

**Mark 8: 34-38; "The Dining Room of Christian Discipleship" (Part 2),
Sermon # 56 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 13th, 2009,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

We are continuing to examine the rooms in the house of Christian Discipleship. We have most lately been in the Dining Room. We have been talking about the spiritual dining with our Lord Jesus Christ; that dining which must take place in order for us to make progress as a disciple. So far, we have looked at the truth that this spiritual dining is with Christ Himself, and that it is also something that should be taking place in our family as well. The last time that we were together we saw that the spiritual dining which Christians engage in, is formal dining. By this I mean that we most definitely engage, on a daily basis, in the spiritual devotion of sitting down in our heart of hearts to partake of spiritual truth and grace with our Lord, and to have fellowship with Him. It is not a casual thing; it is a most deliberate thing. It is epitomized by the believer's sitting down to partake of the Lord's Supper. But it certainly is not exclusive to it. Christ is expecting to have spiritual fellowship with us every day. He has good gifts of His grace prepared for us each and every day. He is expecting that when we sit down to dine with Him, that we will have prepared something for Him spiritually, in our devotion to Him. He is also expecting good words and good works to flow from this devotion to Him; works that we will thoughtfully and deliberately engage in. So as disciples of Christ we do have a religion with duties that we should be engaging in, both toward God and toward other people. The religion that the Christian engages in is not like the other religions of the world. Jesus Christ has opened up for us a new and living Way to come to God and to know God because of what He has done for us at the cross. When we truly believe in Him we find that we have spiritual things to partake of, and spiritual things to do every day because we have grace coming to us from a risen, living Savior.

As a result of His resurrection from the dead, our Lord is even now sitting at the right hand of the Father. He has been glorified, and as such, He can hear the prayers of every believer, and see the hearts of all believers more clearly than they can see them themselves. He ever lives to make intercession for us. And as a result of this intercession for us; we have the opportunity and the responsibility to develop a real and living heart relationship with Him. This truth, most Christians who are sensitive to the Spirit, understand. But each one of us needs to remember that for that relationship to flourish, the Christian has to engage in the holy duties of dining every day. They should be consciously thinking through how they can fulfill their Biblically defined duties in order to please God; the One who called them into fellowship with Himself. They will do this by faith, and they will work through it in prayer. But both faith and prayer must be in exercise, in relation to dining with Christ, every day. We have seen that it is often because Christians neglect spending time in this holy activity of the preparation of spiritual food and

engaging in spiritual dining, that as disciples they are immature, and they are not becoming much like their Master. But in Luke 6: 40 Jesus says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." There is a training, a discipline in living the Christian life. And formal dining is a very real part of that training. If a person is neglecting their spiritual dining with Christ, they are neglecting an important part of their training in which they become like their Master. They are neglecting this great salvation that has been given to them. There is no preparation being done by them in the kitchen, and there is no formal dining taking place in their heart. Sometimes this condition comes upon many people in the same local church, and as a result, our Lord Jesus Christ has to speak to them and to warn them of the spiritual danger that they are in. The way that He does this in our day is through the admonition of His word to their souls. Through the preaching of His blessed word He comes to us to teach us, to rebuke us, and to encourage us to dine with Him. So we want to understand first of all, this morning, that there is a confrontation in spiritual dining between ourselves and Christ. Secondly we want to see that there is counsel that is given to us in spiritual dining, and then thirdly we want to realize that that there is a church involved in spiritual dining. So this morning I want to continue our study of spiritual dining by having you turn with me to Revelation 3, verse 20.

1st of all - There is a Confrontation in spiritual dining between ourselves and Christ.

The Lord Jesus says here: "Behold I stand at the door and knock." "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." From this verse we can clearly see that Christ our Master comes calling at the door of our heart; at the door of our house of Christian discipleship, and He knocks. He knocks because He would gain an entrance and come in and dine with us, and we with Him. There is a confrontation here; Christ is looking for fellowship with you the believer. Will you open to His knock? Will you let Him come in to dine in the house of your Christian discipleship? We should understand that this verse can most certainly be used as an evangelistic verse in the preaching of the gospel. Christ would gain an initial entrance to your heart, O unbeliever, by your deliberately opening the door of your heart to Him. Will you do it? Will you open the door of your heart to Christ? Perhaps this sounds like Arminianism. But truly it is only gospel responsibility which is being commanded here. Christ will not come in to set up His eternal residence with any person without their permission, unless they do not have the power to reason and think it through. With dying infants and the mentally impaired, He does not need or require their permission to gain an entrance, and to do a gracious work. He has the keys and He will unlock the door and save the soul because of His compassion, and on the basis of His finished work at the cross He will save them. Salvation for those who have never been born, or who die in infancy, or who are mentally unable to comprehend their need, only comes because of Christ's blood shed for them, is applied in a most deliberate way to their helpless souls.

