

**DAY 5 | MARK 2:13-17**

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

# A Table on Earth A Table In Heaven

*by* Eddie Hypolite

How do you go about defining who is allowed into your circle of friendship and who is excluded? Do you have a mental “worthiness test” you put them through? Is it based on their religious and social standing? Do they have to be Christian in general or Adventist specifically? Do they have to be Facebook friends in good and regular standing or are you a little more flexible than that?

**Take a few minutes and break into groups and answer the question:**

How do you define who’s in and who’s out in your friend groups?



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If there was one thing more than any other about Jesus that annoyed the rulers of His day and confused even His disciples, it was the way that He treated people who were social outcasts. Everyone believed that when the Messiah came, He would restore the fortunes of Israel again, but no one ever expected the kingdom to be made up of everyone and anyone in society.

The inclusion of the ‘outcast of society’ into the kingdom and favor of God, was never a move anyone saw coming. And yet this is what makes the life and ministry of Jesus so beautiful as you read the gospels.

Mark 2:13-17 paints a picture of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish, not only in the society of Israel, but also in the hearts of His disciples.

## A Table of Separation

Levi, also known as Matthew, is a tax collector. He is hated by both Jews and Gentiles because he collects the Roman tax. The Roman tax was set by the Romans, but no one really knew what that tax was except the tax collectors. So it was the practice of the tax collectors to add more to the tax and keep extra for themselves. Levi was all the more hated because he was a Jew collecting the Roman tax, and was considered worse than a Gentile. By all accounts he was neither kingdom nor disciple material. As a Jew he had grown up religious and had been a member of the Adventurer, Pathfinder, youth club, and Sabbath school of his day. But somewhere along the road, he got distracted by the city lights like the prodigal son and thought that making a quick dollar would make him happy. It is curious what one would do to short circuit the road to happiness. He crossed over to the 'enemy' line and started to work against his own people.

As is the case for many young people who walk the Levi road, sooner or later, they realize that the pursuit of happiness apart from God is like peeling an onion; they find out at the end of the day that there is nothing inside. Levi did not quite know what to do to process his anguish; he could not go to the synagogue, as he would probably experience the rejection of his people there. So he kept it to himself, until Jesus, who has a way of showing up in timely fashion, showed up.

## The Power of Love

Verse 13 says that Jesus intentionally passes by the booth where Levi sits working, stops, and addresses him directly with the words, "Follow me!" There is something profoundly simple about the kingdom here that we must not miss.

Jesus does not wait for people to find Him, He finds them first. We are not called to wait for people to find us; the kingdom of God is actively seeking the lost and

going to where the lost are. The invitation “Follow me” is given to affirm God’s love for Levi even though he is a social outcast.

If people know they are loved and accepted, even when they sit at the “tax booths” of life that make them socially despised, there is a transforming power from God that enables them to get up from where they are and move to where He is. The world will not care what we know until they know that we care!

Three quick lessons for us present themselves from these two verses (13 & 14).

- 1. Lives empower lives!** The teaching of Jesus that will affect people the most in our societies are those written into our everyday existence. Jesus’ words, actions, and life were all one and the same. What He taught He lived and what He said reflected who He truly was. This is what will make people leave from where they are and follow us as we follow Christ!
- 2. Consistent love is impossible to ignore.** Consistency is the by-product of sensing the value God places on the people He sends you to. The actions of Jesus for the lost remained consistent all through His ministry and life. Jesus did not love by accident, nor should we. Love is the most intentional giving in the human experience, one which doesn’t happen by accident, which is why it’s so transforming.
- 3. Jesus associates with outcasts.** Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:17 that God did not send His son to condemn the world but rather to save the world. So He shows His commitment to that ideal by spending more time with the outcasts of society and bringing to them the truth of God’s kingdom. And what is that truth? It is the fact that God associates His love and life with them and does so without apology.

Mark recalls that Levi gets up and leaves his booth. He leaves everything! He can never go back there again and does not choose to. His new direction far outweighs his past reality. What is the result of this new direction? He extends to Jesus and others the love of the kingdom that has been extended to him. He has spent

his working life making a table for taxes and the things that have made him an outcast, but now he makes a table for Jesus in his home.

## A Table for Jesus

Mark 2:15 says that Levi throws a massive party, a banquet, to which he invites Jesus, his guest of honor. Look who else is invited to the party: at the table with Jesus are tax collectors, sinners, and other outcasts. No distinction is made between them and the disciples. Mark 2:15 simply records that “there were many who followed Him.”

The banquet Matthew set out for his ‘outcast’ friends is reminiscent of the wedding banquet Jesus refers to in one of his end-time kingdom parables in Matthew 22. The banquet was filled with all kinds of people, “good and bad.” The strange thing about this parable is that those who finally showed up were not originally invited. Those who were invited never showed up. Everything was ready, the table had been set, and the band was ready for the wedding march; the king was at the door and the son was waiting for his bride, the church, but no one showed up. The king sent his servants to remind the guests of the invitation, but they were too preoccupied with their own personal business and had no time for the king or his son; some even got upset at the king’s insistence and mistreated and killed the innocent servants.

