

At **Table**
with **Jesus**

A BIBLE STUDY ON MEALTIME
CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SAVIOR

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STUDY EDITION

(All Scripture is from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.)



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Introduction

At meals, much more can happen than the mere consuming of food. Around the table, as friends and family gather for a meal, relationships can be deepened, special occasions can be celebrated, important life matters can be discussed. In short, life is often shared over a meal. Many significant things happened over a meal during Jesus' earthly ministry. This study invites us to journey into the Scriptures and take a seat around the meal table where Jesus dines. May the Holy Spirit use this study to deepen our understanding of what grace our Savior extends to those who get to dine with Him, and how He continues to set a place for us to be nurtured by Him.



At Table with Jesus A Covenant Confirmed

Setting the Scene

“In the East, even today, to invite someone to a meal was an honor. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life” (J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*). Table fellowship was an integral part of Jesus’ ministry. Time and again at table, Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God and shares a meal in that atmosphere of acceptance, forgiveness, and peace. Yet before we sit at the table with our Lord incarnate, today we will look at how God had used table fellowship in Israel’s history to communicate His grace to His people.

Into the Text Exodus 24:1–11

1. What does God instruct in verse 1? Why is Moses alone to come closer to God in verse 2? How do these instructions illustrate that the time of God’s plan of salvation had not yet fully come?

2. What might be meant by “all the LORD’s words and laws” that Moses told the people, what is the possible distinction between words and laws?

At Table with Jesus

3. How do the people respond?

4. What is significant about how Moses arranges the area for worship in verse 4? Compare 1 Peter 2:4–5.

5. What tasks did Moses give the young Israelite men? What was the purpose of a burnt offering and a fellowship offering? See Leviticus 1:1–5, 7:11–21.

6. How does the LORD begin to confirm His covenant with His people in verses 6–8?

7. Following the sprinkling of blood upon the people, what amazing thing now happens in these verses?

At Table with Jesus

8. Why was it surprising that God did not “raise His hand” against the leaders of Israel?

9. Discuss the reason God seals this covenant with His people with a meal.

Final Thought

It was a hopeful, well-intentioned promise the Israelites made to the LORD. They vowed under the blood of the covenant to do and obey everything the LORD had said, both the commandments and the whole legal code given through Moses. Yet not one generation throughout the entire history of Israel, not even one single Israelite, would keep perfectly this promise. According to the legal understanding of the day, the fate of the animals sacrificed should be the fate of those who do not keep the covenant. God is not oblivious to the sin of His people. Though He could justifiably condemn them before their vow leaves their lips, our Lord does just the opposite. Even before their failed vow is made, the Lord provides a sacrifice — a burnt offering that will show that He will cover their sin with the blood of another ... another that foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Savior Himself. The Israelites will be forgiven, and the Holy Lord will mercifully suffer His failed, sinful people to dine with Him, both then and forever. This mercy will not only feed the Israelites, it still feeds His children today with the gift of salvation in Christ, for eternity.



At Table with Jesus Meals that Bless

Setting the Scene

Many things commonly happen when friends get together for a meal. There may be laughter, stories told, memories revisited, another building block to the relationship is added, and certainly, there is food that nourishes. Yet something even more was considered to have happened during meals in Jesus' day. "Table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares in a meal brings out the fact that they all have a share in the blessing which the master of the house had spoken over the unbroken bread" (Arthur Just, *Luke-Concordia Commentary*, p. 232). And when the Almighty Lord sits at the table, something far more life-giving is present than food. Christ comes to the table of sinners and brings the gift of salvation and sanctification.

Into the Texts Matthew 9:9–13 and Luke 5:27–32

1. What gracious invitation does Jesus extend to Matthew? How does Matthew respond? Why was it surprising that Jesus had extended this invitation to him?

2. What implications are there in the fact that Jesus goes to Matthew's house for dinner, especially considering the guest list that comes as well?

At Table with Jesus

3. How do the Pharisees respond to the situation?

4. How does Jesus directly address their accusation?

5. What does Jesus mean when He quotes Hosea 6:6 — what is the difference between mercy and sacrifice?

Luke 19:1–10

6. To where is Jesus heading as He is passing through Jericho?

7. How does Luke describe Zacchaeus?

8. What embarrassing acts does Zacchaeus do in order to see Jesus?

At Table with Jesus

9. Why **must** Jesus stay at Zacchaeus' house that day?

10. *So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly* (Luke 19:6). How does this phrase imply that a meal was served in Jesus' honor?

11. How does the crowd react to Jesus going to be Zacchaeus' guest?

12. How does the fact that Zacchaeus stood up (v. 8) further suggest that they were eating a meal at the time of this exchange?

