

# The Mercy Of Hospitality (2)

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are in week two of four of a short sermon series here in the evenings on the biblical virtue and practice of hospitality.

Biblical hospitality, it is not trying to impress people with all the puddings you know how to make. Biblical hospitality is not a synonym for entertaining.

There's nothing wrong with entertaining people. In fact, it's a wonderful, good gift. But biblical hospitality entails way more than that. It's to show the welcome of Christ.

We said the Greek word for hospitality literally means to welcome in the stranger. It's at the very heart of the gospel. Ephesians 2, those who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

And this calls us to life of hospitality that affects so much. It's how we relate to others in the church. It's how we invite people into the church and into our home. It's how we talk to our neighbors.

[ 1 : 01 ] It's how we think about the needs of those around us. It's how we respond to people who have physical needs. It's people who are refugees. It's how we lean into the culture. It's how we do evangelism.

Our hospitality and our posture of that and our practice of it should affect all of these things. We're asking, are our hearts and our homes and our diaries open?

Jesus says in Matthew 25, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. To welcome in a stranger is to welcome in Christ.

There's this guy named John Chrysostom. His nickname was Golden Mouth. That's how good of a preacher he was. And he said this about hospitality. Make for yourselves a guest chamber in your own house.

Set up a bed there. Set up a table there and a candlestick. Have a room to which Christ may come. Say, this is Christ's room. This building is set apart for him. This guy named Henry Nowen, a theologian, and he describes biblical hospitality as the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.

[ 2 : 11 ] There's a woman named Rosaria Butterfield, and she writes about ordinary biblical hospitality, not something spectacular, just something ordinary that rules the mundane. And she says what it is is turning strangers into neighbors and neighbors in the family of God.

John Calvin, he lamented actually in his time in Geneva that hospitality had ceased to be practiced in the way that it used to be in the church.

Why? Because hospitality at that time was taken over by inns and things like that, the hotels of the time. And he lamented it, and he said, rather than personal hospitality being practiced, he said, surely this is an expression of human depravity.

Calvin said it, not me. Calvin said it. Take it up with him. You know, this all takes, it takes some creativity of what we're talking about. It takes some intentionality. It takes prayer, some thought. And it happens inside of the church, and it happens outside of the church building. There's this writer named Rebecca McLaughlin. She wrote a book called *Confronting Christianity*, kind of a book on apologetics.

[ 3 : 17 ] Highly recommend it. Nothing to do with the sermon. Highly recommend it. That's free of charge advice. But her husband, she posted on Twitter, her husband, big introvert, doesn't like doing small talk and things like this, but he has three family rules on a Sunday morning, and it's this.

I thought it was good. I thought I'd pass it along. He said, a person who's alone in our gathering is an emergency. Friends can wait. Introduce a newcomer to someone else. Some people want really practical, what does this look like?

Here, that's some advice of what you can do. A person who's alone in our gathering is an emergency. Friends can wait. Introduce a newcomer to someone else. So hospitality, it's meeting, welcoming, listening to, and loving real people who we are very aware are created in the image of the Holy God.

And tonight, we're going to look at that scene in Luke that we just read where there's a host, there's Jesus, who's eating and drinking, and there's an unexpected guest, and there's this real reversal of roles that happens within the story of what we'll see.

To be a hospitable church, we must realize our need for mercy, and in turn, desire to show it.

Before we talk any further, though, let me pray for the preaching of God's word.

[ 4 : 38 ] Father, would you help us to see our need for mercy? Would you grow a desire as we listen to your word proclaimed to be a merciful people? And even now, Lord, as we sit underneath your word, would you give us an experience of your mercy?

We pray all this in the merciful name of Jesus. Amen. So Rosaria Butterfield, who I just mentioned, she is sitting in the driveway of a stranger's house.

The stranger was a local pastor's name, was Ken Smith. His wife was Floyd. Rosaria Butterfield, at that time, she was there because of an invitation. Please come over and share a meal with us.

