

Vision Series 2017

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[0 : 00] As Sam's indicated, we finally get to the end of our vision series for this year. And all vision series are important for us as a church. But this one, I would say, has had a particular edge to it.

God leading Sam and Sam to move interstate to begin preparations to plant a church was unexpected. And certainly a bold and radical thing that they're doing.

And there's a great deal of personal cost involved in that decision. And what they are doing is simply an extension of the vision that God has put in front of us, that we've had in front of us for just over a year now, that we are desperate for the world around us to encounter Jesus.

And so their move, God moving them and shake up of their lives, has caused a bit of a shake up for us as well to think about what does it mean for us to take on bold and radical decisions to fulfill the vision that God's put in front of us.

And some of the things that we've been looking at through this series is a desire for us never to get comfortable and settled and content with the way things are.

[1 : 12] A desire for us to make decisions driven by mission as opposed to social relationships within the church.

And so we've been looking at these themes as we've journeyed with Jesus on this road to Jerusalem in now six weeks. This road to Jerusalem for Jesus is a tough road.

He's going to Jerusalem to die for the sins of humanity. And Jesus calls us, his disciples, to follow him on that road. And it is a demanding road for us as well.

He calls us right at the beginning is to take up our cross and to follow him, to die to ourselves and to follow him. So he calls us to a life of radical discipleship.

And radical discipleship, as we've gone through this series, is defined in a whole kind of different ways. But one of the ways is a life of radical generosity. It's radical generosity relationally.

[2 : 15] Radical forgiveness, radical grace, radical generosity with wealth and a whole range of things. Radical discipleship means that we will be characterized by a spirit of unselfish service in every aspect of life.

Nothing is left untouched. And so we're going to finish this series with one of the areas that I think is crucial for us to grow in.

We have been increasing in radical generosity in terms of our finances over the last number of years as a church. But this is one area that I think that we really need to grow in. And it will really touch us to the core about how desperate we are to see our world encounter Jesus.

And when I say a world, I mean immediate world encounter Jesus. This one's, it's one thing to give your money away. It's another thing to open your life up. So if we are desperate for the world around us to encounter Jesus, then it will be absolutely essential for us to grow in radically generous hospitality.

So Luke 14 is where we're up to. If you've got your service sheets in front of you, you've got a Bible, that'll be fantastic. Luke 14 opens with Jesus at a party.

[3 : 31] It's a dinner party, a luncheon, something like that, a barbecue. He's in the home of a prominent Pharisee. And this is not a free lunch.

This is not a casual gathering. It's the Sabbath. We're told it's the Sabbath. And Jesus has been invited in amongst people who are not his friends. And he's been set up to fail by the religious elite. This is an entrapment lunch. Because before Jesus, right, you know, the odd one sitting out in the room, apart from Jesus, is this guy who's very sick.

And all eyes are on Jesus to see what he's going to do with this sick man. Is he going to heal this man? And if he heals this man, he's going to break the Old Testament law about not working on the Sabbath.

And so it's an awkward gathering. There are no friends for Jesus here. And so what Jesus does is he heals the man and he leaves everyone speechless in the room.

[4 : 30] They've got nothing to say. He ends up trapping these Pharisees and religious elite in their own hypocrisy. The leaders are silent. Nothing has been learnt by them.

Nothing has been confessed despite a barrage of evidence from Jesus as to who he is. Their position on who Jesus is has not changed.

And so in verses 7 to 11, Jesus is talking about a commonplace issue for that time. And he's using it to get under the skin of his host and his religious guests.

His plan was to expose their hearts. He wanted them to see their hypocrisy. He wanted them to see their religion was a veneer. See, when people went to a party back then, they were seated relationally.

The host had the place of honour. He had the big chair and everyone else was seated according to how important they were to the host.

[5 : 39] The more important you were to the host, the closer you were to them. It's not something that we tend to do at our barbecues nowadays, and I don't think we're necessarily going to do it tonight.

But one place where we tend to do this is wedding receptions. The closer you are to the bride and the groom, generally speaking, the more significant you are in the relationship.

If you don't get invited, then there's not much more you can say about that. But what you tend to do, it might just be me, I arrive at a wedding reception and I check what table number I'm on.

I mean, I want to see who I'm seated with and how long this is going to be of an evening. That's the first thing. But secondly, what table number am I on? And so table 13 means that you're next to the kitchen door.

