

**Mark 8: 34-38; "The Dining Room of Christian Discipleship", Sermon
55 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on November 15th, 2009,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

Now we want to proceed from the Kitchen to the Dining Room of Christian Discipleship. The kind of dining that we are talking about is formal dining. The object of coming into this room is to be found in the serving and eating of the spiritual food of grace and the truth of the Word of God. Furthermore, the object is to bring the food out of the Kitchen and to sit down and dine with Christ. And, as progress is made in this, discipleship will also be pursued by learning to dine spiritually with your family, and with other believers also; not just in pursuing eating by yourself. Let me ask you this morning whether you have considered the truth that Christ and other believers want to spiritually dine with you? I want to develop this idea in this sermon and the next one. As we go on, I want you to see that dining with Christ is a great part of our being a His disciple and following Him. As a disciple of Christ, you are called to fellowship with the Father and the Son. Every day it is He who is seeking to gain entrance to your mind and to your heart as a believer, so that He would be able to partake of the things which we have prepared for Him. And then, in return, as He sits at our table, He would give us presents of further grace and further responsibility, as rewards to us, for faithfully following Him. This morning we have come to dine at His table; to partake spiritually, once again, of what He has done for us; in His blessed life and His sacrificial death. When we gather down front in a few minutes, we will be remembering Him. But you should understand also, that He will be remembering us. He will be dining with us. He will be looking to see if you have prepared something for Him to partake of, as well. Your preparations for this table are not done to merit favor with God or with Christ. They are done out of your love to Him. To make progress in Christian discipleship you really must come to see your spiritual life in this way. If you don't; you must ask yourself; am I really His disciple? You must attempt to look the issue square in the face, and answer the question. So as we enter this room, we want to think first about formal dining with Christ individually, and then we will be thinking in our second point about what it means to formally dine with Christ in our family. And thirdly we want to understand more about what it means to formally dine with Christ in relation to other believers.

First - What does it mean to formally dine with Christ individually?

I think that we can illustrate this by the life of a certain man who came to Jesus, and he got more than he was looking for. Actually, this is the way that it is for each one who comes to Christ. But let us learn from his life. I want you to turn with me to Luke Chapter 19. Here we have set before us the history of how a little man came to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and how he first began to follow His

Savior and Lord as a disciple. "Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho." "Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich." "And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature." "So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way." "And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.'" "So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully." Let me pause here and make a few comments. There were many people who came out to see Jesus on this day in Jericho, but Jesus was singling just one person out. Whenever Christ designs to save a soul, He singles that person out. He so orders the circumstances that He will personally come to interact with that person. Jesus may have saved many sinners that day but the one person whose conversion was recorded for us in the Scripture on that day, was Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and he was publicly known as a sinner. The reason that he was publicly known to be a sinner was because he was a tax-collector, and all the people knew that tax-collectors grew rich because they would take advantage of those whom they were collecting the taxes from. They would demand more of them that the government was requiring. But Jesus Christ has come to save sinners, even the chief among them. As Matthew Henry says, "Christ came to save even the chief of sinners, and therefore even the chief of publicans." Well, this man had heard about Jesus and he wanted to see "who He was". He had heard of the great miracles that Jesus had done; He had heard about His teaching; that He gave it in parables and amazing sayings. He knew that His gospel message was related to a person's repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus, and that He was able to save them soul and body forever if a person believed. He had heard that Jesus was sent from God and that He was a great Prophet. He wanted to see Him for himself. The problem was; that there was this great crowd, and he was very short. But he didn't let his shortness stop him from trying to see the One who He heard was a great Savior and a great Teacher. Let nothing stop you, either, from by faith, seeking a sight of Christ by faith.

Zacchaeus did something quite extraordinary here. He climbed up into a sycamore tree because He knew that Christ was going to pass by that way. And "when Jesus came to the place," it says, "He looked up and saw him, and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.'" This is the verse from this passage that I most wanted you to see. Out of all the people in that crowd that day, Jesus singled this one man out. And He made a point of saying, "I am coming to your house today." And this is exactly what the Lord Jesus does now, since He has been raised from the dead; except on a much greater scale and with every individual who trusts in Him and who would follow Him. We need to see, here, that if Jesus would stay with Zacchaeus, He would no doubt also dine with him too. Do you realize, my friends, that when Jesus Christ comes to you in salvation, He comes to stay, and He comes to dine. Since He is

now raised from the dead, when a person believes in Him, He comes to abide with them forever in the person of His Holy Spirit. He comes to take away all your sins and turn you away from all of your sins. He comes in to your house of discipleship to dine. This is the greatest of privileges, when Christ comes to your soul in salvation. The one receiving such a call in the gospel ought to immediately come in haste and believe in Christ. They ought to receive Christ joyfully. Ask yourself if you have done this? Ask yourself as a Christian if you realize that Christ is looking for this kind of fellowship with you every day.

