

Everyone is Welcomed to the Table - Joshua 2:1-15 & 6: 22-25

So much of Christianity revolves around the supper table. David wrote in Psalm 23, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Jesus invites us to the Lord’s table where we gather to eat his true body for the forgiveness of sins. Christians gather regularly around the table at potlucks and family dinners to fellowship together and encourage each other. And then, there’s heaven. Isaiah wrote, “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines” (25:6). Can’t you just picture that lavish spread laid out in the New Jerusalem, like an endless buffet, in the presence of Jesus and all God’s Children of all time? God’s table evokes images of salvation, story-telling, satisfaction, and singing – joy beyond the most amazing spread.

I believe our story today answers some difficult questions people have about this idea of the Christian table: *First, is there room for me at the table? Second, is there room next to me at the table? Third, what can I learn at the table?*

Read the lesson.

Is there room for me at the table?

Even Christian people are not immune to this question: is there room *for me* at the table? Am I really welcomed at God’s table? Is there something I must do to get there or stay there? Is there a place for me in His family and plan? Is God ticked at me—maybe just a little bit? Sometimes it just feels like we have maxed out our divine credit card and the payment has come due in the form of suffering, rejection, or failure—washing grimy dishes instead of welcomed to the banquet.

But let me ask you: Did God spare Rahab because he owed her a favor? She had undoubtedly ruined marriages and contributed to the breakdown of society through her ungodly occupation. One simple act of kindness does not clear a mountain of rebellious rubble, nor does a few years of mission work in China, nor even decades of “going to church.” But this going-nowhere nobody gets written into the story of God’s people anyways! And see how she is not only spared but exalted! She is the only woman besides Sarah to make the “heroes of faith” list in Hebrews 11 which says, “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient (v. 31).” Notice! She is contrasted with those who were disobedient, as if she were a model citizen. The book of James puts her in the same category as Abraham, that of a righteous person, something that must have shocked his Jewish readers. A Gentile Prostitute at the table as an equal with the Father of the Jews?

That’s the scandalous nature of God’s all-inclusive Grace!!! John 1 says that “through Christ we have all received grace on top of grace already given.” When my wife and two of our favorite people went on a cruise together, gathering around the supper table every night was a delightful event. The food was fantastic. I remember one night where we wolfed down lobster tail. When the server came around he said, “So, what did you think of the lobster?” “It was amazing!” “Great! Would you like another?” “yeah!!!!” It was lobster on top of lobster already given. God’s all-inclusive grace is like that: Grace on top of grace already given.

And it’s yours! You may think you are worse than Rahab; you are still welcomed to the table by a God who says, “Sin? What sin? Failure? What failure? Welcome to the table! You are always, always welcomed here.” So, back to our first question: is there room for you at God’s table? Absolutely. Dig in! He has prepared an eternal banquet of grace for you.

The second difficult question about the Christian table that the story of Rahab and the spies answers is this:

Is there room next to me at the table?

Considering the insular and communal nature of God’s People at that time, the spies’ treatment of Rahab is remarkable. Without any permission from their superiors, these soldiers (called “young men” here) put their necks and reputations on the line to spare a disreputable woman and her family. They treated her as a soul, not a nuisance, a problem, a statistic, or a drain on their time. The result was that she was welcomed to the table on their recommendation.

And Rahab was not tucked away in some corner like an eccentric auntie that no one knows what to do with; the author of Joshua says she still lives among the people. She was one of them now—not an outsider; not a third wheel, not a lesser citizen. In fact, the book of Ruth tells us that a righteous man named Salmon married her. Then, Rahab became the mother of Boaz, another righteous man who married another outsider—Ruth. So, Rahab was also the great-great grandmother of King David, and Matthew proudly tells us that she was an ancestor of Jesus. She wasn’t just tolerated; she was tied into the story of salvation by blood and embraced by God’s people. Yep; your Jewish

Savior's got a little bit of Canaanite blood in him because of Rahab. There was definitely a place of honor for Rahab at the table next to the Greats, like Boaz, Ruth, David, and Jesus!

