

A long dining table set with white linens, glassware, and red flowers in white vases. The table is set for a meal, with various glassware and plates visible. The background shows a framed picture on the wall.

"Come & Dine"

THE LONG

JOURNEY

HOME

LENT/EASTER 2013

Patrick J. Griffiths

“COME & DINE”

The Long Journey Home

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An Introduction

What is meant by the word liturgical? Liturgy literally means public duty. It refers to the actions of a group. It is the form in which the work is done. As it relates to our public worship service it refers to the structure or form. The liturgical calendar enables us to look at the year as a whole, recognizing and celebrating the various seasons that mark the major movements within the *Story*.

Why is the liturgical calendar a healthy observance? The times in which we live are not exceptional. Every era has been marked by fracture, opportunity, and drift. Our present lives are not different than our past ancestors. Although technology has enabled some to be perpetually plugged into a world of superficial communication, needless interruptions and erratic distractions, life is always marked by the struggle to stay anchored to who God is, what He has done, who we are, and why we exist.

By marking the three larger movements inside of the liturgical calendar one can go about intentionally remembering the bookends of God's *Story*. The first movement, ADVENT, speaks to the idea that "God is with us" (Matt. 1:23). This has been His desire and design for creation. **From the very beginning of the biblical Story God has sought to dwell with His people so that they would enjoy Him forever.** When we mark ADVENT we are celebrating the truth that He is with us in the incarnation. The second movement, LENT/EASTER, speaks to the idea that "It is finished" (John 19:30). **Our betrayal of Him is met with His provision for us.** He establishes the means whereby we are redeemed from our sin and adopted into His family. The third movement, PENTECOST, speaks to

the idea, "Go and tell" (Matt. 28:18-20). PENTECOST fills His people with hope knowing God reigns and finishes the *Story* He began. PENTECOST is the glad proclamation of God's victory over sin and death shared with anyone, everywhere at all times.

As we approach the LENT/EASTER season we are reminded of how God prepared for His people a place where they might dwell with Him and enjoy His presence forever. Although traditionally during Lent emphasis is often placed on how we make ourselves pleasing and acceptable to God through personal preparation, the Scripture speaks contrary to such thinking. The biblical narrative speaks of how God has prepared a place for us to encounter Him. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God. There is no human preparation capable of spanning the gap that exists between God and man. This would be true even if Adam and Eve had never sinned. There was no preparation made by Adam or Eve that enabled their encounter with God. God prepared the platform for this encounter. After they betrayed Him, they attempted to correct the problem through their own effort (Gen. 3:7) but their remedy only compounded the problem. God made the way.

This same principle is still true. God prepares the meal and we come and dine. The act of tending to the garden or vineyard, or accepting the invitation, or sitting at the table, or eating and drinking are all faith acts. Every one of those activities simply says, "I believe."

With all of this considered, let us quickly note how seeing LENT/EASTER as a season of "spring cleaning" can be valid. It isn't so much the season of LENT/EASTER that promotes cleaning and simplification as it is a yearly

reminder to wash the dirt off our feet knowing we are already clean (John 13:10). All of us have a tendency to drown in the immediate. It is often referred to as the tyranny of the urgent, when our busyness robs us of His business. We swim in a puddle of the good and rob ourselves of washing in the ocean of the best. We dabble with dirt pies when He offers us the abundance of His banquet table. The process of removing all of the impediments blocking our view of Him is good, but this process is just a shadow. The shadow isn't intrinsically bad but becomes so because we enable it to become so. Before we know it "the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).

Thus the activity of making ourselves ready in principle is good, but we must be careful that it does not rob us of the best. The larger idea of Scripture is seen and the means of understanding the *Story* is found when emphasis is placed on **God's quest to celebrate His greatness through the joy of His people in Him. God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.**¹ All of Scripture speaks to this preparation whereby His people might enjoy His presence forever.

Whatever preparation we make is only in response to God's initial movement. He prepares a place where we encounter Him and we accept the invitation to come, to believe He is enough. Our preparation does not create the platform or the encounter. Our preparation only says, "I believe." No matter what we think we are doing to undo God's activity, He is always acting to encounter. He is always seeking to enable us to enjoy Him forever.

