

# The Power of Biblical Hospitality

Good evening everybody. It's great to be with you guys today. This is a cool experience for me, because ~~(like Tim already mentioned?)~~, y'all's church and the church I'm a part of, originated from the same place, from Midtown Fellowship in Columbia, SC. We were sent out from there back in 2016, and you guys in 2020. So it's kind of like City Church and Citizens are *siblings*.

So I don't know **if any of you with siblings** have had this experience. But the first time I got to visit my brother as an adult, it was kinda surreal. I got to look around at his life and go "wow, we both made it. We both figured out how to grow up. Despite our best efforts to the *contrary*, we both survived. Good for *us*." Anybody ever felt something like that? That's kinda how today feels to me, being here with you guys. I'm looking around and going, "we both have survived so far. So way to go, *us*."

But if you have a bible, go ahead and turn with me to the book of **Luke, chapter 19**. Tim asked me if I would come this evening and teach on whatever I felt like would be helpful to y'all. So as the older "sibling" who was sent out on their own a couple years before you guys, I wanted to come and share something that has been absolutely central to our survival as a church throughout our infancy. And because of that, I would imagine it is also going to be pivotal to yours. And that's something the Scriptures call *hospitality*.

Now, chances are, **when you hear that word** *hospitality*, it brings certain images to mind. We think of it as hosting and entertaining and feeding people in our home or apartment. Right? So if you're a little older, maybe when you hear that word, you tend to think of *this* (Martha Stewart in her pre-prison years). If you're a little younger than that, maybe for you it's something like *this*. If you're younger still, maybe it's like you and a few of your friends hanging out in front of your LED plant wall or something. Or maybe you just got your first apartment, and you're going "yeah, I literally live in an oversized shoebox, so showing hospitality isn't really even an *option* for me. Thanks though."

But **whatever you tend to think of, right from the start, I do need to ask you a favor**. I need you to do your best to forget everything that comes to mind when you hear the word *hospitality*. I need us to try to just have a *blank slate* in our mind to begin with. Can we try to do that? Because the word *hospitality* has come to mean some things in our society that aren't necessarily bad *things*—they just aren't really what the *bible* means when it *uses* that word. **Maybe you're really good at the American version of hospitality. Maybe your apartment looks like something right out of an Instagram ad. Maybe your**

house looks like Chip & Joanna just left after doing their best work. Maybe you're really good at cooking really unique, quasi-healthy-but-still-delicious meals that blow people's minds. And that's awesome—good for you. I'd love to have your help the next time I have people over to my house.

But while those may be some great ways to *show hospitality*, I want to try and show you this morning that **those things aren't what hospitality is**. While those are great *expressions* of it, none of them are *requirements*. You can show hospitality in those ways, but also in dozens of other ways. In fact, you can show hospitality to people without even owning a house or apartment at all. Because **biblical hospitality is something altogether different**. And that's what we're going to see in today's passage. And I want to try and show you *that* this morning through the story of a man who showed the most incredible hospitality the world has ever seen, without even *owning* a house and without *cooking* a single thing. And that man's name just happens to be Jesus.

So let's **work through our passage** and see what we can learn. **Luke 19**, starting in v. 1:

*[1] He (meaning Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. [2] And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus (who some of you may know as a “wee little man”). He was a chief tax collector and was rich. [3] And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. [4] So he (Zacchaeus) ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.*

So chances are, those of us here who grew up in and around the church are at least a little familiar with this story. In my church tradition, there were illustrations and coloring books and really catchy songs to accompany it. But at least most of the commentary around the story when I was a kid centered around the fact that Zacchaeus was *short*. Right? He was a “wee little man.” Almost as if the primary point of this story was “Jesus loves short people too.”

And just for clarity, Jesus *does* love short people too. It's important to me that you know that. But that's not really the point of the story. The point of the story isn't that Zacchaeus was *short*—the point of the story is that Zacchaeus was *hated*. The story tells us that he was a “chief tax collector and was wealthy.” If you're unfamiliar with what that means, tax collectors were seen in their day as equal parts traitors and extortioners. They had sold out their fellow countrymen to work for the oppressive, occupying Roman government.

And were using their position to collect *exorbitant* taxes from their own people, and generally taking significant cuts off the top for their own benefit.

So just imagine with me for a second that a foreign government rules over America in a *Man-in-the-High-Castle* type situation, and one of your best friends decides to start working for that government, takes part in your oppression, and becomes extremely wealthy doing it. Try to imagine how you would feel about that friend. You're probably not grabbing lattes with them once-a-week to catch up. That's the situation Zacchaeus was in. People *hated* him, and the Roman government simply *used* him. Not a guy with a lot of friends.

