

Good evening and Merry Christmas. I have always been a fan of dinner, and I don't mean that thing you do in your car or fast food thrown across a coffee table. I'm talking about that moment when you're surrounded by good friends and family and great food and a great bottle of...Coke or Shasta or whatever. That moment is really a holy, deep thing. It really is. That place of safety, that place of friends and family where story and laughter are as common as toys at Christmas. I don't know that you've ever got a chance to experience a room full of people that you are very much in love with and get to just laugh and exaggerate old stories and eat great food. But in that moment, much more than the stomach gets filled, the emotions, that place that the emotions flow out of gets stuffed also. And in those times the soul drinks in so much that it almost feels like it needs to unbutton the top button, if you're tacking with me. I think that's why Scripture references the table so often. I think that that might be one of those shadows Colossians talks about. Colossians says there are all these pictures here on earth painted, there are all these things painted on the canvas of creation. They're not random, not accidental but they are to teach, they are try to give us a glimpse of something bigger than the shadow itself. Because it seems that over and over and over again, Scripture wants to come back to this table.

Even Mary can't help but reference it when she finds out that the Holy Spirit will conceive Christ in her womb. Even as Mary begins to worship and pray when she finds out this news, she can't help but referencing the table. Let me show you what I mean. Let's turn to Luke 1, starting in verse 46. It says this, *"And Mary said: 'My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things;..."* Once again, we go back to being filled, and Mary is not talking about supper here. When she says that He fills the hungry with good things, she's once again referencing the shadow, she's referencing this moment, she's referencing this place where we can come and not only physically be fed, but also spiritually and emotionally be fed. Ecclesiastes 3:11 is going to say that God has put eternity inside of us so that we'd always be groping, always be wanting, always be wanting to fill something inside of us and that that hole, that chasm of eternity was put there by God to lead us to the table, to get us to sit down.

So if this living shadow, if this living illustration is there to teach us, then we've got a couple of questions I want us to answer tonight. If there is this table of God that we are to sit at and eat up and drink up, who is invited and what are we having for supper? We have to go to Isaiah 55 to find the answers to those two. In Isaiah 55, starting in verse 1, it says this, *"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."* He just said, "The table is set, the candles are lit, the wine is on the table, the food is here. Now let me invite people." And He extends this invitation right out of the gate. *"Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat."* So the first person that's invited to the table is you who are broke, you who are poor. Now don't get caught up in the physical here. Don't get caught up in just the mere words. These are Hebrew writers writing in a Hebrew style, and this goes well beyond simply those who have no money. The invitation here is to the weak, to the broken, to the overcome, to the downcast, to the overwhelmed, to the criminal, to the drunk. "Come to My table. Come and buy and eat." And please hear me tonight because I'm trying to grab something back that's been hijacked by a lot of mainstream Evangelical press. God doesn't tend to avoid the sinner, He tends to invite them to dinner. He doesn't tend to go, "Wash your hands and then come to eat." He says, "Hey, come eat with me, you who are broke, you who are poor, you who are despised, you who are violent, come eat with Me." "Well I'm filthy." "Yeah, I know. Come sit down." "Well,

I'm a drunk." "That's why we have milk and water also." "I'm a thief." "Okay, but I'm all knowing and we'll know where the silverware is when you leave. Come sit down, you who are broke, you who are tired, you who are weary, you who are overwhelmed, you who have no hope, you who have no clout, you who have no prestige, you who have not the looks. Come sit at My table. Come sit, eat and enjoy. Come." that's good news.

Now the second person that gets invited is found in verse 2. You've got to look for it, but I'll show you where it is. "*Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?*" Now in verse 2, we have left the category of verse 1, because now the invitation goes to those apparently have wages and have money to spend. So He can't be talking about the same group that He was talking about in verse 1 because verse 1 is "Come you who have no money." Well if you have no money, then you have no wages. If you have no money, then you have nothing to purchase anything with. So the first one invited to the table is the broke, the downtrodden, the overwhelmed, the overcome, the thief, the murder. And then the second invitation that goes out is to those who do have money, who do have nice homes, who are the pretty people, who do seem to have it all together, who do have prestige, who do have honor. Because apparently, although they have all of it, they're still frustrated and haunted by a lack of fulfillment. "Those who have nothing come by and eat. Those who have everything but are still haunted by emptiness, those who have all the gadgets, those who have the big house, those who have the spouse, those who have the children, those who have this perfect little world and still find their hearts lacking, come, sit, eat. Come to the table. The candles are lit, the music is playing. Come eat, come drink."