13. As a result of Jesus' presence in his life, what fruit of faith does Zacchaeus now show? How might Zacchaeus' actions be reflective of God's Word in Exodus 22:1 and 2 Samuel 12:5–6?

At Table with Jesus

14. What joyful declaration does Jesus make in verses 9–10 and to whom is it addressed? Why is Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham?” See Romans 4:1–3, 12.

Final Thought

It is no mistake that Jesus’ table fellowship outside Jerusalem and the events of Jesus’ ministry begin (Matthew) and end (Zacchaeus) with Jesus having a meal with a tax-collecting sinner. There is a similar pattern found in both Matthew and Zacchaeus’ encounter with the Messiah. Jesus extends a gracious invitation. There is a joyful and immediate response. There is a celebration meal where the Savior is the guest of honor and an outside crowd murmurs, objecting to Jesus’ fellowship practices. Yet the Messiah will not be dissuaded from His mission of which these tax collectors are examples. Jesus sits down to dine with sinners while they are still sinners, but before the final course is finished, Jesus has brought them to repentance and granted His gift of salvation. Can anything different be said when our Lord graciously invites us to dine at His Holy Table?



At Table with Jesus The Abundant Provider

Setting the Scene

Cut off from any means to sustain them locally, and having far too few personal resources to care for their needs, the disciples are confronted twice with the same situation in the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000. The people need to be cared for and fed, but how can this be accomplished with so little. Fortunately, the One for whom the crowd had gathered is more than able to provide for their need and then some. But are these miracle events merely two versions of the same story, or is there something unique to be gained from each event? What insights are there in these meals with Christ for the Church today?

Into the Texts Matthew 14:13–21; Luke 9:10–17; Matthew 15:29–39

1. What were the causes of Jesus' journeying to Bethsaida (Matthew 12:1–2, Luke 9:7–10)?

2. How does Matthew describe the area in 14:13? What happens to interrupt this private time? What does Jesus do for the crowds according to both evangelists?

At Table with Jesus

3. What practical problem comes up as the day continues? How would the disciples address it? What does Jesus suggest to them?

4. Discuss how the early Church used the symbolism of this meal in its teaching?

5. What might Jesus' instruction of how to seat the crowd suggest? See Exodus 18:21, 25 and Isaiah 35:7.

6. What do the actions of Jesus with the loaves and fish reflect?

7. What is the end result of the meal?

8. Where does the feeding of the 4,000 take place (Mark 7:31)? What happens immediately before this feeding (Matthew 15:21–28)?

At Table with Jesus

9. What does Jesus' healing ministry in Matthew 15:30–31 seem to reflect? See Isaiah 35:5–6.

10. What is the cause of this miraculous event in Matthew 15:32? How do the disciples respond in verse 33?

11. Compare and contrast the two miraculous feedings? What insights can we draw from them?

Final Thought

They were remote, solitary places for both Jew and Gentile, yet they were the places where Jesus was, so it was the place of life. As crowds follow Him, bringing along their sick and lame, Jesus provides abundantly. He heals. He teaches the good news of the kingdom of God. Then He offers a meal ... not just a snack to physically get them on their way. Rather, these meals may be representative of a new community being formed ... centered on Christ ... gathered around His Word where His compassion addresses their needs ... and equally fed by Christ through the service of His disciples, both Jew and Gentile, under the same blessing from Jesus. That community is still found today ... still being taught God's Word, cared for, and fed under the same blessing of our Messiah. And His provision is still enough and surpassing to meet the needs of all that come.



At Table With Jesus Anointed by a Sinner, Forgiven by the Savior

Setting the Scene

Jesus' ministry is compelling people to form an understanding of who He is. John the Baptist asks in prison through his disciples if Jesus is the One to come or should they look for another. The Pharisees and experts in the law regard Him as a teacher and perhaps a prophet (which would be exciting even to them since there had not been a prophet for some 400 years before John's arrival). In today's lesson, a Pharisee, Simon, and his colleagues will have the honor of dining with the "possible prophet." Yet they will only get a meal because they will be skeptical and scandalized when Jesus reveals His true identity at the table. The greater blessing will be imparted to the uninvited guest who will come to know that Jesus is the Savior.

Into the Text Luke 7:36–50

1. Skim over Luke 7:18–35. How do these verses (especially vv. 29–30) help set the context of today's lesson?

2. Discuss the nature of such a meal that would be hosted by a Pharisee.

At Table with Jesus

3. What uninvited “guest” now appears on the scene? What does she do that shows her love for Jesus and how might her actions be taken? See Psalm 2:12 and 1 Kings 19:18. Why might she have taken such bold actions?

