

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Place to Stay: A Place for Christ - Luke 22:11

Most of us remember the story of the nativity, told in countless school plays and church services every Christmas. One of the most memorable phases repeated every year is “[Mary] brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” Luke 2:7. In all of Bethlehem there was no guest chamber to receive this heavily pregnant woman and the precious baby she was carrying. When born the Baby was laid in the animals feeding trough!

This week’s talk, continuing the theme of the various guest chambers or rooms mentioned in the New Testament raises the most important challenge as to whether or not we have room in our own lives for Jesus Christ. Presumably as you are listening to this talk you have an interest at the very least in Christianity. But the title I was given was “A place for Christ” and not “Place for Christianity”. I have been impressed recently with the importance, the vital importance of this. We make room in our lives for the people and things that are important to us. So this is a question of the highest significance; do I, do you have room in your life for Jesus Christ?

It isn’t whether I have time for religion, church or charity but what place do I have in my life for Jesus Christ? I would like to consider three portions of scripture that touch on this theme. All three have a common thread running through them in that all feature sharing a meal together. Not eating to meet our need for nutrition but sharing a meal with friends or family. To enjoy their company and friendship, and maybe also to find encouragement but primarily to enjoy the company of those we love.

The first Scripture I would like to read is in Luke’s Gospel. “Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.’ So they said to Him, ‘Where do You want us to prepare?’ And He said to them, ‘Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’”. Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.’ So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’” Luke 22:7-20.

To set the stage for what is happening we must remember that we know, although the disciples certainly did not, that we are nearing the end of the Lord’s life here on earth. One of His trusted disciples had agreed with the chief priests and scribes, the religious leaders of the nation, to betray the Lord to them. Judas, a name that will forever be associated with treachery and betrayal. It is no coincidence of course that it was also the time of the year to celebrate the Passover Feast. A feast first ordained by God the night the Israelites were to be delivered from slavery in Egypt. Sheltered by the blood of the little lamb splashed on the door posts and lintels of their houses, whilst the Egyptians were punished by God. So many of the various feasts and offerings pictured throughout the Old Testament were to have their dramatic and complete answer in the space of the next few hours. It was usual for devout Jews to celebrate this Passover Feast each year, but of course for our Lord Jesus it held special and terrible significance.

Preparation for the feast was vital. For a week prior to the Passover Feast all the leaven, always in Scripture a picture of sin, was scrupulously removed by the devout Jew from their houses and from their diet. Now the day had arrived, called the Day of Unleavened Bread, when, as it says in Luke 22:7 “the Passover must be killed”. Jesus sends Peter and John into the city of Jerusalem to prepare. When asked by the disciples “where shall we prepare” the Lord gave them very exact directions as to who to follow and where to go. I don’t want to over-spiritualise these details but even a casual reading of the passage will highlight the fact that within the space of a few verses the word “prepare” is mentioned 4 times.

This really is the significance of the feast of unleavened bread which immediately preceded the Passover. It was a necessary opportunity for them to prepare themselves for the Passover Feast. Paul picks up on this in 1 Corinthians

5:7-8. "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. To get rid of leaven is in picture to judge sin in our own lives and as the passage makes clear, in the lives of others in our company if the sin is blatant, known and un-judged by the individual concerned. Only then can we "keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

Most times when we come together as Christians, go to church or go to a meeting, however we describe it, we go to ask and to receive. And rightly so, we trust a God Who we can call our Father and Who delights to give. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32. But do you not think that here we have an opportunity to give, to respond, to be obedient to our Lord's request that we remember Him? Instead of meeting with the expectation of receiving, although we certainly will, we go with the intention of giving! Giving thanks to the person Who as He was described by John the Baptist is "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" John 1:29.

Whilst the Lord told His disciples to make ready for the Passover, He introduces a new and simple memorial, what Paul called the "Lord's Supper". It was one of the very few things that Jesus asked rather than commanded His disciples to do. The Lord's own words indicate how important it was to Him. "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" Luke 22:15-16. At a time when it seemed as if all outside of that guestroom were conspiring to capture and kill Him, Jesus treasured the time spent with His own. It raises the question what value do you and I place on the Lord's Supper? Indeed what value does my church or your church place on this simple feast? Should it not have a central place in our lives and should we not be ready to devote time and prayer to preparing ourselves to make time and room for Jesus Christ in this way? The Lord Jesus said "Remember Me". The bread and wine are emblems, pictures of, in the Lord's own words "My body" and "My blood" separated in death. We have so many opportunities to remember our blessings, but on this occasion Jesus says "Remember me". His life, His love, His suffering and His sacrifice.

The house of Martha and Mary in Bethany, was clearly a place where the Lord Jesus was always welcomed and where He felt comfortable. I sometimes wonder if my home has this same welcoming atmosphere, or whether it would be uncomfortable for me if the Lord Jesus turned up at my front door! What would I have to hide up and excuse? And what would be the point of trying to hide anything from Him in any case? In the book of Revelation we have in the second and third chapters, seven epistles or letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. Starting with a letter to the church at Ephesus they chart the history of the Christian testimony from the earliest days to the return of the Lord Jesus for His Church. In each letter the Speaker says "I know" eight times in total! He has what are described in the first chapter of Revelation "eyes like a flame of fire" Revelation 1:14. He sees everything, He knows everything and not just words and actions but also motives!

