

A Divine Dinner

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- [0 : 0 0] We are in week two of a series looking at hospitality, so six weeks looking at hospitality before we begin a series in Revelation in the fall. So our series is called Table Grace, Practicing the Hospitality of God. Now, when I say this word hospitality, I wonder what comes to mind for you. So I'll say it. Hospitality. What came to mind?
- But perhaps Martha Stewart came to mind. That would be natural. Or the Southern Living magazine came to mind, perhaps.
- Perhaps you think of like hospitality. Yes, the perfect dinner. Lots of great friends over. Fantastic conversation. And you've got this big long table and you have this most wonderful tablescape.
- Did you catch that word, tablescape? It's like the new thing. It's a cool thing. You don't set tables anymore. You have a tablescape. It's on Pinterest. You should check it out.
- And everything you do is based on hours of research from Pinterest. Folks, that's not hospitality. That is entertaining.
- [1 : 1 9] And it's not terrible. Sounds quite lovely, actually. But it's not hospitality. Because what can happen is there can be this sort of bit of a dark undercurrent with hospitality.
- The focus can be on yourself. The goal can be to impress people. Entertaining. I know this will sound a bit cheesy, but it's a helpful thing just to remember.
- Entertaining. The goal can be impress. As hospitality, the goal is bless. Well, think about it like this. Entertaining and hospitality.
- Entertaining is like the evil twin of biblical hospitality. Hospitality. So, just keep that in the back of your mind as we move forward. Now, to get our heads around what the Bible is talking about when it talks about hospitality, which it talks about a lot, we're going to look at Hebrews 13 here.
- These first 14 verses. Now, they do cover a ton of different stuff. It's quite a diverse range of stuff they cover. Not just hospitality. So, what I want to do for about five minutes is I just want to cover off these first 14 verses as a whole.
- [2 : 2 7] As a whole chunk. And then we'll go back and we'll look at the first couple of verses which are about hospitality. Right. So, Hebrews 13, 1 to 14. The big picture first.
- What's it about? Well, chapter 12 tells us. The end of chapter 12 tells us. It says, right at the end of chapter 12, Let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.
- So, what does it tell us about chapter 13? It tells us that it's about worship. It's about acceptable worship. It's about what it means to worship God. That's what chapter 13 is about.
- Now, there's a slight sort of excuses here. For a long time. Well, when you think about worship, perhaps you're like me. You know, like I used to think worship was like. Worship is what you do at church, right?
- Come to church, you worship. Worship is, in particular, it's the singing bit of the church service. Which it is. That's worship. That is worship.

[3 : 25] But it's not just that. And if you think it's just that, this kind of ceremonial sort of thing that we do once a week for an hour and a half, then that sort of thinking, it doesn't take into account the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It doesn't take into account the coming of the Holy Spirit. Because those things completely change the nature of what worship is. Now, let me sort of unpack that a little bit.

In the Old Testament, worship looked like a formal set of rules and rites and ceremonies. And good chunks of the Old Testament are actually dedicated to just explaining those rules and rites and ceremonies.

Like Leviticus, for example. That's what it's mostly about. Now, worship happened in a particular place, the temple or tabernacle, at certain times of the year, the festivals. And only certain people could facilitate those things, like the Levites.

Now, this is not, you know, this is not bad, that stuff. It's actually wonderful. It was a gift. These structures and rites and ceremonies and things and festivals, these were a gift from God, so that God's people in the Old Testament could experience God in a special way.

[4 : 43] And it also pointed to Jesus. So what Jesus did on the cross would be understandable years later on. But now, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, with the cross, and it changes this.

We are the body of Christ, the Bible says. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Bible says. The Bible says that we present our bodies as a living sacrifice. There's no kind of, like, super special way to kind of interact with God.

It's, well, we have this unfettered access to God, to the life of the Trinity, because of the Holy Spirit, because of what Christ has done. How does this change worship?