You're with the photographer and the uncle that no one expected to show up. It's a little awkward and it's happened to me. In Jesus' time, protocol demanded that you would not grab the seat too close to the host.

[6 : 44] You never know who's going to turn up and push you further and further and further down the line. I don't know if that's ever happened to you. I remember sitting on once upon a time, many, many years ago, I managed to upgrade a flight from LA to Sydney into business class.

And I had business class to myself and one other guy. And just as we were taxing off at LA to take off, the curtains parted and this bloke jumped through from economy and sat in business class.

And, you know, zipped it back, laid it back, got himself all covered up. And I think he was settling down for the night. And as we got off in the air, seatbelt signs went off and the guy comes through, the, you know, manager of the plane thingy, comes through.

And he stops beside me, looks at me and looks at this guy, goes back, grabs a piece of paper, looks at me and looks at this guy. And then taps the guy on the shoulder and said, and the guy's, tap him on the shoulder and pulls his wrist.

Right, get back. It was so good. It's like, yeah, yeah, get back. You know, I've used points to be here. Anyway, it's that kind of thing.

[7 : 46] You know, elevate yourself, you get pushed back. And so society in Jesus' time was extremely class orientated society. It was all about being connected to the people at the top, the people closest to the front of the plane, if you like.

And the people at the top would engage, they would lower themselves to engage people below them, only because engaging with those people would mean that they would be able to use them for some personal gain in some way.

And all those people who were being used for personal gain in some way were happy to be used because it meant that it connected them with someone at the top. All these relationships and allegiances and power networks were conducted through hospitality.

You brought them into your home and then they would owe you a favour. It's the patronage system. Advancement through connections and using people.

You only invited people in you to your home or went to another person's home if you would gain something out of it. If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

[8 : 56] Of course, that's how our city works. That's how Sydney works. We use people for personal gain. How many times have you heard the statement, no such thing as a free lunch?

There's no such thing as a free lunch. And so Jesus is using a protocol of his time, the culture, using people to gain position, to illustrate a profound biblical principle. And it's in verse 11 and the rest of this passage fits around it. All those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Recognition eludes those who demand it. Recognition eludes those who demand it. And that is true across society and it's true to the deepest level of salvation. Those who reckon they qualify will discover they don't. To claim God's approval as a right or the grounds of position in the church or reputation in the community is in fact grounds for disqualification.

[10:09] And so what Jesus says next completely trashes their patronage system. He shows us a different kind of hospitality, a radical form of hospitality.

There is in fact such a thing as a free lunch. It's called gospel hospitality. And he addresses it. Verse 12, have a look at it. This is Jesus addressing the host of the dinner party. When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours. If you do, they may invite you back and so you'll be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Now, first point. When Jesus says, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours, he's using hyperbole. He isn't saying, new rule guys, you must never, ever, ever invite friends or relatives to your home. Now, for some of us, that would be a great rule. But, so could you imagine becoming a Christian and you email all your friends and relatives and, okay guys, I've just become a Christian and you must never, ever now come back, come over to my place.

[11:25] I'm really working hard here on obeying Luke 14. So it's been great, but no more. I don't think that's what Jesus is saying here. But he is saying something very radical.

He is saying, get people into your home that you can't pay back, or that they can't pay you back. He's calling his disciples to practice gospel hospitality.

Now, the word hospitality doesn't actually show up here in this text. But it does in a number of places in the New Testament. And the New Testament makes a big deal about it.

In fact, Romans 12, 13 says, practice hospitality. And what practice hospitality means, what that literally means is work really hard at hospitality.

Work really hard at this. Now, one of the reasons we don't work hard at it, and we often overlook it, is because the English word hospitality is so weak.

[12:24] It's weak. It doesn't actually get across the actual New Testament word. When we think of the word hospitality, we think Jamie Oliver, Donna Hay, Sarah Lee, and to a lesser extent, Gordon Ramsay.

Jesus is not referring here to entertainment. That's not what he has in mind. He's talking about something more radical.

He's talking about gospel hospitality. And this is what gospel hospitality is. It is welcoming strangers into your living space, treating those strangers like family, so that God can turn some of them into family.

