

Fed By Grace | Food in the Gospels

“Wash the Dishes”

Luke 11.37ff

3.10.13

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 tithes 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.

We're looking at the four Gospels, *the source documents/authoritative record* of the life of Jesus Christ...And we're looking at the theme of food in the story, noticing, for instance, how food is used in the teaching of Jesus (like last week, "our daily bread", bread used as a symbol for everything we need). And, also *noticing*, how food is used as an occasion for teaching. Eating events were very significant occasions in the ancient Mediterranean world...The Greeks and Romans had what they called the "symposium" meal...planned for discourse.

Today, we find Jesus Christ in the home of a very serious religious man, a Pharisee. And immediately the discussion gets hot and the meal gets cold.

The discussion was almost completely one-sided, Jesus doing almost all the talking. And the topic was manners...everyone has manners ("These fish have manners..." said Jerry Maguire). And manners are good...in fact essential to human flourishing and people getting along with each other.

Some people have bad manners...or ways of relating to others that are not really very well conceived, sort of happenstance manners, without a lot of deliberate thought. *But this was not the case with the Pharisees: they're approach to life was very intentional and deliberate.* A lot of thinking went into their manners and ways of doing things. IN FACT, this was their greatest strength, they had carefully interpreted the Law (and thought through it's implications) AND they strongly maintained purity by their manners...And Jesus confronts them at the point of their strength (not their weakness) their strength...Their strengths were killing them and Jesus has come to warn them.

We too have manners...and better to be deliberate (not careless) and *YET* when we have become STRONG in our habits and protocols and our deliberate policies for doing things "how they ought 'a be done", at that point of strength, we can be in real spiritual trouble...and probably not even know it. Let's look at: 1) The Misuse of Strength; 2) The Gift of Weakness; 3) Using Weakness to Help Ourselves and Others

This is the second time Jesus Christ is invited to eat with a Pharisee (also in ch. 7) and this time He doesn't even wait for words. He sees shock on the face of his host and He's not going to play like He doesn't understand. To use a picture some of you know, Jesus Christ see a little triangle innocently cutting through the water...and He knows that underneath that little triangle is a ravenous, ferocious shark.

When the hand-washing bowl comes around and Jesus says, "No thanks" and passes it by, the host is visibly appalled and Jesus takes on the issue (the 600 pound shark in the room!).

Luke calls Him by a title in v. 39, "But the Lord said to him..." as if to say, "Jesus Christ is speaking authoritatively...He sees what this is about."

And says, "You foolish ones..." in other words, "You THINK I have bad manners or don't KNOW about purity...but in reality, it's YOU...you think you're PhDs in purity...but you're purity clowns!"

He attacks seven areas: 1) You'd rather look right than actually have character 2) Fixated on small stuff so you completely miss the BIG IDEAS God wants you to see 3) You love recognition – want to see your name in lights and get credit 4) You hide your faults and people get damaged

(like hidden tombs that defile people unawares, v.44) 5) You deal in moralism and hypocrisy (you burden others what YOU don't even do...and then you look down on them!, v.46) 6) You have this nostalgic attachment to a religious heritage...which is actually evil (you build shrines for the prophets who your ancestors killed and ...if you had the chance you'd kill the prophets too!) 7) You make the Bible hard for normal people to understand and all the while find elaborate excuses for why you don't obey – self-justifiers!

And all these seven scathing criticisms...pertain to the very things about which they are most convinced that Jesus Christ should be congratulating them!

They are actually hiding behind these areas of success in the same way Adam and Eve hid behind their fig leaves...and they're proud about how they are orderly...and follow protocol...and God didn't even call them to DO THESE THINGS!

I've used this dumb illustration before but imagine if you had to leave the country for six months. You hire a lawn-service to mow your lawn. As soon as you leave the lawn man decides what this yard really needs is bright yellow flowers...so every day...and then twice a day and then three and four times a day this guy plants yellow flowers...and more and more... hundreds and thousands.

And when you return there are notices plastered all over your front door...fines and liens...and your neighbors are disgusted and Code Enforcement is in your driveway because the grass is six feet tall... never been mowed...fire hazard...children/pets have wandered in never to be seen again... *"Condemned"*!

And as they're taking you away in handcuffs the yard guy shows up...excited to hear your praises for his amazing work...Then he gets irate because you're not thrilled and not in awe of his amazing yellow flowers!

His "greatest strength" has cost you your home or at least a lot of court fees...and trouble. But he thinks he should be recognized for his efforts.

Now, as with so many characters in the Gospels these Pharisees look "larger than life" to the point that we're ready to see them as clowns...but very different from us. We would never be like that landscaper! We would never go to our garden, check our basil plant and noting that there are ten new leaves, carefully remove one leaf for a tithe...and then disregard these huge themes like justice and the love of God...c'mon we don't sweat the small stuff!

We don't obsess on our reputations and how people think of us...to the neglect of our private life and what people DON'T see...We don't love recognition and crave approval...We would never demand from others (read: our children!) what we are not able or willing to do ourselves...or our nostalgic attachment to heroes of American history or church history...or even

our pet doctrines that really don't help people understand what the Gospel is, using our jargon ("Are you saved?...Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Oh well, I guess you just don't get it!... Have you asked Jesus Christ into your heart? You don't know what that means?! Well I'll pray for you!")