4. What does the host Pharisee conclude about Jesus in light of the woman’s actions (v. 39)?

5. What is the point of Jesus’ parable to Simon in verses 40–43? What is the causative action of the debtor’s love?

6. What do Jesus’ comments in verses 44–46 reveal about the woman’s heart toward Christ? About Simon’s heart?

7. How do the parable in verses 40–43 and the last portion of verse 47 help us to understand that the woman’s love for Jesus is a result and not the cause of her forgiveness in the first part of verse 47?

At Table with Jesus

8. When Jesus forgives the woman her sin what is He saying about Himself? What role would He play in His parable of the two debtors? How do the other guests receive His pronouncement of absolution?

9. What does the woman receive from Jesus in verse 50?

Final Thought

Not everyone who merely eats and drinks with Jesus receives the greatest blessings He imparts at the table. Important religious leaders, honored guests, dine with the Messiah at Simon's home, but they do so seeing no need for their repentance ... no need for Jesus' forgiveness. They had a meal, but not true fellowship that leads to salvation. However, a rejected, uninvited guest, a sinner, is not welcomed by the "righteous crowd" to sit and dine, yet her Lord graces her with something that will sustain her to eternal life — His forgiving love. It is her repentant heart that shows itself in her humble love for Christ. When we come to Christ's table with a repentant heart, what great things our Lord freely gives!



At Table with Jesus The Humble, Heavenly Banquet

Setting the Scene

A great banquet had been prepared by one of society’s elite, and the upper crust of the elite were all in attendance, all seeking to see and more importantly, be seen as guests of honor. Into their midst comes one who has no honor, no place of power or recognition, a man with a disease that would make him, to say the least an unwelcome guest, the one who should take the humblest spot at the banquet ... if any spot at all. Yet there is Another there who could rightly take the highest place of honor at the head table, but this One has come to take the humblest spot of all, to be the servant-Savior. Jesus elevates this diseased outcast with the greatest honor, to receive the healing grace of God. The gift is there for all at the banquet, but will the powerful and proud who are carefully watching Jesus humbly receive the invitation to His banquet?

Into the Text Luke 14:1–24

1. Read Luke 6:6; 7:36; 13:10 and 14:1. What pattern do we see emerging in these verses regarding Jesus’ Sabbath activities?

2. Discuss the phrase “prominent Pharisee” that Luke uses to describe the host of the banquet.

At Table with Jesus

3. When did the Pharisees begin to “carefully watch” Jesus? See Luke 6:7. Why were they carefully watching Him?

4. According to Leviticus 13:2–3 how was the man who had dropsy to be viewed by the Israelites? How then would his presence at the dinner been received by the other guests?

5. What question does Jesus pose to the “honored” guests before healing the man? What response to this issue had been given in Luke 13:14? What response do these elite now give?

6. How does Jesus heal the man? What is the implication in his method of healing?

7. How does Jesus again raise the issue of showing compassion on the Sabbath in verse 5? What is the response by the religious leaders in verse 6?

At Table with Jesus

8. What issue does Jesus now see among the honored guests? How does He address it in His first parable? What is the faith lesson to be gained from this?

9. What “meal etiquette” lesson does Jesus the offer for the host in verses 12–14? Who will bless such a gracious host (v.14a) and when will that blessing be fully realized, showing that this is more than just a statement about how to host a good meal?

10. What is meant by the “banquet beatitude” spoken to Jesus in verse 15?

11. In Jesus responding parable, how do the invited guests respond to the banquet host’s invitation to come?

12. How does the owner of the house respond to his servant’s report about the refusal of his guests to come? What two groups are now brought to the banquet? Why do the servants have to “make “those found on the roads and country lanes come to the banquet?

At Table with Jesus

13. What ominous warning does Jesus give at the end of this parable that again reveals it's more than a simple story?

Final Thought

It's one thing to be invited to a friend's banquet. It's something far more to be invited to "eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." We in no way have the means to pay back our Lord for the table He sets for us. He is above all the One who deserves to sit at the head table in the place of highest honor. But the Master of this banquet tenderly welcomes in us poor guests, gives us the place of honor, and serves us the finest fare, His gracious gospel, His very body and blood, His gift of salvation. For His part, our Lord takes the humbler place. While we feast on His love, as Isaiah says, our Lord feeds on something else. "He will swallow up death forever." Taking our place of humiliation, Jesus gives us His seat of honor, and the eternal banquet joyfully begins to His glory.



At Table With Jesus Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes

Setting the Scene

It had looked like all was lost. The One who had shown such promise, of whom they had hoped would redeem Israel, now lay dead for some three days. Some women from their group had reported Jesus to have risen, but as these disheartened disciples make their way to Emmaus, their hopes seem far from alive. Yet in the next hours, as they make their way home to an evening meal, they will be joined by a “Stranger” who will kindle their hearts again with the promise of God’s Word and will open their eyes in a meal symbolic of the Church they will share in founding.