What you don't know about Butterfield unless you've heard her story, she's a tenured professor of postmodern critical theory at Syracuse University. She is a lesbian in a lesbian relationship, and she's a gay activist at all of the pride marches and things like that.

In fact, she was the faculty advisor to five different LGBTQ student groups on campus. And she had written this article in the local newspaper, kind of bashing and tearing to shreds this Christian ministry called Promise Keepers.

[ 5 : 55 ] It was really big during the, what was it, like 90s or so? In America, I don't know if it made its way over the UK or not. And she got a bunch of mail back and she said she loved to read the letters in response, a lot of angry people, a lot of people affirming her, and she got this one letter from this local pastor named Ken Smith of the local Reformed Presbyterian Church in Syracuse.

And he invited her over for dinner. And you might think, why on earth would she have said yes to this? Well, she was writing a book at the time on the Christian right and kind of what she saw as it being a hate-filled group.

She was writing a book on the history of it. And she figured going to Ken and Floyd Smith's house was like having an unpaid research assistant for her. So she said, why not?

Let's go. But there she is. She's sitting in her car in their driveway wondering if the invitation was worth it. Wondering, right, was the invitation real?

Did they really mean it? She's wondering what she's going to meet on the other side of the door. She writes and said her experience of Christians to that point, at least the way she felt it and experienced it, was that they liked to talk about her sin way more than getting to know her as a person.

[ 7 : 10 ] She met a lot of Christians that she felt were full of mercy. And what she found as she walked through the door is that it was a home of mercy.

We'll come back to her later. Mercy. It's kind of like a churchy word, right? It's easy to tune out when the preacher starts saying mercy. It's kind of like the flight attendant on your flights when they're telling you how to buckle your seatbelt and where all the emergency things are.

You're just like ignoring. It's like, yeah, the exits are in your left and right. You're like, whatever. The pastor's going on about mercy and you're thinking, ah, okay, when's the snack? When do I get to go home?

Our passage, though, it confronts us with the mercy of Jesus. And it asks us not to ignore it but to respond to it. We're going to look at our passage in three parts and it's simply the three characters that we see in the story.

There's three characters in our passage. There's the woman, which is called the sinner. There is the host, who later we find out his name is Simon. And there is Jesus.

[ 8 : 12 ] The woman, Simon, and Jesus. First off, the woman. Jesus, he's asked to a dinner with some local religious intellectuals and he accepts the invitation.

And you can imagine the scene. The custom at the time was they didn't have high tables like we do. They would be low ones on the floor. And the reason it would be low on the floor is because you didn't have chairs. Instead, you would recline. And often what you would do is you would recline on

your left elbow, lean in towards the table and your feet would be stretching backwards behind you. And the servants of the household, they would stand behind those at the table who were reclining. And it wouldn't be uncommon actually for people in the village if they were interested in the intellectual conversation that was going to go on to be standing around, listening in. And so as they're reclined at the table, their feet sticking out behind them, this woman comes forward. And now, again, the problem isn't that she's there, but she's supposed to stay on the sidelines.

Instead, she inserts herself into the scene. What does she do? Do you remember? She walks up to Jesus' feet and she's weeping. And her tears, they start to splash down onto Jesus' feet, mixing with the dirt on them.

[ 9 : 28 ] And she's let down her hair, it says, and she uses it to wipe away these tears, cleaning Jesus' feet. And that's not all. She's brought an alabaster flask with ointment in it and she starts to anoint Jesus' feet.

You know, alabaster, it's this soft stone and it would often be used to contain perfume. And it's very likely that this is very, very expensive perfume, perhaps even worth as much as a year's wages. That's how costly this was. And she doesn't just anoint Jesus' feet, she kisses them. Like a lot. And what's this woman done in the past?

It doesn't actually say. It doesn't say what she's done, but clearly everybody in the village knows she's simply identified as the sinner. We don't even get her name.

