

When In Rome

Luke often used the setting of meals to tell his eyewitness account concerning Jesus. About 20% of his writing revolves around eating and drinking. Much of Jesus' teaching was done in the setting of a Roman style banquet, often with people whom the religious elite disapproved. Romans used banquets to promote its imperial ideology. Jesus used the venue to call on Jewish elites to switch their loyalty to the kingdom of God.

Jesus used meals to break down ethnic and sectarian boundaries. He called for a more inclusive table fellowship—reflecting on God's social vision for his kingdom. People often express a desire to get back to the early church model. The Roman banquet is the closest setting to that model.

The banquet had a specific protocol, including dress, table setting, order of service, type of food and standard of acceptable behavior. Things must be done "decently and in order." We can see this banquet setting being used in Paul's corrective letter of 1 Corinthians. The first part of the banquet (church service) was a full course meal. The second part, symposium, was a prolonged period of leisurely drinking of mixed wine and entertainment. The entertainment might include music, lectures, debates, philosophical discussions, recitations, dramas, riddles, dancing or party games. There was always group singing. Followers of Jesus were able to advance their newly formed cause in this setting.

Banquets were the ultimate communal event. They were designed as times of joy, friendship and pleasure. The senses were stimulated and camaraderie was strengthened. Invited guests had ethical obligations to one another. The goal was for the group as a whole, not just individuals, to enjoy the experience. Drunkenness, quarreling and abusive language were discouraged. Guests ate from a common platter, drank from a common bowl, and spoke on a common subject. Individualism was discouraged. Sharing food, drink and conversation naturally created bonds between diners that may not have previously existed, forming friendships (phileo—love).

When guests served their own interests and did not share in the communal aspects, the gods were angered. Everything was designed to be profitable, instructive and pleasant, leading to good deeds and charity. People who were not equal in status outside of the banquet were equals within—able to eat and speak freely. This was a place to escape the dangers and banalities of life. At the conclusion of the evening guests left feeling a sense of peace and wholeness.

Luke 5:27-32

Why would Jesus cross the lines of social protocol to eat with "sinners"?

- Sinners = those who could not or would not observe the Law of Moses
- The worst sinners were called "outcasts" i.e., prostitutes, murderers, extortionists & tax collectors (despite their ability to accumulate wealth by mostly dishonest means they were considered of low social status)
- The righteous observed the Law. **"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"**
- Jesus' ministry was directed toward the disenfranchised.
- **Jesus broke with the recognized and accepted interpretation of the Law!**

- The presence of Jesus at the table symbolized shared lives, intimacy, kinship, & unity with these sinners.

What kind of “kingdom of God” was Jesus preaching?

- Pharisees believed the kingdom was reserved exclusively for those who separated from sinners.
- What kind of prophet announces the arrival of God’s kingdom and, at the same time, dines with tax collectors and sinners?
 - Befriends Peter, a sinful man (5:8)
 - Heals an unclean leper (vs. 12-16)
 - Forgives sins (vs. 17-26)
- Jesus operated outside of the present system and presented the kingdom as restorative or redemptive.
- He not only forgave sinners, he welcomed them into his social sphere. Jesus broke the rules.
 - Invitation to a changed life by abandoning unrighteous practices
 - Becoming full members of God’s new community

Luke 18:9-14 Pharisee & tax collector

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 we are righteous
- You and I are made righteous through faith in Christ.
- Justified = just as if I'd never sinned.
- We are able to come into the presence of God as if we had never even sinned.
- This is the gift of grace we have received.
- Yet, we must never forget that we were sinners saved by grace. It is not our righteousness that counts for anything. We are the undeserving recipients of the gift of righteousness.
- We are not better than sinners. If not for the grace of God, we would still be sinners.
- It is not our place to judge and exclude people. It is our job to invite sinners to The Table of the Lord.

Conclusion

- Too often the church acts more like a club for Pharisees than a banquet for sinners.
- The church must do a better job of welcoming and reaching out to sinners.
- Like Jesus we must befriend sinful men like Peter.
- We must be willing to go to the unclean and offer God’s healing touch.
- We must find the helpless and hopeless and carry them to the healing and forgiving arms of Jesus.
- When you sin Jesus does not shun you. He welcomes and embraces you.
- He forgives you and shows you a better way.
- Repent and follow Jesus!

Discussion Guide

Luke often used the setting of meals to tell his eyewitness account concerning Jesus. Much of Jesus' teaching was done in the setting of a Roman style banquet. Romans used banquets to promote its imperial ideology. Jesus used the venue to call on Jewish elites to switch their loyalty to the kingdom of God. Jesus used meals to break down ethnic and sectarian boundaries. He called for a more inclusive table fellowship—reflecting on God's social vision for his kingdom.

Luke 5:27-32

- Why would Jesus cross the lines of social protocol to eat with "sinners"?
- What would Jesus' presence at your table represent?
- What did Jesus mean when he said that he did not come for the righteous? Is it wrong to be righteous?
- What kind of prophet announces the arrival of God's kingdom and, at the same time, dines with tax collectors and sinners?
 - Befriends Peter, a sinful man (Luke 5:8)
 - Heals an unclean leper (Luke 5:12-16)
 - Forgives sins (Luke 5:17-26)

Luke 18:9-14

- What was wrong with the Pharisee's attitude? What was right about the tax collector's attitude?
- **Read 2 Corinthians 5:21**
- You and I are made righteous through faith in Christ. We are able to come into the presence of God as if we had never even sinned.
- Yet, we must never forget that we were sinners saved by grace. It is not our righteousness that counts for anything. We are the undeserving recipients of the gift of righteousness.
- We are not better than sinners. If not for the grace of God, we would still be sinners. It is not our place to judge and exclude people. It is our job to invite sinners to The Table of the Lord.