The last church written to is the church at Laodicea and things had become so bad, that the Speaker, Who is clearly the Lord Jesus is standing outside the door! Is it possible that there are churches where Jesus is standing outside? Laodicea is described as being lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and is in danger of being vomited out of the Lord's mouth. "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" Revelation 3:14-22.

At the birth of the Lord there was no room for Him, and I suppose we are not surprised that He was not wanted. But what a shock to realise that there has come a time when there is no room for Christ in some churches! We must carefully and self-critically examine where we are in this matter. Is there room for Christ in the church? It seems to be a particular danger for rich societies. "Rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing" Have we become so materialistic that we feel we have no needs? No spiritual needs, not even a need for Christ? David wrote in Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want" or as another has expressed it, "The Lord is my shepherd, what want I more?" For David having the Lord meant he was satisfied, we have fallen a long way if there is the possibility that we have so much that we have no need of Christ.

And what are we missing? Look at the times Jesus came into a house in the gospels and the wonderful blessings that flowed out to others. Jesus came into the house of Peter and found Peter's mother-in-law sick so "He touched her

hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.” Matthew 8:14-15. In Mark chapter 5 the Lord Jesus came into the house of Jairus and raised his dead daughter back to life again. Or think of the terrified disciples huddled together after the crucifixion in John chapter 20. He spoke peace to them and showed them the wounds in His hands. It was exactly what the disciples needed! They were glad when they had seen the Lord! These people had room in their houses, in their lives for the Lord Jesus, and how tremendously they benefitted as a consequence! But often if Jesus comes in there are things that have to go out. Jesus came in and as we have seen death and disease have to leave, but in the house of Jairus when Jesus arrived there were present those who mocked him. They too had to leave! We sometimes allow into our houses those who mock our Saviour, and I am not talking about actual visitors, but those on the television and radio who take His name in vain and make fun of Him. We wouldn't tolerate a visitor who spoke so disparagingly of our Lord, we must be equally self critical of what we watch and listen to.

But in the passage we read from Revelation we have pictured the Lord standing and knocking at the door. He doesn't just knock once and then walk away impatiently, rather the word really means “Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking.” Revelation 3:20. He so badly wants the company of His own people that He stands and keeps knocking, trying to attract our attention. And if we do respond and open the door Jesus says “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” Surely it has to be worth our while to make room for Christ! “I sat down in His shade with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste” is how the bride described her similar experience in the Song of Songs 2:3. So again we face the question, are we willing to make room for Jesus Christ?

The third story I wanted to think about was one told by the Lord Himself in Luke 14. The Lord was giving advice to His disciples on how they should behave themselves when invited out to a feast. I will read the passage to you. “So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ‘When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honourable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’” Luke 14:7-11.

We all probably have a tendency to overrate our own importance! I remember hearing once a government official who was tasked with the responsibility of arranging the seating plan at important state functions. He was asked how on earth he managed to get so many important people in the right order without causing offence to some. He replied “Those who care, don't matter, and those who matter don't care!” It's probably very true!

Social position and standing matter a great deal to some. In the times in which our Lord lived, the position you had at a feast, how near you were to the host or how far away from the host you were, was a clear indication of how important you were. How embarrassing if you sat down at the table only to be asked in front of all the other guests to make room for someone more important than you! How bad would you feel trudging down to the bottom of the table looking for a spare seat! On the other hand you would feel very good if having taken a lowly place the host insisted you come up and sit beside him!

It thrills me to think that very soon God is going to straighten out the social order in this world! The Lord Jesus said “And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.” Luke 13:30. We live in an age of celebrity, often the strangest, most shallow of individuals are accorded fame and honour that they have done nothing of significance to earn. There are those in places of great wealth and power only through corruption or violence.

“Thus says the LORD GOD: ‘Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.’” Ezekiel 21:26-27. There are so many who claim and cling to dignity and power which they do not deserve, it is definitely not the job of the Christian to interfere, rather we are told to pray for those in authority, but one day God will intervene and to the surprise of the entire universe, Jesus, crowned with thorns at Calvary, will be crowned with the crown of supreme glory by God. God will in effect say “Give this Man place”! He will make room for Jesus Christ. He who took the very lowest place will be asked in front of the gathered universe to take the highest place.

God clearly has room for Jesus Christ! Have we? Does He have any place in my heart and life at all? And if He does, is it the very highest place, or is He well down the list of what is important to me? Is what I like and what pleases me more important in church than what would please the Lord Jesus? Do we take time to remember and honour Him in the way He has requested? May God give us the grace and courage to order our lives around the Lord Jesus. To make sure there really is “Room for Christ.”

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