We just get what everyone else knew her as. The woman who was the sinner in the city. This is the way that the world has named her and defined her. And did you notice, it says she intentionally, she didn't just happen to have a jar of perfume.

[ 10 : 35 ] She's intentionally brought it with her. There's this guy named Alfred Adersheim. He is a 19th century biblical scholar. And he writes that women of questionable morals would often bring a perfume with them.

It would sweeten the breath and their smell and you don't have to have much imagination to think and imagine why she was called the sinner. But she's come with the intent of pouring it on Jesus' feet.

She doesn't need it anymore. And she takes this thing that would make her attractive in her previous life and she pours every last drop out at Jesus' feet in this just beautiful act of devotion and faith.

She's actually believed what Jesus has said. That there is a God who is merciful and his kingdom is for people like her. That there is actually hope for someone like her and she doesn't actually need this perfume anymore.

Bringing the jar of perfume seems intentional but the tears are unintentional. And she hasn't brought a cloth to wipe Jesus' feet with so she has to use her hair.

[ 11 : 53 ] Let me stop for a second there and exhort us in application to do what this woman has done in our hospitality and our evangelism.

Our sharing of our faith. Our sharing of the good news. We seek in doing these things not to win an argument. Not to be the loudest. Not to be the most right. Not to look the most intelligent.

What we're trying to do is to show the beauty and surpassing worth of Jesus. How beautiful do you see him? How beautiful is he to you?

This is what we're trying to do. How utterly we adore him. How we don't have a hope in the world unless what he says is true. And this woman she comes and she has this faith she has this belief she knows that we're the whole realm of nature hers.

That would be a present far too small. She sees Jesus and she responds in a way that costs her. That's what our evangelism that's what our hospitality what our welcome should do.

[ 12 : 58 ] It's supposed to cost us. Why? Because we have everything we need. And people start to look. You know maybe it wasn't her moving forward that made people look I don't know maybe it was maybe it was the sound of her tears splashing down and hitting Jesus' feet and hitting the ground next to him.

People start to look. Simon the host the Pharisee he looks he sees and he goes oh my goodness her he's serious and this is the fear that we have about our sin.

Alright? If we expose our shame people are going to judge us like Simon does to this woman. There's this risk in her vulnerability in her moving forward.

Everybody in the town knows about her and knows her as the sinner. To step forward would be to risk shame. But there's a vulnerability we're willing to risk when we know the mercy of Christ. There's a vulnerability in hospitality when we invite people into our homes. They might see your kids not behave very well and come to my house. They might see your house isn't as nice as you want them to think.

[14:13] they might see what your cooking looks like and it's not your grandmother's cooking, right? Who cares? I can't tell you at every home I've ever been invited and the thing I do not remember is what exactly their house looked like.

I remember that I was a welcomed and honored guest. But there's a vulnerability in that. There's a vulnerability in coming to Jesus and believing that his mercy is real. This is why we wrap our shame in pretty wrapping paper and put a bow on it and we hide it from the world.

This is why we won't let people into our hearts much less our homes because we fear that mercy won't be reciprocated and it's going to be withheld. Can you imagine the boldness to step out of the shadows and pursue Jesus in faith and someone just reinforces all of your fears?

She knows her sins. She feels her guilt. There's no hiding it and yet her belief in the mercy of Jesus moves her to act. That's the first person, the woman, the sinner.

Second character that we have is Simon. Simon is the host meaning he's the one who's invited Jesus into his home. He's the one who's supposed to be showing this hospitality. But being hospitable is not merely having someone into your home.

[15:33] There's a posture. There's a purpose. And as Simon watches what's going on you know you start to see his heart and he's got these presumptions about Jesus and his presumptions are confirmed.

He can't really be a prophet because if he was a prophet he would know who is washing his feet and touching him. This chick is unclean and defiling him.

I'm a Pharisee and as a Pharisee we take ritual purity especially at meals very seriously. This Jesus guy what a bozo. But apparently Jesus knows that you don't catch sin like COVID.