That's gospel hospitality. So let's unpack that a little bit. Gospel hospitality is welcoming strangers into your living space. Now, living space here is bigger than the concept of your house or the thing that you might call your home.

Living space is not just the enclosure that we do family in and the thing that we retreat into for an element of privacy. Our living space will include that, potentially include that, but it is the place where we find rejuvenation.

[13:55] Home is the place where... Your living space is the place where you recharge the batteries, the place where you are restored. Home is a place of warmth and food and rest and nourishment and relationship.

It's as much as possible, it's a place of order and beauty, which is why it's not necessarily the home if you've got kids under five. It's not necessarily that place.

Our living space is much bigger than the place that we call home, but for our culture, it is tightly connected to the home. The great Australian dream, the concept of the great Australian dream, is tightly connected to our living space.

For many people in our culture, the dream is not just to have a roof over the head, but to have a place of perfect rejuvenation and escape from the world. And this has particularly become prevalent in our culture since the 1990s. Our family homes have become security sanctuaries. The fences which we tore down in the 1950s and 60s actually started to go up again in the 1990s.

[15 : 15] Security gates, systems. The things that we used to go out to, we now bring into our home. Home gyms, home entertainment systems. We get food delivered to our home so we don't have to engage with anyone else.

Our homes are where we exclude almost everyone else as we seek for our homes to be places of rest, sanctuary, security, rejuvenation.

And it's one of our biggest roadblocks to practicing gospel hospitality. And yet the irony of all this is that no one is entirely satisfied with their home.

No one completely gets what they're looking for from their home, what they're hoping to get from their home. That's why virtually every one of us at some point in our life will have home envy. You know, you go and you look at something else's home and you go, awesome. You know, you go to a holiday home and you go, wow, I wish I had this. You know, shows like Better Homes and Gardens feed that envy.

[16 : 26] Better Homes and Gardens should just be called Better Homes and Yours because that's what they all are. All those home renovation shows feed this hope that there is a place somewhere that will perfectly rejuvenate me.

A place that offers me sanctuary, a safe place, a place to escape the world and in fact to escape my teenagers as well if I got a sanctuary for myself away from them.

And there's no place on earth that can possibly fulfill that. You can spend a fortune building your dream home and it won't give you what you want it to.

And gospel hospitality is the exact opposite of what our culture is seeking to do with its living space. Gospel hospitality is bringing strangers into our living space.

The space that would normally be reserved for family and the very close people, bringing them into that space is inviting strangers to be refreshed with the same things that refresh me.

[17 : 35] And so gospel hospitality is far greater, so much more significant than having someone like me over for lunch.

It involves inviting strangers into my living space, my favourite restaurants, my hobbies, my activities, the things that I do to rejuvenate me, inviting strangers into my personal space.

And it is costly. Secondly, gospel hospitality is about welcoming strangers.

The word that is translated hospitality all the way through the New Testament is a word that means love for strangers.

Not tolerance of strangers, love for strangers. And strangers are people that are different.

[18 : 34] Different than you. They're not your kind of person. They're not my kind of person. They might be a different race, they might be from a different socioeconomic background, or they just might be different.

And there are three kinds of strangers that Christians are to practice hospitality with. Christians should practice hospitality with other Christians. That's because there are a lot of strange Christians.

I should finish the rest of the sentence. Who we should invite into our space. There's a lot of Christians who are very different. There are lots of Christians who are strangers. And this church is a great church to practice gospel hospitality because there's a lot of strange Christians here.

For most of us at St. Paul's, the people here are strangers. They are people that we don't know. Some of them you might not even want to know.

But according to the Bible, that is exactly the people you should be inviting into your living space. If they're Christians, they are brothers and sisters in Christ.

[19 : 46] And so when we practice gospel hospitality, we are treating them like family. Because family are the people that we would normally bring into our living space. Christians need to practice gospel hospitality with their neighbors.

Neighbors are the people that you encounter on a regular basis in your network. They're the people next door on the street that you cross all the time, walking your dog, the workplace, the social club, whatever it might be.

And most of those people will not share your beliefs. And Jesus did this all the time. In fact, he's doing it when he's telling this story. He's hanging out with people not like him. But he's always also hanging out with the sinners and the outcasts in society. And the vision is to love them and hopefully love them towards belief in Jesus. Because people do not get argued into the kingdom.