When Jesus comes to dine with you, it is exactly as it is given to us in verse 7. "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Jesus is the guest, and you are the host. You have something to give to Him as a sincere believer. You have something to say to Him which will tell Him of your change of heart. He has given you this change of heart, but He has come to your house to see if you will really do something with the grace which you have been given. You know yourself to be a sinner, and other people know that you have lived for yourself in the past, and lived for the World in the past. You have not pursued what was right in the way that the Bible defines it, but you know also that Christ is able to change the whole direction of your life. You see, as we read on further on here, we find that Zacchaeus had something that he wanted to say, and something that he wanted to do in relation to his past sins. Let us ask ourselves if we are like him? He was repenting of them, but he wanted to repent, in particular, of his past favorite sins of covetousness and greed. He wanted to repent of anything that he even might have done wrong, while in the position of being a tax-collector. Truly, he was already dining with Christ. Look at verse 7 once again. "But when they saw it, (that is when the crowd of Pharisees and others who supported them saw it) they all complained saying, 'He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.'" (To the people who are religious, but unsaved, it always seems wrong for Jesus to come and save sinners, and dwell with them. They believe that Jesus should not show mercy to them or befriend them at all. But this is what Jesus does with all of God's Elect.) Now that Zacchaeus is a changed man; right away he speaks up in Jesus' defense, because he is a changed man. A person who has been changed by the grace of Christ will want to make restitution for the wrongs that they have done. They will not make excuses for them. Zacchaeus knew what he could do now that his heart was changed; and he knew what he should do now that his heart was changed. Verse 8 - "Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore four-fold." "And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Ask yourself if you are dining with Christ since you have made your confession of faith in Him? Are you putting away those sins which you once loved? Covetousness, greed, pride, selfish ambition, sensuality, talking about people behind their back, or using false accusation. These are only some of the sins which an unbeliever is guilty of. And

these are only some of the many sins if you continue to hold on to one of them, to continue to love them and to continue to practice them, it will only prove that you are not really a Christian. A true Christian is a daily repenter. He searches his heart and mind in the presence of His God and His Savior in order to come to terms with the sins which may be lurking there. He may have repented of them once, but he may need to repent of them again. They may have come back into his heart and into his thoughts even stronger than before. Have you repented of all of your sins? Are you forsaking all of your sins? "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses his sins and forsakes them, he it is that shall find mercy." (Proverbs 28: 13) Are you making restitution to those whom you have taken something from? Are you confessing and forsaking the sins which you once cherished and loved in your heart? This is the heart and the life of a disciple. This is dining with Christ, because the true disciple will be praying for the grace and strength that they will need to truly change and become more personally righteous and more personally holy. The true disciple knows that they can add nothing to the perfect righteousness of Christ and His finished work at Calvary. But they also know that they have much to learn and much to grow in, in relation to Christ's cross, so that they can personally bear their own cross and become more righteous in relation to that grace which Christ has given them.

Secondly - What does it mean to dine with Christ in relation to your family?

To formally dine with Christ in your family means to consciously include Him in the things that you do together as a family. There is a problem which has developed in our generation in this regard; in relation to what I am calling the "formal dining" of discipleship, in relation to families. In both the earthly sense of formal dining and in the spiritual sense of formal dining; it doesn't take place in families, much any more, in our society. In the earthly sense of dining; if you will notice; back in the 1970s and 80s, people in our society began designing and building houses which either did not have a formal dining room, or if it did, it was usually placed in the front of the house; not necessarily close to the Kitchen at all, and people rarely even went into it to eat. It was more of a sitting room than a dining room. This, I believe, is a very sad state of affairs. It not only says something about our society in terms of earthly things. I think that it says something about our society in terms of spiritual things as well. It says that we are living in a time of tremendous spiritual decline. The reason that I say that it is sad is that I believe that spiritually, there is a problem as well, that is related to it. There is not enough formal dining going on in the families which make up the Church today. The Scriptures teach us that Christ is the One who gave us the house of discipleship, and Christ gave us every room in this house. And He, as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, expects us to receive Him into our house of discipleship, in a formal way so that He might dine with us in an excellent way which befits our King. When I say "formal", I mean that we would consciously set aside some time together as a family to engage in family worship of Christ. Family

devotions are very glorifying to God. They are glorifying to God, not only in the fact that conscious, deliberate, and meaningful worship is being given to God, but also that conscious, deliberate and meaningful reading and instruction from God's word is being given to the children.