I wonder who Jesus was referring to in this parable. It is easy to immediately point the finger at the Jewish people who turned the king’s son down. But what about religious people today; what about me? Am I so preoccupied by my own personal pursuits that I disregard my greater calling in life, the king’s invitation? Do I get impatient with those sent by the king to remind me of his invitation? I wonder.

So the king ends up sending his servants to open the invitation to people in the streets, to anyone who could be found and anyone who was willing to come, and soon the room was filled with guests.

What a beautiful image of the inclusive love of Jesus for lost humanity.

Coming back to Levi, the invitation that he made to his 'outcast' friends was a powerful testimony to a life that has been changed by this love and acceptance. Jesus called Levi from a table that separated him from humanity and salvation, and Levi makes a table for Jesus that brings humanity and salvation into one glorious space.

As always, there were those who didn't like the idea that the kingdom could be a place where Jesus doesn't have favorites, that all are loved equally by Him. As a result, verse 17 says that they complain, but Jesus makes it clear that the sick need help, and that is His reason for reaching out to them.

## Lessons from a Jesus Table

The actions of Levi in opening his home, not only to Jesus but to all the people he used to sit with, open four very important images of the kingdom and Jesus that must not be missed.

### **1. A table for Jesus isn't always filled with the obvious.**

We must never assume that we know who Jesus wants to save and who He doesn't. When Jesus says "whomsoever will," He means it literally. Let us never presume to judge who can and who cannot be saved. Let us be a church that doesn't open the table of love and fellowship to just the obvious.

### **2. A table for Jesus is an open table.**

Many even today fear the idea of opening the doors of our church to anyone and everyone, but the kingdom is saving 'anyone's' and 'everyone's' each and every day. We have no say in whose heart the Spirit of God chooses to work. We only get to see the result and then welcome them into the family so that they can grow in love and grace

also. Let us always make our table an open table, knowing that Jesus sits at these tables especially.

### **3. A table for Jesus remembers who used to sit there.**

Levi never forgot both where he came from and who it was that used to sit at his table before Jesus called him. It is so easy for us as Christians to forget where it was that Jesus found us and how far He has brought us. Jesus wants us to remember the people we may have left behind once we find Him. He wants us to remember who used to sit with us and make a place for them at our new tables. We must be careful of becoming 'over-saved.' An 'over-saved' person looks with scorn on those they used to associate with, because they have a new life that is so unlike their old life. Like Levi, when we find this new life in Jesus, we must remember those we left behind and make a place for them also.

### **4. A table for Jesus never apologies for, but always defends, who sits there.**

Jesus never apologized for the people who sat at His table. He always defended both their presence and reason for sitting with Him. He came to show, by actions first and words second, that God was truly with us. He did not distance Himself from those who the rulers of the temple believed were beyond help and not worthy of salvation.

We live within a society that no longer listens to our words, they listen to our actions. The old saying is so true, "Actions speak louder than words!" The life and love of Jesus in us will always be known in how we defend the unloved and dispossessed in our society. Jesus made a point of doing this so that we would know how to live with others and each other.

### **5. Lastly, Jesus is the only way to the table.**

Going back to the parable of the wedding banquet, the king had made provision for wedding garments for every guest at the door. But

some, however, came in and refused to avail themselves of the special garment that had been fashioned for them. Our only access to the end-time, eternal kingdom banquet is the robe of righteousness that Jesus freely provides through His precious blood on Calvary. In this robe of righteousness, there is not a single thread of human devising; ours is simply to accept.

But we are glad that it is God and God alone who makes this ultimate decision about ultimate access to the eternal kingdom, for we do not have access to the hearts of people. Ours is to be generous in our invitation to all mankind and leave the separation of good and bad to the only one who reads the motives and intents of the human heart.

Each of us are tables for Jesus: our homes, churches, school rooms, even Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds and pages can also be tables for Jesus if we choose to use them in a way that brings glory to Him.

Could it be, that for a Church that struggles to make the gospel have any real impact in our western secular societies, that Jesus has made it as simple as opening our homes? Could it be that the true good news of the kingdom Jesus is asking us to share is our transformed lives and open tables? Is it at all possible that Jesus is asking us to share changed lives because they speak louder than any sermon ever will?

While we are busy trying to find the next great idea, maybe the great idea is simply finding Jesus a table.

### **Let us take the time to pray for three things right now:**

1. That we will sense our need of a Savior right now!
2. That we will create spaces / tables where Jesus and society meet.
3. That I will never be ashamed of who Jesus chooses to sit with. ●