They get loved into the kingdom. Christians also need to practice gospel hospitality with needy people. When the great John Newton of amazing grace fame looked at this passage, he wrote this. [20 : 55] One would almost think that Luke 14, 12 to 14 was not part of the Bible. I do not think it is unlawful to entertain our friends. I've just said that.

He's just saying the same thing. Our instinct, our human instinct is to invite people we want to know who we like or who will potentially open up doors for us.

And Jesus says, no, no, go for the hurting people. Look for the needy people. If we understand anything about God's hospitality, then bring them in.

And the goal is to turn some of the strangers into family. You see, when you treat the stranger like family, God will turn some of them into members of the family.

There's something incredibly supernatural about gospel hospitality. C.S. Lewis said that there are no coincidences for the Christian.

[22 : 05] He referred to it as there always being a secret master of ceremonies at work. Because when we practice gospel hospitality, God is the actual host.

Even if we're doing the inviting and even if we're paying for the food and drinks, it is God who organizes the circumstances of the gathering of people. He puts the people together. He brings some of them into his family.

So let's get really practical for a moment. You may need at the end of this to go and grab another sign up to serve card and fill it out. Here's a few ways to start right now. Start inviting neighbours and work colleagues and others that are in your network into your living space.

And Christmas is a perfect time to do that. It's the festive season. Perfect time. You don't even need an excuse. And if you find that some kind of connection is building with those people, invite them to church, into another part of your living space.

Start inviting each other here at St. Paul's into your living spaces. Those who have got a little bit more living space might want to invite those who don't have as much living space.

[23 : 23] Those with houses might want to consider inviting into their living spaces the uni students who live from couch to couch, for instance. Not that I'm saying you all do.

Those who are long-term residents of Chatswood of Sydney, Australia, invite those who are new arrivals. Those who have been Christians longer, invite those who are being Christians for less time. Those who have been at St. Paul's longer, invite those who are relatively new to St. Paul's. Here's another way. Have a community group in your home. Why not volunteer for Grace Ministry and ESL to show love to prostitutes and new migrants?

Volunteer to be part of the welcoming team. Car park. You get to welcome strangers every week. Like, brilliant. There's a couple of options.

And Christmas is a great season. Here's a couple of final ones. Like tonight, when the kids go out and we get an opportunity to mingle, do it. Get out of your seat and go.

[24 : 25] And even if it's embarrassing, you've got eye contact with this person for the last six years and you still don't know what their name. Just go up to them and say, eat some humble pie, introduce myself, let's have a conversation.

When we suggest you, at the end of our time together, go out and talk with people and engage with people over supper, do it.

Don't rush off. Don't go into your living space. Stay protected. Stay and practice gospel hospitality. It is not easy.

Can I say that this is harder than what it was last week to fill out a pledge card and give money to the project? This is significantly harder. Much easier to give money a distance than to actually draw people close. And the secret to gospel hospitality is found in the last section from verse 15.

Someone at the table says, blessed is the one who will eat at the feast of the kingdom of God. He's referring there to the ultimate feast at the end of time when God renews the world and all death and suffering and evil is finally dealt with.

[25 : 33] And all the jubilees and carnivals or the banquets and fiestas or the laughter and festivity of a thousand years of human history won't even come close to the wonder and the glory and the joy of the celebration which the God of the universe lays out before us in that moment.

It will be a magnificent occasion beyond human imagination and the beginning of just a whole new world of celebration and joy. That's just, I mean, I can't really say much more than that.

It's just going to be magnificent. And the man in verse 15 is pretty confident that he's going to be there. He's part of the in crowd with Jesus. Sitting around the table with this prominent Pharisee. He's one of the men who Jesus says exalts himself. And so Jesus, being a great pastor, uses the occasion to tell us who in fact will be there. And to cut the guy down a little bit.

He tells a story about a man who throws a big banquet and the man represents God. The invitation's God out. God invites a bunch of people but they don't come.

[26 : 48] And those sitting around the table with Jesus at this moment, they have no trouble decoding what Jesus is saying at this point. You see, Jesus is referring to the work of the Old Testament prophets who proclaimed that the kingdom of God would arrive in the future.

And those that were invited then were represented by those sitting around the table with Jesus. God's historic people, the Jews. The ones who had the prophets had addressed with the promises of God for centuries about the coming kingdom.