Do you believe this? Do you believe that He is enough in this life and in the life to come? Do you believe He is not only necessary, but He is enough? Do you believe beside Him there is no one and beyond Him there is nothing? Do you believe that everything without Him is nothing and He with nothing else is everything? God wants you to enjoy Him. He created you for this end. He knows your greatest happiness and joy can only be achieved in Him. Everything else apart from Him is shadow joy. It is in "His presence [there] is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Ps. 16:11). Let us never allow the shadow to take from us the simple joy of knowing Him.

May this LENT/EASTER season find us drawing near as a family of families through the blood of Jesus and His position as our great high priest (Heb. 10:19-25). May this LENT/EASTER season find us pushing aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us and with joy looking to Jesus who is the author and finisher of faith (Heb. 12:1, 2). May our eyes be opened and our palates cleansed so that with joy we taste and see God's invitation to "come and dine."

Feb. 17
2013

What Happened?

Genesis 3:1-8



The phrase “Welcome back” presupposes absence. The phrase “the long journey home” speaks to once being home, being absent, and now moving toward one’s final destination. Something happened that removed us from “home.” What happened?

In the beginning God created a garden, a sanctuary if we please, an environment where humanity might live with Him and enjoy His presence forever. The Bible refers to this Garden as the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). In time a shift took place in the thinking of humanity’s first couple, Adam and Eve. At a pivotal point, they moved away from simply trusting God to trusting someone or something else. **In their quest to love God they sought to be like God and then be God.** The reversing of this rebellion is the content of the biblical *Story* and to this end, the *Story* begins.

Although much focus is on the actions of Adam and Eve, and rightly so we might add, I find the movement of God more compelling, and conceivably more scandalous than what they did. Scandalous in the sense that it is shocking to think God would choose to pursue a relationship with man. **First**, God’s habit of walking in the Garden in the cool of the day to meet with His people is scandalous. Why would God stoop to such a level as to commune with created things? **His joy was in the joy of those who experienced joy in His presence.** He joys in the joy of His people. This same joy is present when we give gifts to our children and thereby joy in their joy. We give simply to see their joy. How many times have we waited with anticipation to see someone’s expression of joy upon receiving a gift? God delights in

giving Himself to His people in order that they might joy in Him and their joy is His joy. Thus, God comes to the garden in order that Adam and Eve might have joy. God knows in His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forever more (Ps. 16:11). John speaks to this joy.

⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and **find pasture**. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; **I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly**. (John 10:9, 10)

The Garden created by God for His people is a pastureland (Ps. 23). In the pasture of God the people of God are well fed. God knows this. He is the pastureland.

Second, God seeking, pursuing, and asking, “Where are you” is scandalous (v. 9). The thoughts and intent of Adam and Eve’s hearts were already laid bare before the one who knows everything. God could have justly dismissed this pursuit. He could have chosen to let them face the bitter fruit of their choice. God was the shunned lover. He “felt” the sting of their rejection, yet still He pursued. God has done everything necessary for the fullest and final experience and expression of our capacity for joy. He only and alone fills our emotional cups to overflow. We push ourselves away from the banquet table of God’s provision. Yet He calls and invites.

Adam’s confession of guilt is readily heard in response to the question, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself” (v. 10). What was this sound? It was a warm sound, a sound like the soothing tones of a mother’s words and the soft babbling of a cooing baby. It was the relieving water of a warming shower cascading and caressing the body of the weary and

heavy laden. Yet Adam's rebellion caused him to recoil in dread and shame. What was to invite and comfort became repugnant and fear-filled. What happened? Sin happened. Sin pushed us from God and sin keeps us from coming. God persistently pursues; He continually invites and welcomes us back with open arms. Come we must. The house has been prepared and the table is set. God welcomes us into the warmth of His fire on a long and cold journey of absence. He is there warmly receiving and patiently waiting. May this LENT/EASTER season find us recognizing the passion of God for His people. Remember, the larger idea of Scripture is seen and the means of understanding the *Story* is found when emphasis is placed on **God's quest to celebrate His greatness through the joy of His people in Him. God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.** All of Scripture speaks to this preparation whereby His people might enjoy His presence forever in the Garden of His making. Friends, let us come and satiate our hunger with God. Come, my friends, and dine.