But with you who can think and reason, it is a very different story. You are no doubt without strength to save yourself, but when He comes to save you, He is looking to dwell with you. He is looking to be a guest in your house, as we studied last week in the story of Zacchaeus. It is true that Christ has the keys to every heart and He can open any heart when He pleases, in accordance with the Father's Electing love and grace. And it is true that in regeneration, which comes before the exercise of saving faith, that the Spirit does His blessed work in the heart, while the unbeliever is unaware that He is there. The unbeliever is being drawn by the Father; his heart and his will are being drawn and being turned, but he knows it not. But when the gospel is presented, and when Christ is set forth; when the Spirit of Christ comes with power Christ Himself is knocking and He would have you the sinner to open to Him. Truly, you must decide; will you have Christ and be saved by Him, and be ruled by Him; or will you not? If you shall hear His voice and open the door He shall come in and you shall dine with Him and He with you.

But our text is saying something far more than this even. It is saying that Christ not only does this once, when we very first believe in Him; but He does it every day afterwards, so that we might know Him better and better; that we might know that we are having fellowship with Him day by day. He is seeking fellowship in righteousness; fellowship in truth; fellowship in His knowing our heart, and fellowship in our knowing His heart. There is a daily confrontation; there is a daily knock. Is this what you are daily responding to; dear believing friend? If you look back up at verse 15 of Revelation 3 you can see that this confrontation is over the state of your heart; whether it is hot or cold or something in between. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot." "I could wish you were cold or hot." "So then, because you are luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." You know; these words are giving us to understand that the Lord Jesus likes His spiritual food hot or cold; but he does not like it luke-warm. His spiritual food; the food that He dines upon is your works and the devotion that you have to Him and to His grace. That is His food. He knows how you go about to do all of the works that you do. He knows the preparation of your food and how you serve it. He knows whether the thoughts that you think and the works that you do are done for Him and for His pleasure and His glory, or whether they are done for you and for your earthly pleasure and for your earthly glory alone. He knows when you try to mix these ambitions and works together. When you do your works for His pleasure and His glory, out of a heart which is thankful for what He has done, and full of love for Him, this is what He feeds upon with pleasure. But when there is no devotion, no thankfulness, and no endeavor to please Him in accordance with His word, then you are cold. If there is no fervent prayer and no devotion to Christ, you are dead spiritually. But what was most disturbing to Him in regard to the church at Laodicea was that they were neither hot nor cold, but luke-warm. This was what He confronted them with. Since their works were like this; he would vomit them out of His mouth. He could not stand

the food that they were serving Him. I believe that the confrontation that the Lord Jesus brings to the soul that would daily dine with Him is this; whether you will be zealously devoted to Him, to His cause of righteousness and His kingdom of grace; whether you learn of Him and feed on His grace, or whether you will try to be self-sufficient and worldly in the frames of your mind and your heart. And so when the Lord Jesus comes to dine with you, He will also often come to confront. He would see and know and show you where you are spiritually in relation to Him. Are you willing to receive this from Him today if you are dead, or if you are luke-warm. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten," He says in verse 19. "Therefore be zealous and repent." Perhaps some of the greatest confrontations that you have ever had in your life have come to you from your parents when you were sitting at the table and having a meal together. It was the place where you thought to simply come and dine, but it was there that confrontation took place. It was for your good, but you might not have thought it so. But let Christ's rebuke to your luke-warmness be received by you today that you might truly dine with Him; that you might grow stronger as a disciple.

Secondly - We want to see that there is counsel given by Christ in our Spiritual Dining with Him.