Point is... we only have to be marginally creative to SEE how we also do all these things... We make laws and count things sacrosanct even though they are not found in the Bible at all...things about the way we do church/worship...strong opinions we may have about some things (can't really prove them from the Bible...but certain they're IN there...at least... they should be.) The early NT church was fixated on circumcision – people felt very strongly – should Gentiles have the operation in order to be counted true Sons of Abraham?

Finally Paul says, "If you obsess on this issue...I'm pretty certain you don't even get it! Don't get the grace of God in the Gospel...For IN Christ, neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is anything but only faith leading to love – getting forgiveness and new life BY REPENTANCE AND FAITH and that grace leading you, transforming you into someone who genuinely loves...that's the Big Idea." (Gal. 5.6)

When you do good things, habits, practices, service, morals, giving (and you may be really strong at any or all of these things!) but are you sure you're not doing these things for the wrong reasons? Doing them to be noticed by others or to convince yourself that you're better than the people who don't do them? Are you sure of your motives? Is your heart really IN IT...or are you going through the motions? Is it possible you have mixed motives? Is it possible that the bad part of the motives are more than you think? Are you willing to accept the gift of weakness? To say, "Lord, my service and habits and obedience and manners may be motivated by self-seeking desires way more than I think!"

The Pharisees couldn't go there! They couldn't question themselves this way...they were so self-assured (so strong!)...They were, at one level, very deliberate and intentional and at another level living the unexamined life. It must've hard to be one ...or be around them.

And yet Jesus accepts their invitations to eat. Jesus has courage to eat with church people! And He says the really tough things that have to be said. One very old writer said Jesus Christ was using, "benevolent severity" – He was using the paddles, the defibrillator ...to see if their hearts could be shocked back into rhythm. He wanted their hearts...not just their habits because when you start asking these questions you realize that behavior alone isn't all there is to it...It's very possible that mannerly, scrupulous, deliberate, disciplined behavior is either something different from what God called us to or springs from a heart that is only in it for self.

My friend, Ronaldo pointed out to me that this all took place at a meal...which looks like bad form and looks like Jesus was a bad guest. Later though in Matthew 23 He seems to say these things publically. So, it is possible that Jesus was saying these hard words privately first...in the

intimate setting of a meal. And while He does point out how clownish their way of life was...He's not laughing but crying. That's the meaning of the word "Woe" (6x) – My heart is breaking because you look the part but you don't even know Me. (You know the Law of God but not the God of the Law...and definitely not the God of grace.")

The fact that Jesus said these words so important for His religious friends to hear...and KNEW that they would lead many of them to hate Him...but He said them anyway! (I would've been tempted to say, ah what's the use?!) That fact shows that He loved them and that His heart was completely set on the Father and doing the Father's will. Eventually, He would say, "Not My will but thine!" He would become weak and He would give Himself for religious hypocrites like us and like them...He would become weak for people like us who are so powerless over our own motives...We're barely able to change our behavior and we're powerless to change our hearts.

If you come to Jesus Christ, realize that it's not your weakness that's the real spiritual danger but your strengths... if you receive His gift of weakness (when He became weak for us) He'll begin to transform our manners and habits and obedience and make them beneficial. Here's how you'll begin to roll differently:

1st – You'll be much more concerned to know that what you're doing really IS God's command and not just something you want to do. That ritualistic washing before the meal wasn't even a requirement in the OT...You'll stop with the yellow flowers and start mowing the lawn...doing what's actually commanded.

2nd You'll stop using manners and habits and practices and giving to get things:

You'll start repenting for using these things to get over people. You'll stop using service and spiritual practices and habits to boost your self-esteem and you'll stop using these things to get blessings or love or protection from God.

You'll begin to get strong in Christ...Your confidence will be more in what HE did for you in His life, death and resurrection. And you'll begin to rest in God's approval which Jesus earned for you. Then it won't matter so much that you're better behaved than others...and your self-esteem will be based in how God esteems you because of Jesus.

3rd, you'll be freer and freer to recognize that you really don't know yourself very well. Truth is it's very, very difficult to even know our motives never mind change them. Those old Pharisees definitely didn't see themselves as Prophet killers but they were...and you'll be able to face up to that and receive criticism more easily. You'll start getting confident that we aren't accepted by God because we have pure motives – we're accepted because of Jesus Christ's perfect motives. Therefore, we'll be less concerned with outward appearances and the opinions of people and more willing to see that dirt inside the cup...and to invite Jesus Christ to wash and have our hearts. This will lead to that delightful state of (what one friend calls) "blessed self-

forgetfulness”, when our habits and hearts are sort of organically the same – our duty becomes our delight.

4th, as we transfer trust away from us and on to Jesus Christ, we will bear fruit. “Apart from Me you can do nothing”, said Jesus “but connected to Me you’ll bear great fruit...” People will actually benefit from your obedience and find it sweet and attractive and life-giving, like the obedience of Jesus ...even when it has to be “benevolent severity”.

Last, if you set out to obey and you...suspect...maybe your motives aren’t all they should be (maybe mixed or selfish motives), well, don’t wait for the motives to be pure before you obey (it’ll never happen in this life!) INSTEAD, obey...AND repent for your low quality obedience (invite God in!). That’s how you get grace and only grace can change our hearts and motives (little by little).

Let’s pray.