Into the Text Luke 24:13–35

1. How does Luke establish the setting for this event?

2. What exactly were the two disciples discussing?

3. How does Luke introduce Jesus to the situation?

At Table with Jesus

4. What does Jesus ask them? How do they answer? What does their answer reveal about their Christology? The Christology of chief priests and rulers?

5. Why might Cleopas have been mentioned by name? See John 19:25.

6. How does Jesus switch roles at this point? (vv. 25–27) What passages of Scripture could you imagine Jesus using to teach these disciples about His mission as Messiah?

7. How does the action shift focus in verses 28–29?

8. Discuss the significance of meal in verses 30–32.

9. What is the response of the disciples in verses 33–35?

At Table with Jesus

10. What further lessons are here for the Church today?

Final Thought

Indeed, Jesus was only a visitor, a sojourner, in Jerusalem during that first holy week. He had come from heaven and was soon to return, having accomplished His Father's will for our salvation. Yet before He physically departs, He draws near to these two ordinary followers. They too are about to embark on a journey of following this Messiah. But before their journey begins, He will equip them well. They will be taught all the things concerning Himself from God's Word, and their hearts, once slow to believe, will now burn with that Word. They will also have their eyes opened to recognize that their Savior will be with them in the breaking of the bread, where He will continually welcome and feed His children His very grace that will sustain them ... now sojourners themselves in a world where they will proclaim what He has done ... until such time as they become permanent residents of a new Jerusalem, where the Lord of Hosts will set them down at His marriage feast, and their eyes will be opened to recognize Jesus face to face forever. In the Emmaus disciples we see ourselves — the life-long journey the same, the provision of our Savior, the same, and the sure hope of setting at His table forever, the same.



At Table with Jesus A Meal for the Lost

Setting the Scene

While Jesus has been the dinner guest of honor many times in this study, in today's lesson, Jesus is the host of the dinner party. He graciously welcomes and dines with those who have come to hear Him, the tax collectors and "sinners" who are blessed to sit down with the Lord incarnate and share a meal with Him. However, there is a group peering in from outside the party, the scribes and Pharisees, who express their dissatisfaction with Jesus' fellowship practice. Our Lord will respond in an engaging "table talk" that will reveal His amazing forgiving grace.

Into the Text Luke 15:1–2

1. What is the setting of the parables described in Luke 15:1–2?

2. What was the significance of Jesus welcoming sinners and eating with them?

3. What two main audiences are now listening to Jesus' parables?

At Table with Jesus

The Lost Sheep Luke 15:3–7

4. How does the shepherd respond to losing one of the hundred sheep?

5. Discuss the detail that Jesus goes into in describing the actions of the shepherd in finding the lost sheep and his joy in finding it.

6. How does Jesus connect His parable to its real-life application? What exactly did the sheep do to repent in the parable?

The Lost Coin Luke 15:8–10

7. What circumstances in the parable are different from the first parable which help further Jesus' point in teaching?

8. What elements stay the same to deepen the teaching?

At Table with Jesus

9. What constitutes repentance in this parable?

The Lost Son, The Elder Son, The Surprising, Loving Father

Luke 15:11–32

10. What shocking request does the younger son make at the start of the story? How does the father respond?

11. What does it mean that the younger son “got together all he had and set off for a distant land?”

12. Discuss how far the son sinks before he comes to his senses.

13. What seems to be the thrust of the younger son’s initial thoughts of repentance?

At Table with Jesus

14. How does the father show surprising, life-saving grace to his son? How does this grace seem to mold the son's repentance?

15. How does the older brother indicate that his relationship with his father is also in a lost state?

16. How does the father show surprising grace to the elder son?

17. Why does Jesus leave the parable unresolved?

18. How might these parables inform the life of the Church today?

Final Thought

Our Savior hosts a feast and two sets of guests are welcomed to be a part of the fellowship. The first group is the “sinners” who joyfully enter at the welcome of Jesus, to hear Him share the good news of how the lost are found and there is rejoicing in heaven. The second group, the self-righteous have come near, but have not come to Jesus’ table because of the other sinners that are present. Jesus tells three stories that build in their intensity and are all about His amazing love. The first is one lost in a hundred, and only a sheep. The second is one lost in ten, and only money. The third is one in two or actually two lost, and now it’s not only livestock or money, it’s a father’s children. In His stories we hear the longing of our Lord to joyfully welcome the repentant home. Some are sitting at the table, receiving His grace. Will the others come into the celebration and receive the same grace? Christ’s Gospel call goes out to all, and may that joyful welcome to all always go out from His House!



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