

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 April 17th, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.

This morning 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. In this spiritual dining there are deliberate decisions that are made to sit down and partake of spiritual things with Christ. 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, and having fellowship with your Lord. Furthermore, your object in dining is to bring the food out of the Kitchen and to sit down and spiritually dine with Christ. And, then, as regular progress is made in this fellowship with Christ, further discipleship will also be pursued by your learning to dine spiritually with your family, and with other believers also; and not just partaking of spiritual things 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? As we go on, I want you to see that dining with Christ is a very great part of your being His disciple and following Him. As a disciple of Christ, you are called to spiritual fellowship with the Father and the Son. Every day it is He who is seeking to gain entrance to your mind and heart as a believer. Believe it or not, He is looking to partake of the things which you have prepared for Him. And then, in return, as He sits at your table, He also has things of grace and truth to give to you.

This may not be something that you have sufficiently considered before, dear Christian. Your Lord is looking at you to see if you have a hospitable heart toward Him and toward others around you. Do you have good things prepared for Him? Do you have something for Him to feast upon, in relation to the devotion of your heart? Perhaps you have always thought of your dining with Christ, as sitting at His table, partaking of the things that He has done for you. And certainly this is where spiritual hospitality begins. We come to His house and we sit at His table. It is very good for you to think this way. But this morning I want you to see that there is also a table which you prepare for Him. “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.” This is your house of discipleship. Your preparations for dining with Christ at this table are not done to merit favor with God or with Christ. They are done out of your love for Him. To make progress in Christian discipleship you really must come to see your spiritual life in this way. You must attempt to look the issue square in the face, and answer the question. What does it mean practically for me to be Christ’s disciple? So as we enter this room, we want to think 1st, about formal dining with Christ individually; and then we will be thinking in our 2nd point about what it means to formally dine with Christ in our family. And 3rd - 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 want you to understand at the outset that I am not speaking about formalism when I speak to you about dining with Christ. It is just the opposite. Formalism is when you get into a pattern of doing things in your worship, your life, and your activities, as a Christian, that you find that you are just going through the motions of living the Christian life, and there is no substance; there is no real life in your devotion at all. There seems to be very little of the Holy Spirit’s activity. But formally dining with Christ is just the opposite; you are deliberately cultivating the life of Christ within you. Your greatest desire is to really interact with Him. And you are deliberately making plans in your mind and heart every day to do so. In this regard, nothing will be taken for granted; nothing will be boring, because you are desirous to have real fellowship with Christ when you dine with Him. I think that I can help you to understand this better by our

looking at the life of a certain man who came to Jesus, and when he came, 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 over 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 that 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. 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 from them than the government was requiring. But Jesus Christ has come to save sinners, even the chief among them. 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: Repent and believe in Me. He knew that conversion was related to a person’s repenting of their sins and believing in Jesus. He believed that Jesus was able to save him soul and body forever if he believed. But He wanted to come to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but he didn’t see how this could happen. But he had this desire to see Jesus for himself. Let me ask you now whether you know that you must come to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in order to be saved and begin the life of discipleship? Zacchaeus had this problem that day; 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 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. Verse 5 says, “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.’” This is the verse that I have 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 with those He intends to save now, as well, since He has been raised from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father on high. He comes to the heart of a sinful person now, in a spiritual way. He does this with every individual who trusts in Him and who would follow Him. I want you to think about the fact, 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? This is a blessed reality in the life of a believer. 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 an effectual call in the gospel will immediately obey the word of Christ. They will come in haste and do what He says. It will be their joy to receive Him into their heart house.

Ask yourself if this has been your response to Christ; not only when you first came to Him, but even now when He is seeking fellowship with you? Ask yourself 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. People around you who do not understand will talk. “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” But you are thankful and you are joyful that it is so. Jesus is your 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 He has given you. 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 the 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 those whom He saves! Now that Zacchaeus was a changed man; right away he spoke up, to make it clear that he was now intending to be righteous in his dealings with people around him. 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.” You see, he was not going to take anything more from people than what was right. He no longer considered it, his right and privilege, to take from others what did not belong to him. He would no longer ask them for more than what the state was requiring him to collect. He would no longer take advantage of them. Instead he would actually give half of his goods to the poor. “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 (wanting and asking for things that do not belong to you; things that you have not really worked for), greed (always desiring more and making plans to obtain it in ways that God would not be pleased with), pride, selfish ambition, sensuality, talking about people behind their back, or using false accusation. All of these are only some of the sins which an unbeliever is guilty of. And all of these a Christian will repent of when they come to Christ. If a person continues to hold on to any one sin, continues to love and practice that sin, it will only prove that they are really not a Christian.

A true Christian is a person who is daily repenting where they need to. They search their heart and mind in the presence of God and Christ in order to come to terms with the sins which may be lurking there. They may have repented of them once, but he may need to repent of them again. Evil thoughts and desires may try come back into your heart and into your thoughts after you come to Christ. But the all-important question will be: Are you willing, day by day, to confess and forsake 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 reality of a Christian’s heart, and this is the life of a true 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 to become the righteous and holy person that Christ wants you to be. 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.

2nd – 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 anymore, 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 spiritual 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 many 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 affects 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 at 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 heads of our households; 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? Do we speak about matters of spiritual importance with each other? Are matters of moral importance spoken of; how our children should think, according to the word of God? Are you, as parents, thinking together with them about the hundred issues of importance related to their being pleasing to the Lord? Are these being discussed? Are you commanding them and encouraging them to do things which are right and good for themselves and others? Are these things thought through together, and prayed over? Are you teaching them to worship and obey the Lord by your own example, parents?

If this is not being done, how can God possibly be glorified, and how will anyone in the family know that you are walking together as disciples of Christ? Genesis 18: 19 – “For I have known Abraham, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” Ours, dear parents, 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 to 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.

3rd - We want to understand more about what it means to formally dine with Christ in relation to other believers.

This is what coming to church is all about. We are not only spiritually dining with Christ, having spiritual communion with Him personally during the worship, we are also dining with other believers in His presence. We are here together on the Lord’s Day, worshipping Him together, and receiving His word together, partaking of holy and spiritual things together. But let me tell you how you can personally help forward Christ’s kingdom when you are here dining with Christ. It is that you would share with other fellow-believers and fellow-worshippers, here at church, perhaps even during the time of our shared meal downstairs, things that come to your mind in relation to the word of God. You can learn, by Christ’s grace and Spirit, to share the things that the Lord has been teaching you; either from the sermon that you just listened to, or by sharing with others the spiritual thoughts and lessons that the Lord has been showing you from your private times of devotion. These would be things that you have been learning or observing from the word of God; something that might be of real value and real aid to others around you.

Do you remember what it says in Malachi 3: 16? It says: “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.” “They shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, on the day that I make them My jewels.” “And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” “Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.” Let us all

remember that the Lord listens to the conversations that we have with one another. He notices those who fear Him in this holy way. He listens and He hears all that is said, and He stores it up in His mind to reward them, both now and in the Day of judgment. His saints are those who fear Him in this life, who dine with Him in this life, and He says they will make up His jewels, both now in this life, and in a greater sense in the life to come. So the lesson we should take with us is that we would serve Him now, in this holy way, of speaking with one another; feeding each other the spiritual truths that will fortify and strengthen our hearts to do His good will.