

Luke: Exploring the Connection Between Communion and Salvation

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Although Gonzalez referred to food, drink, and salvation as themes in Luke's Gospel, he did not quite tie them together in the definitive way of Luke. In Luke's Gospel, when food and drink (meal) were involved, salvation began to occur for participants in the meal. Additionally, even though Luke does not mention it, words of truth and the spirit of grace are shared with each meal. It is as if the meal (dinner) brought people close to Jesus so that He could share truth and grace (dessert) with those at the table. Truth and grace are what made God known to people.<sup>1</sup> The following will show the clear connection of a common meal with salvation. Additionally, Luke implied that a shared meal exhibited grace and seemed to lead people to receptivity of the gospel truth of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Pieced together, Gonzalez's perspective showed a definitive connection between a common meal and salvation: "The meal becomes an opportunity to announce the great reversal one more time. This reversal is not only social and economic, but also religious and spiritual."<sup>3</sup> Salvation was always a companion with Jesus at the dinner table.

Gonzalez mentioned the idea of the common meal and "the hope of salvation"<sup>4</sup> being tied together, but one could make a case that a meal being shared led not just to "the hope of salvation", but the salvation and redemptive process was always included with the meal. Gonzalez mentioned affirmation of this idea later in referencing the meal in the story of Emmaus, the two disciples who ate with Jesus said,

"how he had been made known to them in the breaking of bread"  
(Luke 24:35)...Jesus broke bread with his disciples, and in that very act he made himself known to them. The same has been the understanding of believers through the ages: that when we *take* this bread, bless it, break it, and give it, in these very acts the Lord is made known to us...In that moment, eschatology is not only a matter of the future but becomes also a present reality."<sup>5</sup>

When God was made known to people through Jesus Christ, the salvation journey had started. This theme, meals as precursors to the salvation journey, was seen in the other meals of Luke's Gospel. Jesus's first meal in Luke occurred when Jesus accepted an invitation to Levi's banquet and then stated His intentions of salvific healing to the

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:18

<sup>2</sup> John 1:17

<sup>3</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez. *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 85.

<sup>4</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez. *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 91.

<sup>5</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez. *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 103.

Pharisees.<sup>6</sup> Two chapters later, during a meal, Jesus extends salvation to a sinful woman and dense Pharisee.<sup>7</sup> In Luke 9, Jesus heals many and creates a miracle meal for the 5000. Although this meal was not as personal and intimate, the symbolism of His ability to completely satisfy as Savior is evident.

In Luke 10, the meal is implied with Mary and Martha, but Luke reminded that salvation cannot come by obedience to the Law (Martha's focus on completing the expected tasks) but through drawing near to Jesus (Mary).<sup>8</sup> In Luke 11, Jesus reclined at the table and then aggressively challenged the Pharisee's legalistic and backwards theology of salvation.<sup>9</sup> In Luke 14, Jesus delivers another important truth in regards to salvation. He elevates love as the greatest law by healing a man on the Sabbath.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus's time at Zacchaeus's house was Luke's most definitive relation between a meal and salvation. Although the meal is implied, Jesus spoke the word "salvation" over Zacchaeus's house.<sup>11</sup> At the Last Supper, Jesus announced salvation would occur through His body and blood.<sup>12</sup> Luke closed His Gospel with a meal in which Jesus ate and then walked His disciples through the salvation story and completely "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."<sup>13</sup>

Luke very clearly tied a shared meal with Jesus as a way for salvation to be extended to the participants. Additionally, Luke gave readers a glimpse for salvific strategy, the potent combination of truth and grace that Jesus introduced to the world with His incarnation.<sup>14</sup>

When a meal occurred in the Gospel of Luke, he revealed it as a softener of minds and hearts in which Jesus used his powerful tools of truth and grace to deliver salvation.<sup>15</sup> In Luke 5, Jesus showed grace by accepting Levi's dinner invitation and dining with people no respected rabbi would eat with. He then delivered a powerful truth to the Pharisees about why He was dining with this motley crew.<sup>16</sup> In chapter 7, Jesus shared a

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 5:31-32

<sup>7</sup> Luke 7:36-50

<sup>8</sup> Luke 10: 38-42

<sup>9</sup> Luke 11: 37-52

<sup>10</sup> Luke 14:1-4

<sup>11</sup> Luke 19:9

<sup>12</sup> Luke 22:19-20

<sup>13</sup> Luke 24:42-49

<sup>14</sup> John 1:17

<sup>15</sup> John 1:17

<sup>16</sup> Luke 5: 31-32

meal with two people who would normally never eat together. He fed truth to the Pharisee, carving away with His theological scalpel to expose the wound of legalism and pride. He fed grace to the sinful woman, who felt so safe with Jesus and His wave of grace and acceptance, that she emptied the last part of herself onto His feet.<sup>17</sup> A few meals later, Jesus exhibited grace by healing a man with abnormal swelling and delivered truth: love over law.<sup>18</sup> With Zacchaeus, Jesus's grace in accepting Zacchaeus's invitation to be a guest immediately led to Zacchaeus acknowledging the truth of his sin and repenting immediately.

Luke closed his Gospel with two powerful examples of salvific truth and grace being delivered with a meal. Jesus drew near and walked with (grace) His disciples on the road to Emmaus and then revealed the powerful message of salvation, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."<sup>19</sup> As these two disciples shared this miraculous occurrence with the other disciples, Jesus appeared to all of them (grace) and delivered a powerful conclusion of truth, "The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."<sup>20</sup>

Gonzalez scattered the shared meal and salvation connection throughout his book, but a thorough reading of the meals in Luke's Gospel showed a clear and intentional connection between a shared meal and salvation. Additionally, Luke presented the strategy of salvation: A shared meal typically led to an openness and receptivity of the truth and grace of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 7:36-50

<sup>18</sup> Luke 14:1-6

<sup>19</sup> Luke 24:27

<sup>20</sup> Luke 24:46-47