Verse 17 of Revelation 3 says this: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." The Dining room table is not only the place where the disciple is confronted with the state of his heart, but it is also the place where counsel is given. You have probably known this same kind of thing happening at the literal dining room table of the home that you grew up in. Your mother and your father counseled you to do many things at that place when you were growing up. Why should it not also be necessary in the dining room of Christian discipleship? The preaching of the Word of God is counsel being given. The advise of the pastor to you in private is counsel. Both of them are a means of your feeding and instructing your soul are the Dining room table of Christian discipleship. You need counsel. You should want to have counsel. You should not simply lean to your own understanding of things. The kind of counsel that you as a believer really need is the kind of counsel that is given here. "I counsel you to buy from Me...." We are living in a day when many people think that they do not need to be counseled. Many people think that they do not need counseling unless they perceive that they have a problem. The problem with this is two-fold. You may be deceived into thinking that you do not have any problem when God knows that you do. And, you may be denying the fact that Christ uses His Word, as a word of counsel to you, every day of your life in order to make you stronger and more holy as a Christian. Christ's counsel is that you buy from Him and that you do not buy from the world's wisdom and philosophies. You need to buy; that is

you need to obtain things from Christ that only He can give. Now evidently many of the believers in Laodicea were wealthy by the standards of the world and that day, and so they thought that they had it made. They were wealthy and they were going to heaven they thought. But if those who are being addressed in this letter were Christians, you would hardly know it. They said, "I am rich, I have become wealthy, and I have need of nothing." They thought that they were really pretty self-sufficient and wise in the way that they lived. But this was not Christ's view at all. What they thought was a good way of living, Christ brings to them as a charge. This was Christ's charge against them at the Dining Room table of Christian discipleship. They saw no need of coming to Christ day by day to obtain the spiritual things which only He could give to them. He saw that their true spiritual state was one of being wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." That is completely the opposite of how they saw themselves. So here at the dining room table He counsels them.

Let me introduce you to the Wonderful Counselor, here. That is; that when we, as believers, are ruining our lives by believing worldly counsel (believing the counsel of what is wise and advantageous to ourselves from a purely worldly sense) and then we go on to live that out in a selfish way. As Christians, Christ has the love, the authority, and the power to change that and to give us something better. I say that this is wonderful. He has enough love in His holy heart to be strong to rebuke us and chasten us when and where we need it. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten," He says in verse 19. "Therefore, be zealous and repent." When will we as Christians understand that worldly self-sufficiency is not living the Christian life and that it is a state rather to be pitied and prayed for, whether we find it in ourselves or others. When will we see that living by our own worldly cleverness, or strength, or resources to bring ourselves into a position of self-sufficiency is not what Christ has called us to. It will only, in the end, bring spiritual blindness, wretchedness, misery, poverty, and shame. He has called us to be utterly dependent upon Him for wisdom and grace. But you will say to me, "I do not see that, when I look at those persons who profess to be Christians and they are rich." "They appear to really have it together." And I would say to you, nothing is impossible with God if they are buying from Christ. But if they are not; ah my friend, wait awhile. Unless all that we have, whether we are rich or poor, is invested with the Lord Jesus Christ, it will come to an end and vanish altogether. Riches will make for themselves wings and they will fly away. Where are the rich men of former generations? In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, who had it made? Certainly it was not the rich man; he was in torments. Certainly it was the poor man who trusted in Christ, and who had such great needs, but trusted in the promise of God. How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. How wonderful those who take counsel at the Dining room table of Christian discipleship with Christ.

Listen to the Lord Jesus: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame

of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." All of these things are spiritual treasures which only come through Christ. He would have you to buy from Him and not from the world to find your greatest riches and that you might not then be ashamed in the coming day of judgment. But He also would have you to buy that you would be truly satisfied, and truly happy, in this present day; in this present hour. He would have you to come and dine. He has something better to give you, but you must come to the place where you believe it. Do you hear His voice? Will you open the door? Will you let Him come in and dine with you? Will you prepare something for Him to feast upon? Listen to His counsel in Psalm 25: 12 - "Who is the man that fears the Lord?" "Him shall He teach in the way He chooses." "He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth." "The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." "My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net." Out of what net? The net of worldly wisdom and worldly counsel which will destroy your soul if you follow it; and which will destroy your usefulness and fruitfulness if you will not dine with Christ and receive His counsel. This is how King David prayed. He was not self-sufficient. Listen to him in verse 16 - "Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted." "The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses!" "Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins." "Consider my enemies, for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred." "Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You." "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You." You see; David was buying gold refined in the fire, and that was making him rich.

Let us go on then, Thirdly, to see that there is a church involved in Spiritual Dining.

