

# The Hospitality of God II

Matthew 25:31-40; Hebrews 13:1-3

Hospitality is the story of the gospel. Having walked away from God, we find ourselves fallen, alone, and unable to find rest for our souls. God finds us and invites us to Himself through Jesus to be received, washed, restored, and nourished. Christians generally know that they're called to preach the gospel, but we have less conviction and understanding about the power and privilege of doing it through hospitality.

## The Who

"Hospitality" sounds like dinner parties and old friendships, but the word is *philoxenia*, "love of strangers" (Heb. 13:2). The author of Hebrews is referring to the angels that Abraham and Sarah hosted not knowing who they were (Gen. 18:2). It's not that we shouldn't have fellowship with friends, but we're reminded not to stop there. God teaches us to start at home and work our way out (Gal. 6:10). Parents shouldn't neglect but rather employ their children in the work of hospitality. The Israelites were strangers in the land of Egypt, and God commands the younger generation to remember this and love the strangers among them: "[He] administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:17-19). Even in the Promised Land Israel was to remember "the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Lev. 25:23). Strangers are people we don't know, especially those who are disconnected and lacking community. God takes you in, feeds and establishes you in a place so that you can share your home, His home, with others.

## The What

Since we're talking about loving strangers and not entertaining, the bar is very different. The food doesn't need to be fancy, but we're not gnostics who say it doesn't matter: "He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast . . ." (Lk. 14:12-13). Jesus talks about dinners, banquets and feasts that people want to come to. The goal is to give in every way, and it's better to not be repaid. C.S. Lewis said somewhere that the only books we'll have in heaven are the ones we gave or loaned and didn't get back. Hospitality takes money, but not a lot. It's takes time, but less than most people think. It's driven by the love for others and interest in them. It's a willingness to give in order to know and serve. This is not selfish but it does bless us, much like Jesus' command to become great by serving. You get to see and know and care about someone who bears the image of God. Hospitality is the adventure of people, and when we are in our right minds, it's as natural as starting down down a lush, green trail that we have good reason to believe leads to a vista view. We can also acknowledge that some trails have a whole lot of nettles and spider webs that we encounter while pitting out. These trails always make for the best stories afterwards, a crucial part of the adventure.

## The Why

NOTES:

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We've already seen so many reasons why we're blessed to love strangers. But Jesus gives us *the* reason: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). How many of us would invite Jesus over for lunch if He were here with us today? To overlook the hungry, naked, sick, imprisoned and displaced is to forget about Him. Jesus is not giving us a justification by hospitality doctrine, but He is describing the goats as those who don't recognize His condemnation (vv41-46). In hospitality, we host people who bear the image of God, and Jesus receives this as if we had done it to Him. This is what someone close to God acts like. Jerome: "Let poor men and strangers be acquainted with your modest table, and with them Christ shall be your guest."

## The Result

When we love others this sacrificial way for Jesus' sake, the effect is wonderful: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). Biblical hospitality is sharing with gladness and simplicity of heart. There is no conflict or rivalry, and our focus is on the Lord. When our focus is on Him, other people look to Him and are saved.