Jesus is fine hanging out with the licentious and he's fine hanging out with the legalist. You see when Jesus later says to Simon he says you didn't give me water for my feet did you notice that? He kind of goes through a list of things that Simon hadn't done for him. You hadn't given me water for my feet. You didn't greet me with a kiss. Or you didn't anoint my head with oil. He's actually what he's doing is he's going through a list of things that a truly hospitable host in that culture was duty bound to do.

[16:39] He's invited Jesus into his home but then he proceeds to break every rule of hospitality. What would normally happen is that the guests reclining remember on their left elbow with their feet out behind them a lot of times the servants of the house would come in and would clean the feet while they were eating.

To not do this especially because he calls him teacher, rabbi. There's this prestige to that title. To not do this would imply that your guest is inferior in rank.

Not only that but there would be a customary kiss as greeting when you entered someone's home. This too apparently Simon the Pharisee he neglects. And this woman who seems to come intentionally to anoint Jesus' feet you can kind of imagine she probably notices oh my goodness they didn't greet him with a kiss of welcome and she wants to do it but to kiss him on the lips would be misunderstood what can I do maybe I could kiss his feet she moves forward and she does this and there's that little phrase Simon thinks to himself if this man were you always like that Simon thinks to himself if this man were a prophet and Jesus says Simon I have something to say to you if this man were a prophet don't think evil thoughts around Jesus and to Simon this whole scene justifies why he's been a bad host and so

Jesus who ironically reads Simon's thoughts while he's thinking that there's nothing special about this guy says Simon I have something to say to you and Simon like say it teacher you almost hear like the sarcasm in his voice and so Jesus tells a quick parable did you hear that parable within the story says there are two people they both have a debt one 50 denarii the other 500 denarii you don't have to be good at math to know 500 is a lot more than 50 right both of these people one's a decent sized debt and the other one is like really really really big debt right like one that would be impossible to get out of and both get forgiven by the debt collector and Jesus asks Simon a simple question he says which one do you think would love the debt collector more and Simon he guesses but he gives the right answer he says the one who is forgiven more right alright let me give you an

example to help out you know say your friend is house sitting for you and while you're there they notice that there's a bill in the stack they've been collecting your mail and they notice there's a bill and it's stamped on it it says past due open immediately please pay you must read and so you open it up and they pay it for you cool right that's a nice thing to do and you come home and they tell you that and you're like oh that's great but you see the level of coolness depends on how big the bill was like say you had like not returned do you have library fines here we have library fines in America you might have had to pay a few as a family you lose that library book that your kid like slides under the bed and you you know maybe they paid your library fine for you and it was a couple pounds or something like that oh thanks you didn't have to do that that's a very you should say thank you you should be very grateful for that but what if it was a bill from her majesty's revenue and customs did I get that right we call it the IRS in America

HMRC I think I got that right you're about to be put in jail because you owe millions in taxes they're going to take your house they're going to take your car whew your life is going to be ruined and your friends somehow I don't know they pay it for you cost matters right you don't know whether until you know what the cost is of what your friend has paid you don't know whether to give them a fist bump or to bow down and to kiss their feet like this woman kissed Jesus' feet this is why Jesus says you love little because you've been forgiven little he's saying to Simon Simon you know your sins are actually many some of them we've just recounted your judgmental haughty heart your lack of hospitality your self-righteousness they seem to be culturally acceptable for you and you are oblivious to them you have little awareness of them and thus have not repented and thus you've been forgiven little and naturally you love little if I really wanted to avoid sinners

[ 21 : 13 ] Simon I would be avoiding you not this woman whom you've despised you know it's like this twist in the plot too Jesus reveals who is acting as the true host in this story the sinner the woman she is the one acting in hospitality the one who should be acting as a host completely neglects it why?