As we think of the earthly houses that have been made over the last 40 years, most kitchens in these newly designed houses are connected with the family room as one big room. And the reason for this is because the family room has largely taken the place of the living room as the room in which the family will spend most of their time. And the reason that the family spends so much time in the family room is because they are watching television while the family is eating. And this has, in many cases, taken the place of the family gathering around the table in the dining room, to eat and to discuss the many things in their lives which affect them all. As a result, many moral values and ethical questions, many doctrines of the Christian faith, and even social etiquette and manners are not being communicated by the father and mother to their children. But these things are the essence of discipleship and living the Christian life. In the past, it was often over the dining room table that these valuable instructions and interactions took place. Nowadays, what often happens is that the family will either sit at a counter in the kitchen and eat, or they will take their food to into the family room to sit on a couch or a chair; and there they will watch the TV. They will hardly ever discuss matters of personal, spiritual, or eternal importance. Earthly formal dining, therefore, has in the past, been directly related to family fellowship and interaction. Earthly formal dining has in the past even helped to promote times of family devotion. So we must ask ourselves, as fathers, who are the head of our household; and mothers, those who have such a loving concern for their husbands and their children; are we consciously promoting formal dining in our families? By that, I do not necessarily mean that every night we get out the fine china, or the finest of our silverware and use cloth napkins. I mean this: Do we eat our meals together, or are we and our children involved in so many sports activities, or school activities, or personal activities that we do not take time to even sit and read the Scriptures together and pray together? Are matters of spiritual importance spoken of? Are matters of moral importance spoken of; how our children think, and whether they are thinking in the right way about the hundred issues of importance related to their being pleasing to the Lord; are these being discussed? Are they being commanded and encouraged to do things which are right and good for themselves and others; are these things discussed? If this is not being done, how can God possibly be glorified, and how can anyone in the family know that they are walking as disciples of Christ? Ours, dear parent, is to teach by example and speak and do what is right by example; to teach and to discuss and to love and to pray over each child in our family, until we see an interest in Christ created. And once that interest has by the Holy Spirit been formed; that we would continue to interact with each child over all the issues of their life. Devotion to Christ; dining with Christ is certainly the most important issue. If a child or young person

has real heart devotion to Christ, then they will want to learn to be His disciple. What gladness comes to the parent's heart when they see their children listening attentively as the Bible is read and commented upon, because they want to learn more and do more to serve the Lord Jesus. They will do this more if you, dear parent, will do it more. If God is working in your heart, then He will also be striving with their hearts. Let us come down to the front now, and gather there to give to the Lord our praise for what He has done for us. Let us come down to the front to give Him our hearts and our lives anew and afresh.

Thirdly - I want to remind you that in dining with Christ that we are also meant to understand that other believers are included in it at certain times.

This coming to the Lord's Supper is certainly one of those times. Indeed, this is what coming to church is all about. We are not only dining with Christ alone and personally; we are dining with other believers in His presence. We are together in living this Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 10, verse 1 it says, "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink." "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." That was their Lord's Supper, and they were dining together under the Old Covenant. But let us see if it profited all of them. Verse 5 says, "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." Then it says, "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." "And do not become idolaters as were some of them." "As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'" Let me stop here for a moment and apply this. You can see that there were many of those who were part of the Old Testament community who did not use their experiences of dining with Christ wisely. They did not repent of their sins. They were not thankful for what God had done for them through Christ. This is one of the reasons that this Supper was given by our Lord Jesus. It was given so that we would examine ourselves and see if there be any wicked way in us. As we come to this table, we are not to sit down to eat and drink and rise up to play. Paul explains in verse 8: "Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents." That was the incident where they spoke against God and against Moses for the way that God was leading them. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" "For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." Let us see to it that we do not have that kind of sin which is always questioning God and those who are over us in the Lord. "Nor complain," it says in verse 10, "as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer." "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

"Therefore let him who think he stands take heed lest he fall." What will you fall into if you do not have Christ's grace? You will fall into sin and idolatry and dishonor your God. So let us seek Christ's grace here together today.

The Lord's Supper is made to prevent these falls by our remembering Christ's perfect life and His perfect work on the cross. It is in remembering Him; that He is our God. A few verses later in verse 14 Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." "I speak to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say." "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." The exhortation is to flee from idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of other gods than God. It is to place someone or something above God in the order of importance in your mind and heart; something that you will give your time, your attention, your strength and your resources to; more than God, or instead of giving them to God first and foremostly. Christ never once did this. He loved God with all of His heart, soul, mind, and strength. And He loved His neighbor as Himself. I didn't see any of you come into this place today with your god (small "g") under your arm. But sometimes Christians do not understand that they have allowed other things to take the place of God in their life as the most important things. But here and now I am asking you if Christ is the most important person; His grace the most important thing to you? Are you aware that if He is not; that your sins of idolatry, or pride, or sensuality, or complaining may affect everyone else here in this church? But this need not be, if you will confess them now and seek cleansing in the blood of Christ. "Even though many, we are one bread and one body, and we are about to partake of the one bread which is Christ. Since we have come to this table we must ask ourselves if we are really dining with Him. If we have sinful attitudes and thoughts of our hearts, we need to very solemnly and sincerely repent of them in Christ's presence, now. And having received pardon and forgiveness, which we will; we will give Him thanks and go away from the table with the sincere desire not to have such thoughts and attitudes again. Indeed we shall be filled with joy, because we have been freed from them, to enjoy a fuller communion with Christ. Nothing can be more important than obeying God and walking with Christ by faith.