who will exalt us, you who will lift us up.

Jesus, we want to say that we love you and we thank you that you're concerned about us. We thank you that you know about everything that we are. In Jesus' name, Amen.