

Sermon Series: If Jesus Came To Dinner

#1 Eating and Drinking – Luke 7:24-35

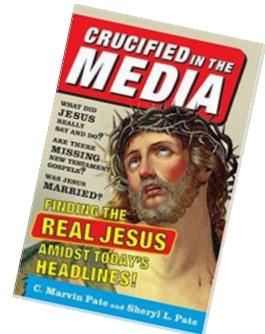
Intro

What headline would you write today about Jesus (on-line or on TV or in print) to grab the attention of the general public and have people genuinely investigate his purpose and his claims?

In 1st Century Galilee and Judea, there were some very vocal critics of both John the baptizer and Jesus of Nazareth creating negative “headlines” about both.

Headlines about John and Jesus

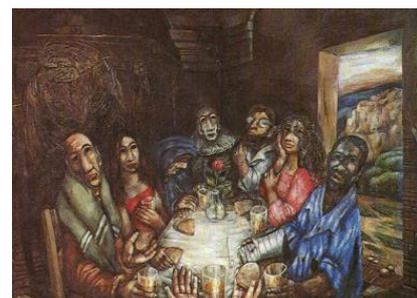
It was as people were “tweeting” about John and Jesus long before Twitter!



- Fascinated by the celebrity-style frenzy surrounding off-beat “John the Baptizer” with his desert-dwelling, hessian couture, feisty preaching, and frugal fasting (Matthew 3:1-12), the haters claimed he was demon-possessed (Luke 7:33).
- Equally, rumours were rife about Jesus of Nazareth who was said to be healing the sick miraculously wherever he went, but not among people from the top end of town, but among the riff-raff!

The religious elite of the day - a group known as the **Pharisees** was both threatened and outraged by the popularity *and* the substance of John and Jesus. They supercharged a **public smear campaign** with fake news about them. For example, in Luke 7:33,34 Jesus exposes the trolling, saying:

33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, “He has a demon.” 34 The Son of Man (referring to himself) came eating and drinking, and you say, “Here is a **glutton** and a **drunkard**, a **friend of tax collectors and sinners.**”



Jesus was being depicted publicly as a glutton (Gk. *phagos* = devourer)¹ and a drunkard (Gk. *oinopotes* = tippler) with claims he hung out with **outcasts**.²

It's important to note that Luke describes the company Jesus kept as "tax collectors and **others**" in chapter 5 (v.29). It's the Pharisees who labelled them "sinners" – because such "**outsiders**" didn't meet *their* standards of purity.

Jesus exposed the critical spirit of the haters in Luke 7:32, saying:

"They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.'"³

In other words, the Pharisees and experts in the Laws of the Old Testament prejudiced against the poor and the "unclean" would be dissatisfied **no matter which song was playing**. Like **trolls** on Twitter attacking ex-Royals **Harry and Megan** today, they would attack their chosen targets whether they acted one way or the other.

Headlines about the "Son of Man"

It's interesting to note that Jesus created **his own "headlines"** by taking the title of "**Son of Man**" in his public ministry.⁴ While it was a title sometimes taken to associate with the fragility of human life, it's likely Jesus liked the association of this title with a reference in The Book of Daniel, chapter 7 where a figure comes before God to receive **authority over all the nations**. Many Jews expected that this "Son of Man", the "Messiah" or "Christ", would come one day as a **warrior** overthrowing the Roman government; to promote them to **priority and power**.

Yet, note how Jesus described himself as "Son of Man" in the Gospels. In Mark 10:45 we are told that *this* Son of Man, Jesus, came...

¹ In Luke 5:33 the Pharisees also criticise Jesus' disciples as those who "eat and drink".

² Tax collectors were considered traitors not only to the nation, but to God for they were collaborators with the Gentile occupiers who had defiled God's holy land. So, the regular company Jesus kept when he ate and drank led the Pharisees to conclude that he couldn't be from God (Luke 5:30; 7:39; 15:1–2). A reasonable conclusion in their minds – unless God's grace is so amazing that even outcasts and enemies are included in God's saving purposes (Luke 5:27–39).

³ The reference to children is not to innocence in this case, but to ignorance of the difference of meaning in a song suited to a wedding celebration compared to one for a funeral march.

⁴ used in antiquity often to identify with common, frail humanity. The original Greek does not intend to exclude females (*anthropou* = humans, mortals)

- “not to be served but serve”.

In Luke 19:10 the Son of Man, we are told, came...

- “to seek and save the lost”.

Both examples provide **dramatic contrast** to the triumphal expectations of many at the time, but the third, from Luke 7:34 may have caused the most conversation. Here, the Son of Man is said to have come...

- “eating and drinking.”

Robert Karris observes that “in Luke’s Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.”

Tim Chester says, “...even when Jesus is not eating, **references to food abound** throughout the Gospel of Luke.

- In **Luke 14** Jesus tells a parable of a **great banquet**.
- In **Luke 15** Jesus tells of the prodigal son, which ends with a party.
- In Luke 16 he contrasts a **rich man** ‘who feasted sumptuously every day’ with a **beggar** ‘who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table.’
- Luke tells about the **women who provided food** for Jesus (8:2-3)
- [and points out that] on **the last day** people will say, ‘we ate and drank in your presence.’”