So then there's this question. If that's who is invited, what's for dinner? The Bible's going to show us three things in particular that's on the table. Isaiah 55:1, "*Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk.*" I think there's probably more on the table, I don't think this is a liquid heaven thing, but He's trying to teach something here and He's teaching through beverages. And so here's what's happening in Isaiah 55. He's saying, "Come to the table, and here's what waits for you there. Water, cool, refreshing, cleansing, purifying water." Do you remember the story of the woman at the well? She has the same discussion with Jesus. She has a discussion about the water, water tied to the forgiving, healing, refreshing, satisfying power of Jesus. "Come sit at My table and be refreshed. Come sit at My table and be cleaned. Don't clean first, it's impossible. Come sit here; I'll take care of that. Come sit, drink." Then He mentions milk. Not only is there water, but there's milk. Now to the Hebrew, milk wasn't a bad drink and it wasn't a good drink. It was a sustaining drink. My son is 7 weeks old. He has not high moments and low moments. He just eats, sleeps and goes to the restroom. And that is the extent of my seven week old's existence right now. Well that and staring at the ceiling fan for hours at a time. We feed him milk because milk is what he needs to mature, to grow, to be strengthened, to get to that place of maturity. That's what's being taught here. God has not abandoned us, has not saved us and said, "Okay, I'll see you in heaven." But rather He's here, giving nourishment for today, growing us, maturing us, providing for us. "Come and drink water. Come and drink milk." And then He says, "Come and drink wine." Wine to the Hebrew is inseparably linked to the party. And I wish there were some kind of deeper spiritual thing there for you, but it's just linked to the party. And whether you like it or not, in Leviticus 23, God says, "You will party or I will kill you." Look it up. "You will party, you will celebrate, you will stop working, you'll play some music and get after me. Or I will kill all of you." And what's happening here is we have this invitation by God, through the prophet Isaiah, to come to His table and live life deeply and richly and to celebrate the goodness and the depth of life now. "Come sit at My table and drink deeply. Not only forgiveness, not only growing in maturity, but come and drink deeply from celebration and joy. Come and drink deeply from joy."

And then He doesn't tie it to the table but look in verse 3 with me. "*Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.*" So He doesn't tie it to food, but once again He says, "Come so that you might have life." Now somewhere along the way, the gospel of Jesus Christ or the invitation table was replaced by a different thing altogether. Somewhere along the way, the primary purpose of God in the universe ceased to be the extension of His grace, love and mercy to mankind and became instead judgment. I'm not sure how that happened and I'm not really sure how that's the good news. I can't get my mind around the good news being, "Hey, you've messed up and God will judge you for it." That does not make me want to sing. That does not make me want to rejoice. That does not make me want to light a candle. It makes me want to hide from what you can't hide from. The thing about the table is the invitation went out a long time ago on a really, really quiet night. The world rotating, the universe doing what it does and out of nowhere dawn broke and the invitation went out. The table was set, the candles lit, the wine poured, the milk passed around and the water placed in front. And then went out the invitation, then went the light. And to this day, the invitation to come sit at this table that I'm talking about continues to go out. And it goes out in a variety of ways. It goes out from a stage like this, because all I'm doing tonight is inviting you to come party with us. All I'm doing tonight is inviting you to this table, this table that's been set for those who would believe. Usually the invitation is just carried from one man to another. How it works is one man walks up and shares the light, and then she shares the invitation and it begins to spread. And one after another, the table gets more and more full. Some of us drinking water, some of us drinking milk, others of us drinking wine. All rejoicing in the fact that God put on the flesh and dwelt among us. That God wanting to be seen, wanting to build a table where the rich and the poor, the white and the black and the Hispanic and the Asian and the Arab sit down together and rejoice in the healing power of the invitation.

So I want to end tonight in old school fashion. As the light continues to spread around the sanctuary, we'll end the night singing about how this invitation first came into the world. We'll sing *Silent Night*. Now, here's my hope for you. My hope is that you would find your soul full, so full that you have to unhook the top button. My prayer is that you would find yourself at the table, because He fills those who love Him with good things. And so I pray tonight, as we head out here and there's presents waiting and family waiting, that we would be reminded tomorrow as we sit down with family and friends and begin to eat food, that we would be reminded that is a mere shadow of a greater reality. And I pray that we might find our souls overwhelmed by the fact that God put on flesh and threw up a tent in our backyard.