After war tore her country apart, my friend and her family fled from their home. She spent a whole night swimming across a river to a refugee camp, pulling her family along by a rope because she was the only one who knew how to swim. In the refugee camp, a man came into their tent and stole her away for marriage, even though she was in love with another man. The family apparently did nothing; no one defended her; no one tried to rescue her; so she was forced to marry her abductor. In the USA, she had 7 children with this man she did not love. When she was pregnant with the 8th, the husband died. The family apparently demanded that she marry her late husband's relative, but she refused and was shunned by her tribe. She lived as an outcast widow with 8 children in a small Midwest town— not always known for welcoming Outsiders. Thankfully, God led a Christian couple to her. They shared the gospel, and one Sunday, she and all 8 of her children were baptized together. There was a place for her at the table.

But, honestly, no one really knew what to do with her. She was a foreign single mom with 8 kids; No one in the church had anything in common with her. Talking to her was difficult because her accent was so heavy. Inviting her family over was a huge investment. Even though her kids were well behaved, there were 8 of them!

Honestly, there are certain people who are easier for me to minister to. This friend and her family were a delight to serve. My wife is great with Rahab-type people. We find these people interesting and receptive. But there are others who require much more grace. They just take too much time; or we have little in common with them; or they are slow to learn; or they are frustratingly resistant to faith; or they don't listen. Some people call them EGRs: Extra Grace Required.

But the reality is that I am the EGR. As the Puritan prayer says, "I am so slow to learn, so prone to forget, so weak to climb; I am in the foothills when I should be on the heights; I am pained by my graceless heart, my prayerless days, my poverty of love, my sloth in the heavenly race, my sullied conscience, my wasted hours, my unspent opportunities." It is, in fact, those I evangelize, disciple, and train who often need far more grace and patience with me. I can be so snobby and judgmental.

Which leads us to our last question: **What can I learn at the table?**

Rahab exhibits astonishing faith and grace even though she had only been a God-follower for a few days. For her whole life, this woman had been a godless pagan; she slept with men for money. And yet, now she confessed, "the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below"—not just another local deity, but the only true God over all creation. She also said, "I know that the Lord has given you this land." This spiritual infant had more faith than the 10 Israelite spies who had been sent into the land 40 earlier and convinced the people that conquering the land was too difficult. She risked her life for a couple of foreigners she didn't know. She courageously shared this news with her family members even though they could have turned her in for conspiracy. She even encouraged Joshua and the spies with her words. A prostitute! A new believer, filled with faith and courage! 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 says, "*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.*" Rahab was less than a nobody among the people of faith, and yet, she was a great example to them.

We, long-timers, often think of ourselves as the mature ones; and we are tempted to view visitors and new Christians as the ones in need of so much help and cleaning up. Maybe that's what often makes it so difficult to reach out to them. We're afraid of the messes. What if I talk about Jesus to my friend and she asks a lot of questions I don't know how to answer? What if I invite my gay friend, and he tells the pastor about his boyfriend? What if he raises his hand during the sermon to ask a question? What if she doesn't know how to control her kids during the service?

But let's turn it around. Have we ever considered that maybe we need the visitors and new Christians for the good of our own faith? Maybe our kids need to see people who are different from them so that they can practice compassion. Maybe we need to see grace at work in Rahab to remind us what it feels like to be snatched from

hopelessness and fear and ushered into the family of God. Maybe new Christians will bring some new ideas and new energy to the table.

We think, “Oh, those poor people over in Africa; their lives are so hard. Oh, those poor people living under communism. They don’t even have Facebook! Oh, those poor people in our city. Brothers and sisters, the reality is that they need us but we also need them. They need us to share the good news with them, but we need them to help us renew and grow. So, today, I encourage you as a church and as individuals to reach out with the gospel—because your neighborhood needs and it and so do you!

It’s not surprising that God can encourage us and change us through nobodies. Think of what Jesus was when he was brought into this world as our Savior: the unexpected son of a teenage girl. Imagine the knowing, superior looks everyone gave her when she and her fiancé walked by. Raised in a poor home in a backwoods town. His followers were mostly outcasts and misfits. He was known as a friend of prostitutes and scumbags. And he was nailed naked to a cross along the interstate for everyone to gawk at, for everyone to think, “So this is what happens to losers, the descendant of nobodies like Rahab and Ruth.”

But three days later, that same nobody burst out of tomb alive, and the great walls that separated you and a holy God were removed forever! That nobody—that descendant of a prostitute, a pagan woman, failed kings, liars, thieves, adulterers, and murderers raised you up as a forgiven and loved Child of God who will rule in heaven with Him forever. That Nobody welcomes you to the table to today to feast on his grace forever—no matter who you were or where you come from.