So when he hears that Jesus is passing through town, he wants to go see what it's all about. So it tells us he climbs up in a tree, so he can see over the crowd towards Jesus. Then this happens, v. 5:

[5] *And when Jesus came to the place (where Zacchaeus was), he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at **your house** today."*

I take that to mean "Zacchaeus, I'd love to invite you over for dinner at my house, but I'm homeless. So it'll have to be at your place." And turns out Zacchaeus has plenty of money and plenty of house, so it works out well. Verse 6...

[6] *So [Zacchaeus] hurried and came down and received him joyfully. [7] And when they (the crowds and specifically the religious elite of the day) saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."*

So **this**, in a nutshell, is **biblical hospitality**. It's noticing a person you don't know or a person that feels out of place or doesn't belong...and then **taking it upon yourself to do something about that**. The word for *hospitality* in the bible is the word *philoxenia*. And it's actually a word made up of two other words: *philos*, meaning *love*, and *xenos*, meaning *stranger*. So *hospitality* in the bible literally means to *love, or care for, or welcome, strangers*. It's the exact opposite of *xenophobia*, which is the *fear of or hatred of, strangers*.

And notice how **biblical hospitality actually has nothing to do with how your house looks, or how awesome or Instagrammable it is...and it also has nothing to do with your cooking**. Jesus didn't *have a house* to welcome Zacchaeus to, and he didn't cook

a meal, and he still showed hospitality. Again, if you're into all that, *great*. You might be *inclined* towards *using* your beautiful home or your incredible cooking to *show* hospitality, and that's great—but it's not *required*.

The **only thing that is required** to show hospitality is a willingness to *notice* people, and initiate friendship *with* them. To recognize people around you who are new—which for you guys, is basically everyone since you're a new *church*. To recognize the people who are new, or excluded, or feel out of place...and seek them out in order to make them feel like they *do* belong. *That's what* hospitality is.

So practically speaking, it's the intentionality with which you show up here on Sundays and seek out the people that look new or that you haven't met yet. Hospitality is the degree to which, when a new person shows up to your community group, *you* take the initiative to introduce yourself and get to know them, and then grab their number to text them about hanging out soon. ~~Now just to be abundantly clear, you're doing that in a Jesusy way, not a "I want to date you" kind of way. Those are different.~~ But hospitality is the speed with which you notice the person hanging out with your group of friends or at your workplace who you can tell feels like they don't belong, and see it as your responsibility to help them feel like they *do*. Hospitality is the desire and the intentionality with which you do those types of things. **It's our willingness to make strangers into friends, and then friends into family.**

Now, I know some of us probably hear all that and think "okay, yeah but **that's just not how I'm wired**. I'm *introverted*. I'm *awkward*. I get uncomfortable meeting new people and it doesn't go well when I do." And trust me, *I* of all people get that. This may be surprising to you given that I do *this* for a living, but I also am *very* introverted and quite awkward in social settings. Sometimes I don't come across that way, but that's only because over the years, I have learned to be a *high-functioning* awkward person. So trust me, I very much get the feeling.

Or maybe it's **even more serious**, and you're one of many people that get **social anxiety** in those types of settings. I know that can be a very real, very crippling thing. And I think there are some ways to navigate that and still show hospitality—we'll get to those in just a second. I want to be sensitive to *all* of that. But before we get there, I do just want us to see that **the way we're wired doesn't change the call from Jesus to participate in hospitality**. Because this call towards hospitality isn't just found in the gospel of Luke. It's found all over the New Testament. I'll give you just a few examples.

### Romans 12:13

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. *Practice hospitality.*

### Hebrews 13:2

Do not *forget* to show *hospitality* to strangers, for by so doing, some people have shown hospitality to *angels* without knowing it. Evidently, if you want to meet an angel, hospitality is a great way to make it happen. Just if you were wondering.

### 1 Peter 4:9

Offer *hospitality* to one another without grumbling. "Without *grumbling*—" Sounds like a word for us introverts in the room.

Nearly *any time* the New Testament gives **practical instructions to a community of followers of Jesus**, somewhere *in* it is a reminder to *show hospitality*: to love and welcome the strangers in their midst. It's such an important characteristic of followers of Jesus that in **1 Timothy**, it lists *hospitality* as a qualification for *leaders* in the church. Evidently, my church can *fire* me as a pastor if I'm not regularly loving and welcoming strangers. That's how big of a *deal* it is to God.