Well, it's no longer just a ceremony or a particular festival. It's no longer what we do just here. Worship now, you could say worship now has more to do with what happens after we leave church.

It's more to do with what happens on Monday. Worship, we do, we'll discover in this passage, is bringing the gospel into our everyday life.

[5 : 59] Worship is just us living our life in a way which has been acutely impacted by Jesus. So, Hebrews 13, back to the passage.

Here we go. So, chapter 13 says, offer acceptable worship, and here is what worship looks like. And if you slide your eyes down the passage, you'll see there, it's very practical.

It lays it out for us. Worship is what? It's hospitality. It's visiting prisoners. It's faithfulness in marriage.

It's being free from the love of money. It's imitating the lives of people you respect. So, Hebrews gives us these very concrete examples of what it means to glorify God, what it means to worship God.

Now, let's zoom in, though, on the first two verses there, which are about what we're trying to get across in our series here.

[6 : 59] Right. Remember the presumption, though, as we move forward. Hospitality is worship. Okay, the first two verses, let me remind you of them.

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. So, it starts in verse 1 there by saying we should love each other.

Let brotherly love continue. Let brotherly love continue. Let sisterly love continue. There's a few things to say about that. It's not quite as simplistic as you could sort of initially think.

First, this word continue. It's a very significant word, this word continue. It's not just saying let brotherly love, yeah, you should just do it. Lots. It's not saying that. It's often translated remain.

In fact, the very same word is used towards the end of chapter 12. And at the end of chapter 12, the author of Hebrews gives this apocalyptic picture of what it's all going to look like towards the end.

[8 : 03] And it is a sort of an analogy or a picture. But the picture is this. God's going to shake the universe. And so, all the stuff that's flimsy and doesn't really matter will get sort of broken up and fall down.

And all the stuff that's really good will stay. Let me read it to you. At that time, his voice shook the earth. But now he has promised, yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.

Verse 27. This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken. That is, things that have been made. In order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Let brotherly love continue is the same word as may be shaken remain. The same word. The writer of Hebrews is making a connection here. And here's what he's saying.

That God will shake the universe to pieces. And only the things that will remain are the things that eternally belong in the kingdom of God. The things that really matter.

[9 : 03] The things that are really precious will remain, will continue. So the writer of Hebrews is saying brotherly love, sisterly love is so precious. It's so wonderful.

It's so valuable. It will remain part of God's kingdom forever. That's how important it is. Let brotherly love continue. The second thing I'd like to say about verse 1 is this.

Is let brotherly love continue. It's not a call to just a particular emotion or sentiment. It's not saying think nice thoughts about this person.

Have good feelings towards that person. It's a call to real, tangible behavior. Let me just, another little excursus here.

All right? Another little kind of thing over here. I've been thinking about social media recently. And I'm not down on social media. But here is something that's unhelpful about it.

[10 : 02] If you go down your news feed on Facebook, if you're on Facebook, you'll see you might have those friends that are, maybe you or this person, that is always outraged by something.

I'm outraged. So outraged. Or something's really stoked about something and they kind of share a link and they kind of, you know. They like something.

They get behind a particular movement. Change the profile picture. Angle over, laying over something to support some kind of thing that's happened in the world recently, perhaps.

Support of some group or some event or some attitude. Sociologically, what's going on there? Is that you're branding yourself.

It's like personal branding. It's like a marketing thing. You're kind of like branding yourself. This is what people say. You're aligning yourself with the right things. Rejecting the wrong things. And this has become a really important thing recently.

[11 : 04] And social media is facilitating this personal branding of yourself. And we're trying to create an image of how we want to be perceived. We're for this.

We're against this. We're outraged by this. We love this. We're this kind of person. Thomas Merton talks about this, actually, before social media existed, obviously. But he warns of trying to live an imaginary life in the minds of other men.