They'd heard the message of the coming kingdom. And now it says in verse 17, everything is ready. The kingdom has arrived in the person of Jesus.

What has been promised has arrived. And what do these men do when they're confronted with the kingdom? They're silent. There's no response to Jesus at all.

So the servant is sent out. It's party time but they don't come. They're priorities. They've got other priorities. They're the self-righteous, the religious, they're successful, they're content.

[28 : 04] God's historic people are just too busy and distracted to in fact have time for God. And they make pathetic excuse after pathetic excuse. That's what Jesus does. He sets each one of these excuses up as being pathetic.

Too busy with life and business to even give a second thought for the kingdom. So who comes then? Verse 21. Go out quickly into the streets and the alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

Notice he doesn't say, go out and invite them in. Why does he not say that? Because in that time, the place and place, the only way that you could ever be invited into someone else's home is if you could repay the favor.

And who are those who are brought into the kingdom? They're the ones that are not represented at the table that Jesus is sitting on.

The sinners, the outcasts, the Gentiles. Those who have been historically outside the kingdom of God. These are the people who are outside the family. These are the strangers.

[29 : 19] These are the foreigners. These are the people who will eat at the feast of the kingdom of God. As Matthew 5 says, Jesus says, blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

He may as well say it, blessed are the poor in spirit because they will be the ones who will be eating at the feast. There are two kinds of people when it comes to God's salvation.

There's the poor in spirit and there's the middle class in spirit. The middle class in spirit might acknowledge that they're not perfect but don't think it's that much of a problem.

They think that they have enough stuff in their moral bank. I've done enough good things. They figure they've got something to contribute to their salvation. They claim some element of rights and entitlements with God.

A pauper in spirit knows what they've done. They've done wrong things. And even the good things that they've done, they were done with the wrong motives. Even the good things they've done were ways of trying to control people or to make themselves feel better.

[30 : 23] Or an attempt to find approval or to control God so that he will do things for them. The pauper knows that they need grace. They need to receive gospel hospitality.

They need what they cannot repay or return. And they are the ones, according to Jesus, who get brought into the great banquet. Into the kingdom. God's hospitality to the poor in spirit is his radically free gift to them.

They can never repay it. But his hospitality cost him everything. It's very expensive. It cost God everything to lay this banquet of the kingdom before us.

He paid the price to open the door to heaven for us. A cross stood on a hill outside of Jerusalem stained with blood. You see, Jesus Christ was part of the greatest in-group in history.

For all eternity, he dwelt with the Father and the Spirit in perfect unity and perfect love and perfect glory. He didn't need anyone else in his living space.

[31 : 44] It was perfect. And Jesus left that and came to earth. He came as a homeless man. Remember what he said at the beginning of this journey to Jerusalem?

Remember the encounter where we began this whole sermon series? Foxes of holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. He was born in an animal shed. Not a home. The living space of holes. He was crucified outside the gates of a city on a hill, not in the city.

He lived in the alleys and the streets. He was rejected. He was stripped of everything. Why?

Because he was paying for our sins so that we could be brought in to his family.

We could be brought into his living space. He was thrown out so that we could be brought in. The ultimate homeless man has become the ultimate party host.

[32 : 47] The feast in the kingdom of God is heaven. It is home. It is where God is.

And it's where every single one of us is. It's where we're all looking for. We're all looking for it. It doesn't matter whether you believe in God or not.

It doesn't matter whether you believe in God or not. This is what you are looking for. You're looking for this table. You're looking for this party. This is the home you're looking for. This is the living space you're looking for.

Whatever your living space is right now, it will not give you what you are seeking. This is the home where every hurt is healed.

This is the place of absolute comfort. This is security. This is absolute relational peace and warmth. This is it. This is what we're all aiming for.

[33 : 52] And this is what the disciple of the Lord Jesus is totally confident of. And so let's hear again the call of Jesus at the beginning of this journey.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross to follow me.

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it.

All radical discipleship is expensive or radical hospitality is expensive. But Jesus' radical hospitality is the most expensive of all because he offers the very best.

The very best in gospel hospitality. The eternal banquet in the kingdom of God. And this eternal banquet with the perfect host is the destination.

of all people who follow the ultimate host. And so friends, I'm calling you to radical discipleship.

[34 : 57] Take up your cross and follow Jesus.