So **your wiring or personality or even your comfort level doesn't change the call from Jesus to show hospitality**; it might just change *how you participate in it*. If you are introverted, have one of your friends or community group members who *isn't* introverted go *with you* to talk to that new person, so you don't have to go alone. If you are socially *awkward*, maybe instead of inviting someone out to dinner with just *you*, you invite them out to dinner with you *and* your spouse. If you get social anxiety, maybe instead of inviting people to something that's very conversationally heavy, you invite them to go see a movie with you and your community group. Or you invite them to watch a football game with you and your roommates. Maybe hospitality is something you and your roommate, or you and your spouse, or you and somebody from your group do *together*.

**Any and all of that** is completely fine. But God still gives you, and I, and every other follower of Jesus the *command* to show hospitality. Your wiring might change the *way you go about* hospitality, but it doesn't change *whether or not* you are called to do it. **Every follower of Jesus is called to love and welcome the stranger.**

Maybe one of the reasons you don't feel motivated to show hospitality regularly is because you feel like you've **already got all the friends** you need. You've got a really

close group of friends here in Charlotte, and you're good. But I would say that's all the more reason to show hospitality to those who *don't* have any or many close friends. Hospitality isn't done for *our* benefit, but for the *new* person's benefit.

One of the definitions for **love in the Scriptures is** to place someone else's *good* ahead of your own. And in that way, that's *exactly* what we're doing when we show hospitality: *loving* the other person. When you decide to make yourself a little uncomfortable by walking over to the new person, or the out-of-place person, and striking up a conversation...what you are doing is putting *them* ahead of *yourself*. You're putting *their* comfort above your *own*. Because chances are, *they* already *feel* awkward. So *hospitality* is when you say to yourself, "I'm willing to *embrace* a little *more* awkwardness so that this other person can feel a little *less* awkward." Does that make sense? It's a way of putting them ahead of yourself. Hospitality is love for other people, put into action. And because of that, hospitality is of incredible *importance* to God.

But it's not just that it's of great *importance*; it's **also of great consequence**. Pick our passage back up with me in v. 8:

[8] *And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the **half** of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded **anyone of anything**, I **restore it fourfold**."* [9] *And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.* (in other words, he gets it—he understands what my kingdom is all about).

So catch this: Jesus says he's **coming over for dinner**, and just by that act of inclusion, something *changes* in Zacchaeus. He immediately says that he is going to give half of his possessions to the poor, and anything that he has taken from anybody, he is going to pay back *four times over*. Just so we're clear, that is a *majority* of his wealth that he is prepared to give away. Now we don't know *exactly* how wealthy this guy was. But no matter what, that's a *big deal*—**not even the most charitable celebrities give away a majority of their wealth. That even makes Oprah look kinda JV, right?**

But **what we're witnessing here is the hospitality of Jesus changing a person from the inside out**. *Because* Zacchaeus now has *Jesus*, he no longer *needs* his wealth. So he gives it away. And *because* of that heart change, Jesus says of Zacchaeus, "*salvation has come to this house.*" Now just to make sure we don't hyper-*spiritualize* that statement: Jesus doesn't just mean this guy said a prayer and now he'll go to heaven when he dies. He means Zacchaeus has been *rescued* out of his former life of taking

advantage of others, and into an entirely new kind of life. He has been *changed* as a human being, as a result of this hospitality from Jesus. Jesus uses hospitality to *change* people.

This was a big part of what happened in the early Church. Take a look at this quote from author **John Mark Comer**:

*Historians argue that [hospitality] is **the primary way** that the gospel spread at such a rapid pace. From a few hundred people eating together in an upper room in Jerusalem, to over half the population of the Roman empire in just three centuries [...] [The early Christians] did this with no political power, no legal protection, under waves of persecution and millions eaten alive in the arena. **With no internet, no sound systems, no printing press, no church buildings, no stages, and no celebrity pastors.** The gospel just spread from one house to the next, from one table to the next, over bread and wine. And it **changed the course of human history.***

Hospitality, quite literally, **can change the world.** It *did*, and it still *can*. **If you're a follower of Jesus, God wants to invite you into this long tradition his people have always had from the beginning.** He wants to use *your* hospitality to change things in the world. **There's some debate, but most people think that this is what the author of Hebrews was trying to say with that odd-sounding passage we read about "showing hospitality to angels"**—there's an Old Testament passage where God's people welcomed in strangers who turned out to be angels. More than likely, it's trying to *use* that story as a way to say, in essence, "you have *no idea* what God can use your hospitality to *accomplish.*" One central thing God wants to use to change the world is *you* and *me*, as followers of Jesus, befriending strangers, showing them the love and compassion of Jesus, and welcoming them into friendship.

Think about it like this: Charlotte and Knoxville are both **cities with no shortage of churches.** No shortage of churches with solid teaching, good music, solid programming—probably plenty that have *all* of that. What should set Citizens apart is being a church of consistent, countercultural *hospitality.* There's a question I love asking people who come around and stick around City Church. After they've been around a while, I always ask them "what made you want to stay here?"