So sharing a post or changing a profile image in support of something, it can feel like you're doing something. And it can feel like, and perhaps maybe some good comes of it.

But mostly, it's pixels. Mostly, it's just the graphics that are changing. The Bible is never satisfied with just words or ideas.

The Bible would never be satisfied with just liking something, but it having no real impact on your life. Which is why this call to brotherly love is followed immediately by a call to action.

[12 : 17] By real practical love. By loving stranger. By visiting prisoners, for example. And the very first one mentioned in terms of what it practically looks like, brotherly love, is hospitality.

Verse 2. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. There's a lot to say about this verse. We'll hit a few of the high points.

It's interesting, isn't it, that it says, do not neglect to show hospitality. I mean, it could say, the sentence would flow a lot nicer if it just said, show hospitality.

It's more positive, right? It's easy to say. But it doesn't. It says, do not neglect. There's something behind that.

And I think what's behind that is the idea that it's actually very easy to neglect hospitality. There's a helpful analogy I heard using gravity here.

[13 : 19] Gravity pulls everything to the center of the earth. You know this? You've seen rocket ships go out, go up into space, and they need an incredible amount of force, a lot of energy to break free from that gravitational pull.

In a similar way, there is a cultural force like gravity in our lives that pulls our thoughts and pulls our affections inward to the center of our own selves.

So your life is all about self. It's all about me. It's all about my needs, my pleasures, my desires, my wants. And neglecting hospitality can become the most natural thing in the world in that scenario because it's the path of least resistance.

You don't really have to do much. Our lives can become very full of our self. So full of our self, there's no room left for hospitality. You see, because hospitality is costly and it's messy and it's exposing.

You share your life with somebody, they might see the parts of you that are not that great. It takes time away from stuff perhaps you'd like to do, like your development.

[14 : 33] It takes time away from the me stuff. Do not neglect hospitality, verse 2 says. It says it because it's easy to do. It's easy to neglect.

Now, what is meant by hospitality? That's the next thing we should work on here. What exactly is it saying here, hospitality? A cultural sort of background is helpful here, I think.

Back in the ancient Near East, there was... Hospitality was a very high cultural value. There was a God, you know, in the Greek mythology, there was a God of hospitality.

Do you know who that God was? Anyone know? Zeus. True story. The God of gods, the main God in Greek mythology, also the God of hospitality.

That's how much hospitality was valued back in the days. Zeus is not real. Just as an aside. I just felt like I should say that.

[15 : 36] Hospitality was a really high cultural value because it was a must for the culture. Like, when people travel, it's not like a Howard Johnson in every little town.

There weren't hotels to stay in when you went from city to city. And traveling was a dodgy business. So people mostly kind of just stuck around their place, their town, and didn't travel that much.

So it wasn't like you had family over in, you know, Achaia or Macedonia or something. You could go visit your cousins over there. What they did have is they had inns. But inns were notoriously sketchy places.

And historians talk about how dodgy they were. So I remember staying in a... Is there anyone from Germany here? Okay. So I remember staying in East Berlin years ago.

And I stayed at this hostel. And do you know how hostels and hotels and motels are supposed to promote themselves with signs at the front that says, Free parking!

[16 : 44] Now with free Wi-Fi! That kind of thing. This one had, now with less dog poop around the hotel.

Honestly, that was the sign outside. And you go in, it's like, less lice here than previous years. East Berlin.

Fascinating place. Why don't you go there? It's wonderful. Just don't stay at this place. So inns in the ancient areas were really, really dodgy. People didn't want to stay in them.

So what happens is that people open their homes to strangers. And there was sort of a code. There was kind of a system in place. So you had the city. There's a wall around it. There's a big gate. So the traveler would come up for the gate and wait by the gate.

And then people in the city would come out. And there'd be a bit of sort of an engagement sort of thing there. And then the stranger would be invited into your home. There was a code, though. Like the host, who was opening up their home to the stranger, would ask them a couple of questions.