because one knows they've been forgiven much and therefore they love much the key to true hospitality hospitality is mercy and the display of hospitality is responding to this mercy and Jesus is trying to get Simon to see how his lack of love stems from his belief that his debt is small how much do you think you need mercy tonight?

has there become very aware to you how much you need mercy? that moment where you've got nothing that you can do besides crying out Lord help it's a good place to be and let me be clear it's not like this woman's sins in her past you just ignore it just wink at it right?

what does Jesus say? he says her sins which are many he didn't say her sins which eh who cares let's define sin is it really hurting anybody else?

he doesn't go that route he says her sins which are many the point is both of you the one who runs away from God in rebellion and the one who tries to avoid sin just to avoid their need for mercy are equally in need of mercy neither person can pay the debt both need a sheer act of mercy see Simon he thinks that kingdom of God is a meritocracy if you just do enough you earn it but Jesus has come to show that the kingdom of God is not a meritocracy it's a mercyocracy the kingdom of God runs completely on mercy and grace so we look closely at the woman who's the sinner and at Simon now let's turn our attention lastly to Jesus we've already talked about Jesus a lot throughout but let me make a couple observations and apply this text again first off Jesus is a friend of sinners and not just respectable sins of sinners that we don't mind talking about right Jesus' mercy is actually bigger than you believe it's actually bigger it's deeper how does Jesus look at you in your sin did you notice that there is this weird phrase in verse 44

[ 23 : 55 ] I tried to kind of pause as I was reading to note it because it baffles me when I've read this passage and I've tried to think of good illustrations for it in the past Jesus he's talking to Simon but what are they talking about the woman and then he answers Simon but who does he look at I love it's just like the most beautiful detail he turns and he looks at the woman and he says something to Simon I was trying to think what is a thing in our culture where that happens I haven't been to a wedding yet in Scotland I'm assuming it's the same but in America when you're giving when you're about to take your marital vows the bride and the groom they turn and they face each other this is the best illustration I can think of and the minister he's standing there and he's asking these vows and that guy's there and he's talking but the bride and the groom they're beholden and loved to the other they can't take their eyes off the other person and they listen but they don't they don't break their view and their locked eyes but just imagine for a second you're at a wedding and

the minister is giving these vows but he's not just asking do you promise to do all these things what if he was there and he was accusing you're not going to do these things in fact you haven't you haven't loved you haven't sacrificed your life in fact you're a terrible spouse and accusing you after sin after sin after sin and yet the bridegroom looks at his beloved bride and he says no no as the voice comes and accuses you of your sin and your shame the bridegroom says well may I my accuser roar of sins that I have done my savior knows many more my savior knoweth none

Jesus is there and he hears it but he looks at you and he says my mercy is real I've actually borne the condemnation of you breaking your vows and through my death I've secured your life and in my resurrection I've secured your glory you can actually acknowledge the reality of sin because your sin will not win if you are united in faith to the crucified and risen king so come to me by beloved and find rest second thing I want to point out he doesn't just want this woman to receive mercy he wants Simon to realize his need of mercy sometimes we walk around kind of thinking Jesus is just there for the underdog he actually wants to receive Simon's love too this is desire this is why he engages Simon he accepts an invitation to Simon's house this is good news Jesus Christ has come to seek and save the lost whether they be the worst sinner you can imagine or the sinner who's grown up in pews like these he's come for them by way of application let me encourage you what is your posture towards the world out there if we get this mercy down deep in our bones

I would suggest that we can move from a posture of hostility towards the world to hospitality what do I mean by that we see a hostility who's saying everything I am is against you and don't get me wrong we have profound disagreements with the secular world around us I mean at the most basic levels about the purpose of life and what a human being is and what it means to live in this world and interact and to be a neighbor there's points of agreement but there are many many profound disagreements but you see you can welcome and accept somebody without approving of them hmm we have these profound differences and yet we also know what it's like to need mercy we believe Romans 5.10 that while we were still enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son so hospitality and welcome goes after the respectable and it goes after the lowly it allows us to weigh into this world and not to be afraid of having differences of opinion but we can still not have a posture of hostility but one of hospitality

