

Theology meets life: Hospitality

Sunday, 31st July, 2011

Over the summer we will be working through a series looking at the ‘normal’ stuff we do in our lives and how God wants to break in and own these things.

In other words, it is what happens when God’s Truth and Grace and Power get rubbed into our daily lives.

And as I said last week, the aim of this isn’t that we know more stuff, but that our lives are changed to be more like Jesus and that we live differently as a

So this morning I want to look at the question of hospitality and how we can use the homes God has given us for His Glory.

Hospitality is a really big issue in the Bible – so much so that in Timothy, it is listed as one of the essential character traits for an elder (overseer):

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (1 Timothy 3:1-3)

In case you think “I’m not an elder so it doesn’t matter for me!” I believe the “character of an elder or deacon” passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are actually describing Christian maturity that we should all be working towards.

And several other times through the New Testament we are told to practice hospitality (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; 3 John 1:8)

And we have examples from the Old Testament (Abraham and the visitors at Mamre) the Gospels (Mary and Martha) and the Early Church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:46)

Hospitality is also a very big issue for us in the Crown as we build a church of many nations – and it’s a challenge for us because each culture has its own idea of what hospitality is.

If you have grown up in the Middle East, you will probably have a very formal and very strong view of hospitality that is overwhelming in its generosity and is offered to whoever walks through your door; similarly in South Asia.

Latino and African hospitality will be a bit different, but will still be very generous.

And then, if you have grown up in Europe – especially in the UK, you will have a different view again.

In most of the rest of the world it is seen as an honour if guests come to visit you, but in the West it’s seen the other way round and so we think we’re honouring guests by feeding them!

And over the years in the UK we have lost the art of showing hospitality.

If you are not from the UK thank you for being so patient with us and I hope you understand it doesn’t mean we are being unfriendly.

Clearly Middle Eastern hospitality looks more like hospitality in the Bible (which was written in the Middle East!) and so in general, Western people have a long way to go to catch up.

If you are from a non-Western culture, please help us.

I don’t really want to say too much more about what hospitality is today; but I do want to make the following points:

- Godly Hospitality comes from a realisation that our homes and everything in them come from God and belong to Him. There is a wrong attitude that thinks that we go out to serve God, but our home is **our** space. As we allow God to invade our homes, hospitality happens.
- Godly hospitality has nothing to do with money. In Britain we are told so many times on TV (“Come dine with me”) and in magazines that you need the right glasses and the fanciest recipes and the poshest dining

rooms and the best wine to ‘entertain guests’ that it can seem out of reach when we don’t have posh enough stuff and so we can feel awkward about inviting people to our homes.

And it is very easy to compare ourselves to someone else and think ‘I couldn’t do that as well as them – I’m not a good enough cook!’ and so we don’t try.

Godly hospitality has nothing to do with that though – it doesn’t matter what we have or what our home is like; it matters what our heart is like.

Jesus was offered rich hospitality by a wealthy Pharisee once, he was invited to recline around a rich table, but there was no love shown – no washing of feet; no welcome or kiss; and then a prostitute came in and kissed Jesus’ feet and washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair and poured balm on them. Guess which one Jesus praised!

I had a friend who was fairly poor once – he used to invite people back to his house by saying “Come round for chips and beans!” So you’d go to his house and he’d cook chips and beans, and he’d welcome you and make you feel so at home!

The richest and most humbling hospitality I ever received was from a family in Romania; it was a meal of one tomato, a piece of pepper, some stale bread and some rancid pig fat; but it was all they had and more than they could afford and it was given with such generosity and love and sacrifice – it humbled me.

Godly hospitality is not beyond the poorest person and it’s not guaranteed from the richest; it isn’t about what we have; it’s about our hearts.

- What’s important for godly hospitality is that we treat people with love and respect and we serve them – and as we do that, we will sometimes be serving and entertaining angels without realising...and even more!

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained **angels** without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

I want to go on to talk about who the Bible says we should show hospitality to.

So in other words I want to look at the question “who should we invite to dinner?”

Firstly, we have a responsibility to our families.

Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(1Timothy 5:7-8)

There is a context to this of caring for widows and elderly relatives, but this is still God’s Word and it still matters to God and this is a strong warning!

In the West, we often forget to honour our families but Paul reminds us about it:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honour your father and mother” —which is the first commandment with a promise— “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

(Ephesians 6:1-3)

Secondly, we are told to show hospitality to our Brothers and Sisters in the Church:

Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Romans 12:13)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

(Galatians 6:9-10)

And as we have seen already, this was what the Early Church was known for – they were devoted to meeting together and eating together!

If we do this, then we are doing a godly thing.

But the Bible challenges us to do more:

Thirdly, we have an amazing offer from God – if we entertain strangers and show kindness to the “least” people; people who can’t or won’t ever be able to pay us back or return the kindness; then God counts that to His own account – and so in showing hospitality to people beyond the Church or our friends or ‘nice’ people, we get to serve angels and God Himself:

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained **angels** without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

Jesus told this story about the Day of Judgement:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, **‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’** (Matthew 25:34-40)

Fourthly (finally) even more than the mind-blowing privilege of serving Jesus, He offers us something greater.

If we will love and welcome our enemies, then we are doing what God has done for us – He loved us when we were His enemies – and if we will do the same to people who are against us, then we are living out God’s Family values, and as such, He calls us His sons:

And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then

your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6:33-35)

The meaning of the word “sons” here is “Huios”, which means a mature, trusted son.

We’ve received so much grace from God – we’ve been given so much more than we deserve; we deserved God’s wrath and judgement, we were His enemies, but He has won us and made us into His friends and His sons!

When we love our enemies and offer them hospitality and welcome in people who will never be able to repay us, then we’re doing what God does – we’re acting like His sons – and so amazingly, that’s what He calls us!

There used to be a big problem with prostitution in Handsworth – it was infamous throughout Birmingham. Nowadays there isn’t such a big problem, because the Muslims and Sikhs in Handsworth campaigned against it and took photographs and wrote down the registration numbers of the kerb crawlers.

There was a big prostitution problem in Jesus’ day too, but He took a different approach to them – He went and ate with them! In fact He got a reputation for eating and drinking with ‘tax collectors and sinners!’ And as He shared hospitality with them, they were changed and they stopped being enemies of God, and they became ex-prostitutes and friends of God!

Isn’t it wonderful that that’s how He conquered us while we were His enemies too!

And today, this is what He says to you if you don’t know Him:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and *eat with him, and he with me.*

(Revelation 3:20)

In many cultures today, eating together is a sign of acceptance and forgiveness – that's included in communion – "The Lord's Table"

Hospitality is a great tool for turning enemies into friends

And it's a great tool for turning enemies of God into friends of God!

Pray.