[17 : 50] Just to kind of feel them out a bit. To make sure that they weren't spies trying to overrun the city or something. And then the host would invite them into the home. That person would be fed and cleaned.

And they could only stay two nights. That was the code. And it worked pretty good, I think, apparently. But it was a cultural obligation. Care for visiting strangers.

Now the Bible, what it does, is it's not satisfied with just this cultural obligation. It ratchets it up. And gives it an incredibly deep base. Of why Christians show hospitality.

Way back in Deuteronomy 10, it talks about this. Let me read it to you. He, it's God, executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. So it's saying, way back in Deuteronomy, love people, show hospitality.

[18 : 48] Why? Not because it's like nice. But it's because, God is saying, because I clothed you. I fed you. I looked after you in the desert. You have been the recipients of my hospitality.

Now show it to others. And the Old Testament goes on. It's not just hospitality to strangers. Not these kind of, you know, traveling business people. It's the people on the margins.

The widows. It's the orphans. So it's not be hospitable, because it's a cultural norm. You do it because this is what God has done. This is what God has done for us.

So we should do it for each other. And that was the, that's basically a pretty good summary of last week's sermon. So, I think an important question would be, how do we do this exactly?

Practically, what does it look like for us to show hospitality to others? I'll give you, I'll give you five examples. And you could write better ones than these, but these are just five examples, right?

[19 : 53] It would mean inviting people into your home. I mean, it's so basic. Invite people into your home. You have a really small home.

You might be a terrible cook. You can make grilled cheese sandwiches. That's good enough. Invite people into your home. It is such a wonderful and precious thing to do. Two, invite people into your spiritual home.

People from work or friends. Invite people to church. Show them the community of God and the hospitality of God. Three, you might think running a Bible study is way too much.

That's fine. You can still host a group though. You could say, listen, I'm not a great sort of Bible scholar. I don't know how to run a Bible study, but I have a house, right?

It's got a living room. It's got chairs and I have running water and I know how to make tea. You can host a Bible study.

[20 : 54] What a wonderful thing it would be to host a Bible study and be there every week and witness lives changing in that group.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to do? You could be on the welcome team. We have a welcome team here that greets people at the door. You could be on the tea and coffee team. I mean, this is basic stuff, right?

It's basic. It's so basic. You could make sure that each week you look out for new people at church, at your work, at university. People that seem like they don't know others.

Show the hospitality of God to them. Now, obviously, these things I've mentioned, there's a cost to them, isn't there? This is actually sacrificial living. It is living in such a way that you are pushing against the gravitational pull of self-centeredness.

Now, why wouldn't we do these things that I've mentioned? Well, I've mentioned one, sort of self-centeredness, but let me just unpack that a little bit. Because the passage actually gives us a foil to that, a cure to that.

[22 : 02] So, there's lots of barriers to being hospitable, and busyness, lots of things like that. But one of the big ones is radical individualism. And this is a product of, this is, particularly in the West, in the last 200 years, this is a product of sort of the enlightenment.

And I don't know much about philosophy, but, you know, there was this post-Renaissance time called the enlightenment where philosophically the world was steered, well, in the West, it was steered away from things like religion and towards all the great isms, secularism, humanism, rationalism, nationalism, individualism.

So today, the rights of the individual take preference over everything. And it's so invasive that it become, it can become part of our sort of base internal narrative.

And the gospel says something very different to this. It challenges this in a very powerful way. In our text just today, there's some wonderful examples. It says, it says your money, it's not yours just to make you happy.

Feed it into the community, plow it into the community. It says your sexuality is not just there to make you happy. Sexuality is not about just your pleasure.

[23 : 25] I mean, it will bring you joy. But don't mistake it for I can do whatever I want because it's my body. No, it's there to glorify God. In terms of hospitality, your home, it's not just your place of comfort and peace and your sort of my space, my little castle, protected from the world.