I wonder do our words our Facebook posts hopefully you don't post too much on Facebook never really does anything good do your words reveal contempt for those who are different than you hmm you know what the end result will be too as we understand more and more our need of mercy it will be beauty it will be the most beautiful thing the world has ever seen people who know every single day of their need of mercy a lot of times we don't want to go there if it's me if I've done something in order to earn it guess what I can say no but if it's mercy if I'm completely dependent on the mercy of God there's nothing he can't ask of me and let me talk to young people too because a lot of times we come to church and we're like this is boring right like my friends were doing really fun stuff like the adventurous life let's live the full life the life to the fullest the good life let me tell you what might if you're an adrenaline junkie what if God could ask anything of you hmm can ask you to share the deep dark stuff you don't like to talk about with other people whoo that would be a rush try doing that in a small group prayer setting well what if he's calling you to go to places that you might find a little bit dangerous what if he's calling you to talk to somebody about your faith that you might actually oh man you might be actually a little afraid for

I'll talk about adventure nothing more adventurous than following the God of mercy and it's going to look messy too because we're going to get it wrong we need mercy we're not going to show perfect mercy we're going to mess it up all the time and you know what even our repentance within that is going to be beautiful hmm let's go back to Rosaria Butterfield she's sitting in her car in the driveway of Ken and Floyd Smith and she eventually works up the courage you know like hey I've got to write this book these people this is like a gold mine right I get to hear what they say and I'm going to put these anecdotes into my book and make some money off of it but she eventually goes in and she eats a simple meal and she has a nice conversation and she says she looks back on it she was shocked in fact she was slightly offended Pastor Ken did not tell her that she was the sinner and share the gospel with her and in fact you know what else he didn't do he didn't even invite her to church you know what he did he invited her back to dinner again he actually did get to the gospel and he eventually did invite her to church but he believed in a God who is sovereign and a God who is merciful and she referred to Ken and Floyd's house as the cult house for a while but she kept coming back you see she would come and it would just be her there would be these other

[ 31 : 15 ] Christian friends there like the body of Christ and she was invited into their meals and she listened as they prayed for each meal and sometimes she would even linger for their Bible studies and she was fascinated because they sang the Psalms in four part harmony and her gay lover had no idea what was going on and why are you doing this are you joining a cult it took two years of hospitality and evangelism they did get to sharing the good news of Jesus it wasn't just hanging out and talking with her about whatever fill in the blank whatever the item du jour is she wrote this book actually the gospel comes with a house key because that's what she experienced she experienced walking into a home full of mercy people who would invite her into their life not make excuses for it not be ashamed of what they are doing but to say to come and try out listen and she said she all of a sudden realized that she had become a Christian when the word of God started being more powerful in her life and telling her who she was and what she should do and naming her than all the other things that she had believed and spent years and years in her life fighting for she's a pastor's wife now in

North Carolina this is what Jesus did and this is what Jesus is still doing is not scorn you in your sin when you come to him it actually gives you an experience of his mercy he will even come after you and pursue you in your self righteousness and he wants to eat with you and he wants you to experience this traumatic event of needing and receiving his mercy mercy and then you and I we get to do this in turn for others to bear witness to the reality of a world of mercy and love that the kingdom of God it's not a meritocracy it's a mercyocracy and thanks be to God otherwise none of us would have any hope pagans and Presbyterians alike let's pray Father would you help us to be like to not be like Simon to not hide in our sin to not live in our disdain to not inhabit self-righteousness but rather to breathe the air of mercy to enter the kingdom of mercy to serve the king of mercy to do the work of mercy to confess our need of mercy and become a beautiful mercy filled people would you cause this to happen would you give us the courage to be people who live by mercy would you give us an experience of it as we go and assurance of your love as we take risks for you we pray this in the name of the king of mercy amen