Revelation 3, verse 22 says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." If you are a believer, you ought to be part of a church. You need to be aware, that as Christ's disciple, that you are not only called by Christ to pursue and initiate fellowship with Him individually, and to initiate fellowship also in your family for His name's sake; but you are also called to think about and to attempt to initiate fellowship with other believers also; especially in the local church of which you are a member. Sometimes Christians fail to do this, because they do not understand it to be a requirement of discipleship. If you are not pursuing this, you are not making progress as a disciple. There is here, at this very point, a link to be seen between the Living room and the Dining Room of Christian discipleship. There is a link between self-denial and your pursuing fellowship with other Christians. It is all too easy to think that your dining with other Christians, in this spiritual way of fellowship with them is something that you might do if you happen to feel like it. But the Bible speaks much more of what is required of you, in this regard, than you might think." Turn with me to Acts Chapter 2 and verse 42. This verse is set in the context of the 3,000 people that were converted to

Jesus Christ through one sermon preached by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. "And they," that is not only the 3,000 new converts, but also everyone else there in the church in Jerusalem in those days, "continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." It is this word "fellowship" that I want to focus upon for a few moments. It is the Greek word, "Koinonia", and it means a participation in spiritual interactions with God and with other believers. When you come to church, whether you are a young believer or an older believer, you realize; or you should realize; that spiritual dining on the foods of the Christian life; the milk, the meat, the bread, the wine, and the honey are all taken in to your soul in connection with the Spirit's working of the truth of Christian doctrine into your heart. You further should be coming to realize that this is something that you need to continue steadfastly in. You will want to steadfastly come to the church to hear the word preached, and you will want to continue steadfastly in fellowship with God and other believers in a continued and on-going fashion. This is what makes for a strong disciple, and this is what makes for a strong local church.

The Lord takes notice of this spiritual dining of believers together, and He will reward us for it. Turn with me to Malachi 3: 16. "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name." Notice that it was those who "feared the Lord" who spoke with one another. And the implication is that because they feared the Lord; they had regard for His person, His Work, His will, and His ways, that these are the kind of things that they spoke about with one another. They were not simply talking over the football, basketball, or baseball scores with one another. They were not simply talking about what they had been doing that week in work, or at home, or the many worldly things which might interest them. That would not be spiritual fellowship. That would not be spiritual dining. They spoke of spiritual truths from the Bible; they spoke of spiritual desires and spiritual concerns, and how the kingdom of God could advance and how people could be converted, and how God could get glory for Himself through the things that did for His kingdom and His name's sake. The Lord listens to this kind of interaction and He takes notice of it. He remembers it, and He writes it down in the book of His perfect memory, that the people who engaged in this holy work of a disciple; having fellowship, would be remembered forever. Let me ask you, then, if this is what you are doing? Are you engaging yourself in this holy interaction, not only when you meet with others to worship the Lord on Sundays; but are you also inviting other believers over to your house to show them hospitality and to engage in the formal dining of deliberately seeking fellowship with them, to speak to them about the things of Christ and His precious grace? That is the kind of thing that this verse is referring to. Remember the words of Romans 12, verse 9 and following: "Let love be without hypocrisy." "Abhor what is evil." "Cling to what is good." "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one

another; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality." Are you "given to hospitality? When was the last time that you consciously had another believer, or other believers and their family over to dine with you in an earthly sense, and to seek to dine with them in a spiritual and heavenly sense? This is a real part of what it means to be a true disciple.

Our fellowship; our dining in the Christian life of discipleship is first of all with the Father and with the Son. But that formal dining with the Father and the Son always leads to deliberately and consciously seeking to share your dining room in the house of Christian discipleship with other believers. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." True and real fellowship with other believers is sought out because of the love of God which has been poured out within the heart of the believer. They want to show love to others because it has been shown to them. Listen to 1 John 4, verse 19. We love Him because he first loved us." "If someone says, 'I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? "And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also." A couple of verses from the little letter of Paul to Philemon will illustrate this. Verses 4-7. "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus." "For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you brother." There you see it. First comes the fellowship which Philemon had with the Lord Jesus in faith and love. Then came the sharing of that faith being made effectual by the acknowledgment of every good thing which was in him in Christ Jesus. The sharing of your faith with other saints is fellowship. It is spiritual dining. And it leads to great joy and consolation when believers love one another in this holy way. The hearts of the saints are refreshed in this way. Ask yourself as we close this sermon; is this what I am trying to do, and to be, to the saints around me? Am I sharing my faith? Am I showing the love of Christ? Am I bringing joy and consolation to other believers around me? Are they refreshed by my ministering unto their spiritual and physical needs? This is true spiritual dining; to have your fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and then because you have been well supplied and refreshed by your fellowship with God, you can go on to show hospitality towards others in an earthly and a spiritual sense. May God enable us to be Christ's disciples in this important way of glorifying Him.