No. No, you can use your home for the gospel in profound and wonderful ways. So how do we overcome this kind of radical individualism that's a very powerful force?

Well, we have one example in our passage today. And we'll use the money hospitality thing together here, okay? If you want to live a life free from the love of money so that you can pay the price for hospitality because there is a cost, you need to hear the promise of verse 5.

And the promise of verse 5 is this, God will never leave you nor forsake you. And if you know that promise, you're thinking, right, I don't need to crave money as a source of my security or happiness because I know God will always be there for me.

It doesn't mean you won't have financial stress, but you will know the presence and kindness of God in this area of your life so that when you have that idea as part of your internal narrative, yes, God will never forsake me.

[24 : 40] You're in a place where you are prepared to pay the cost to be hospitable. That's one example. Let's move on. Two more thoughts before we finish very quickly here. What's this last part of verse 2 about?

For thereby some have entertained angels. Show hospitality. You're entertaining angels, maybe. Angels in the Old Testament were symbolic of the presence of God. I mean, there really are angels. But another way to say it is that they represent the presence of God.

So God here in this command to be hospitable is not saying, come on guys, let's be nice to each other. He's saying, when you're hospitable, something spiritual is happening. There is something, it's almost sacramental that's happening.

Now, hospitality is not a sacrament. But, there's a sacramental aspect about it. What I mean by that is it's taking something common and God is using it for his purposes to say something about who he is or to do something.

So you take somebody out for a coffee that you think is battling loneliness, for example. Wow, what an amazing thing can happen during that conversation you have with that person. God can work powerfully in that.

[25 : 54] And when we do that, when we act like that, when we're thinking like that, we become conduits of God's hospitality. We're part of the process of seeing lives change, but not only that, we change.

Here's what I mean. As we do that, the Holy Spirit can be working in our hearts and it can conquer things that are in there. Perhaps there is some self-seedness in there.

Perhaps there is some stinginess in there. Perhaps there is my home is my castle. No one can come into it. It's my peaceful spaces. Perhaps God needs to conquer that stuff.

This is brilliant. This is practice hospitality and become a different person. One of the things in my heart is that I want people to think that I've got my life really together.

If you've ever come to my home for dinner, that's quickly put to rest, that thought. Because likely, Amy and I have had an argument just before you walk in the door about the tablescape.

[27 : 07] And my kids, you know, there's food everywhere. everywhere. One of my kids will walk out of the kitchen eating like a donut.

We haven't had donuts. Amy and I are both thinking, I don't think we've had donuts in the house for a few weeks. Should we do something about this? Probably not. They're screaming and it's just, you know, it's a complete gong show.

God, in my family, practicing hospitality is putting to rest this idea that I need to be thought of as having this really together life.

Lastly, verses 11 and 13, they put into context everything we've talked about in terms of the cross.

And I'll remind you of what it says here. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

[28 : 16] Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. The holy ceremony in the Old Testament was the day of atonement when an animal was sacrificed. It represented the dealing with sins.

Its body was placed outside the city. Often in these festivals, the bodies of the animals that were burnt up were eaten. This body was taken out of the city to the place of rejection.

Now, these Old Testament sacrificial systems, as I mentioned, point us to Jesus. They're a shadow pointing to Jesus. So the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus who really paid for our sin.

But the language is interesting here, this gate language, right? Jesus died outside the gate, it says. Outside the gate, the place of rejection. You remember the traveler's code.

You hang out at the gate waiting to be invited into somebody's home, into the gate. What Jesus experienced was the opposite of hospitality, opposite of ancient, near-recent hospitality.

[29 : 17] He was rejected by the Father. He was rejected by the people. Why? We did it for us.

He took upon himself rejection, the rejection that we deserve from God, so that we could know the hospitality of God.

It is a brutal but beautiful picture of the gospel. And it's our motivation, it's our reason that we do hospitality. So folks, let's worship God.

Let's be hospitable. Amen.