So here is a **headline** Jesus was **happy to wear**: The Son of Man came “**eating and drinking**”.

Granted, he may not have liked the tag of “**drunkard and glutton**” but frankly, if it suggested he was offering **grace and hope** to those society shuns, Jesus would have even **welcomed that!**

Along with preaching and healing (Lk. 7:22) we can add **eating and drinking with “outsiders”** (Lk. 7:34) to Jesus’ **modus operandi** in his mission.

Eating and Drinking

But **why** “eating and drinking”? And **why** with “outsiders”?

Tim Chester says, “**excess of food and excess** of grace are linked”.

Carolyn Steel in her book *Hungry City* writes,

“Few acts are more expressive of companionship than the **shared meal**...someone with whom we share food is likely to be our friend, or well on the way to becoming one.”

Throughout history, the table has been the **epicentre for relational life**. Meals today are still powerful expressions of **welcome, inclusion and friendship**.

This is why meals were so significant to Jesus (not merely because it was culturally important in the 1st Century). His table companionship **embodied God’s grace** and pointed to **a greater banquet promised in Jesus’ preaching**.⁵

It’s not just that food facilitates community and mission. Food is **central to who we are**, how **we relate to God** and to the story of **salvation**:

- Food reminds us of our **dependence on God**. We pray, “give us this day our daily bread” because we are finite beings who rely on the rest of creation to sustain us. Every meal, no matter how meagre, is an opportunity to acknowledge God as the giver and sustainer of life.
- Food reminds us of our **dependence on other people**. We are tied into a network of farmers, traders, shopkeepers, cooks, families and traditions.
- Food reminds us of the **richness and complexity of life**. Food is so much **more than fuel**. Think of all your favourite foods [Pause here for effect] It didn’t have to be this way – tablets with nutrients could sustain life. But the creation we are part of allows for **ridiculously lavish** creativity and generosity. God’s first act after creating humanity was to **present humankind with a menu**: the fruit of all the trees in the garden.
- We should also remember that food is **also at the heart of our rejection of God**. Genesis 3 records the first act of rebellion by humans as an act of **eating**. Our relationship with food often goes wrong because our relationship with God has gone wrong. Our fractured relationships and greed contributes to terrible inequity that keeps the poor poor.
- A shared table also **foreshadows the destiny** God promises to friends of Jesus – a destiny pictured in the Bible as a great **feast**.ⁱ

⁵ E.g. Matthew 22:9

So, the meals of Jesus represent **something bigger**. They represent **God's Kingdom as come**, and as **coming**. They represent friendship, community, generosity, inclusion and grace.

It follows that **how we regard food and drink** as Christians may also **convey the goodness of the Gospel to others**.

I've told the story before of my wife's bible study group. The group of 15 people gathered at a pizza house for a shared meal. During the evening the foursome on the table nearby watched with curiosity trying to determine what linked this diverse, closely knit collective. As Penne's group was leaving, one at the nearby table of four asked Charlie, a young bass player in Penne's church band, "Excuse me, we're just curious to know what you all have in common?" Quick as a wink Charlie answered, "That's easy, **we all have the same Father.**"

Where possible, let's go **beyond our own circle** in the way we share a table with others (whether at a café, a picnic, or at your own table).

It's no accident that at the heart of what it means to be the worshipping church is a **meal**.⁶ Jesus chose the setting of the Passover ritual (itself a meal) to call his followers to remember him – not merely in a pattern of words - but in a meal packed with **meaning**.⁷

The invitation to all that they are welcome at the Lord's table **comes at a price**: the precious blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

- **We are the outsiders**, even enemies of God⁸, and yet, we are **included**.
- Jesus became for us, and for the world, the **ultimate "outsider"**
- As a result, **we become the included**, the friend of God, **family**.
- This dinner invitation **goes out to all** people in the Gospels.

Rev. Steve Webster March 2020

(with acknowledgement to Tim Chester from his book *A meal with Jesus*)

⁶ In many of the early church examples of "remembering" Jesus' death on the cross Christians shared bread and wine amidst a meal e.g. Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 11:20-21

⁷ Luke 22:19

⁸ Romans 5:8-12

ⁱ When God leads the Israelites out of Egypt, the leaders of the people are invited up to Mount Sinai to eat and drink with God (Exodus 24:9–11). The rescue from slavery in Egypt – the defining act of Israelite identity – is itself commemorated in a meal, the meal of Passover. At the high point of Israelite history, in the reign of Solomon, we are told ‘the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy’ (1 Kings 4:20). Even when things begin to unravel, God promises another meal on a mountain, ‘a feast of rich food for all people’ (Isaiah 25:6–8). On this occasion death itself will be on the menu and God will swallow it up. This is an eternal feast that no one need ever leave. Jesus provides a foretaste of this feast when he feeds the five thousand. Here is a feast which need never end. Indeed there’s more food at the end than there was at the beginning. It’s a pointer to the fulfilment of God’s promise: that one day we will feast forever in his presence.