And I'll tell you, **nine times out of ten,** people say something to this effect: "well, we visited a lot of churches. But when we showed up here, somebody (or multiple people)

came and *talked* to us. People actually cared that we were here, and wanted to get to know us. That's why we stayed." Now do you know how many uncomfortable conversations and social anxiety and awkwardness had to happen for *that* to happen? I guarantee you it was a *lot*. But it was worth it. *Hospitality changes people.*

And **one reason we know that** hospitality changes people...is because **if we are followers of Jesus, hospitality is actually what changed us.** Notice the last line in our passage from Luke: "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*" You may not have thought about it in these terms, but Jesus seeking and saving the lost *is* hospitality. **You see, hospitality doesn't actually start with us mustering up some courage to walk across the room and talk to somebody. It actually starts with understanding what Jesus did for us.** *Ephesians 2* puts it this way:

*...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners ("xenos," strangers) to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

So according to *Ephesians*, here is **what happened at the cross.** You and I were *foreigners* to God. We were *alienated* from him because of our sin. There was a *distance* there that we weren't *able* or *willing* to cross. There was a *disconnect* there that we couldn't resolve. And not only that, but we were strangers to the *promises* of God. We had no idea what it felt like to belong to the kingdom, to enjoy its benefits, to participate in its incredible promises. All of that was *foreign* to us, and we were foreign to *it*.

**But what Jesus did** changed *all* of that. He bridged the divide. He walked across the room. Jesus sought us out when we were strangers. He gave up his comfort and his convenience for *our* good. And he did all of that to *bring us in*. We, who were once far off, have been brought *in* and brought *near* by the blood of Christ. And he did that by dealing with the sin that separated us. By dealing with the "foreignness" that our sin had created. And because he did that, we now get to participate in the promises and the family of God.

**So really, what happened for us** and to us in the cross of Jesus is the single greatest act of hospitality the world has ever seen. Jesus sought out us when we were strangers to him. He *welcomed us* when we were alienated from *him* by our sin. It was the *truest expression* of hospitality. **This echoes throughout the Old Testament too. Anytime God**



encourages his people to show hospitality there, he says “welcome the strangers in your midst, because *you were* strangers, and *God welcomed you*.”<sup>1</sup>

**Us learning to show hospitality actually starts with us understanding that we are recipients of hospitality.** God isn't asking us to do anything he has not already done for us, a million times over. *And when you understand that, walking across the room and introducing yourself to someone seems like a relatively small ask. Befriending someone who's different than us is a relatively small ask. I'm not saying it's not awkward, I'm not saying it's not uncomfortable. I'm just saying it is a natural response to what Jesus has done for us.* Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost. And *his* mission motivates *ours*. There is no grander, no more worthwhile mission in the world than what God is inviting us into, through the love of Jesus. So let's join him in it. Let me pray for us to that end.

*Pray.*

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We're going to respond this morning by taking communion. If you're new around here, communion is a way of remembering and resetting on the reality of what was done for us through Jesus' death. The bread is a symbol of Jesus' *body*, sacrificed for us. The juice is a symbol of Jesus' blood, spilled for us. By taking communion together, we are remembering that the thing that made us right with God and with each other was accomplished on the cross.

If you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, we would ask that you not take communion, just because it would be saying something is true of you that isn't yet. But we would invite you, rather than taking communion, to begin that relationship with Jesus himself. If you'd like to talk to someone about what that looks like, feel free to come down front afterward, and there are people that would love to talk to you about it.

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<sup>1</sup> See Exodus 22:21, Deuteronomy 10:19



**Deleted/Unused Content Past this Point...**

Mainly focus on hospitality???

If discipleship is the “highway” between here and heaven, mission is the on-ramp to the highway.

- Who
- When
- How

Personal stories of letting Whit play sports for this purpose

## Bucket:

Passage ideas: Rev 21:27, Matt 25:31-46, Acts 4:12

In their effort to focus attention on what matters most, well-meaning pastors and teachers often remind us that only two things last forever: the Word of God and souls. Since nothing else is permanent, people who wish to make their lives count for eternity will concentrate their energies on evangelism. These leaders suggest that bringing people to Jesus is more than urgent—ultimately it is the only thing that really counts. I am not convinced that permanence alone guarantees importance. (After all, the lake of fire seems to last forever, yet no one argues that we should live for that.) But even if it did, I think we should expand our list of things that last forever (that is, items that will exist in our final, everlasting state). Certainly the Word of God and souls head the list, but what about physical things, such as our bodies and even this planet? While our resurrection bodies and the new earth will be somewhat different from those we currently enjoy, they apparently will also be quite similar. (Wittmer)