2

And There Was War in Heaven

Feb. 24
2013

Misc. – The Old Testament Narrative (Rev. 12:7)

The *Story* begins in a garden, the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). It is everything imaginable. Regrettably, we shunned the invitation and sought our own path. It was/is a path leading us away from God. Happily, God is a passionate lover who keeps promises. He is repudiated yet He receives the heartbreak of jilted love. God had every right to withhold mercy and carry out the sentence of justice against the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Such would be this unhappy *Story* . . . **but God**. In the midst of striking pain, God spoke a promise and then gave a picture. Genesis 3:15 speaks of this promise.

And I will put **enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.** (Gen. 3:15)

God wins, but there will be cost for the end to be secured. This cost is illustrated in shadow. It is pictured for us in Genesis 3:21.

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. (Gen. 3:21)

In order for the relationship between God and His people to be restored blood was shed and atonement was made. The picture explains the promise. In the bruising of the head, victory is secured. In the bruising of the heel, blood is shed.

In every way and at every turn the serpent's seed seeks to stop the construction of another garden scene where God's presence might dwell and where His people would enjoy

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Him forever. The Seed Promise is relentlessly pursued by the serpent's seed. This tension colors the entire picture. It is a spice that flavors the whole. Please consider the following chapters of the *Story* as this tension is traced throughout the long journey home.

Cain murdered Abel (Gen. 4:8), the daughter's of men cohabitated with the sons of God (Gen. 6:2), the attempt to replace God's government with a centralized tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-10), the lies of Abraham and Jacob (Gen. 12:10-16; 27:18-29), Lot's drunkenness and incest (Gen. 19:30-38), the sin cycles of unfaithfulness within the Book of Judges, the sins of King David and his son Solomon, the rise and reign of Jeroboam, the dispersion of the nation at the hands of the Assyrians, the deportation of Judah to Babylon by the Babylonians, the impurity and moral corruption of the returned exiles and a people unprepared for the fulfillment of the Seed Promise when fulfilled; there is tension and trauma throughout the Seed's journey.

The *Story* is a checkered one with various twists and turns. Yet each step within the *Story* is intentional. Each footstep is firmly placed. The Book of Revelation gives us a snapshot of the entire *Story* and captures for the reader a summary of the whole. It is as if we are reading *Cliffs Notes* for the entire biblical narrative. Listen to how the Book of Revelation captures this journey home.

When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. (Rev. 1:7)

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, (Rev. 12:7)

So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make **war** with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Rev. 12:17)

they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage **war** with him?" (Rev. 13:4)

It was also given to him to make **war** with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. (Rev. 13:7)

for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the **war** of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Rev. 16:14)

These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful. (Rev. 17:14)

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make **war** against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. (Rev. 19:19)

and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the **war**; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. (Rev. 20:8)

Even this cursory reading of the various passages sets a tone and tells the tale. What was stated in Genesis 3:15 (And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel) is graphically illustrated in the Book of Revelation. There is war. A battle is fought against and for the fulfillment of God's promise. It is vicious and striking. Without having the entire record there is considerable suspense and sharp drama. It is premature to

race to the end and perhaps such literary leapfrogging does an injustice to the drama of the entire *Story*, but let us peek for a moment as to how this conflict is resolved.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11-15)

From this deafening drama an unveiling takes place. From death comes life. Let us witness the birth of the best.

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4)

Although God's *Story* is predetermined and without drama or suspense within the eternal counsel of the Godhead, in time it is traumatic. With supernatural confrontation and supra-human opposition the *Story* plods faithfully forward toward its fixed end. God relentlessly pursues the setting up of an earthly sanctuary whereby He will dwell among His

people and they will enjoy His presence forever. God relentlessly prepares each part as the banquet table is set and the invitation extended (Matt. 22:1-4). Listen carefully to the Spirit's voice and you will hear the ever increasing rise in volume and energy, "Come and dine."

Mar. 3
2013

The Hour Has Come

The Gospel of John

3

³ So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴ But **when the fullness of the time came**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal. 3:3-5)

“I promise,” how many times have we heard this statement or perhaps have said this statement? We grow up hearing such things. Some people are premeditated liars. They make statements without any intent of keeping them. They lie to achieve an end, their goal. While others of us intend to keep our promises we often fail because of human frailty. We hear “I promise” from our parents, we grow up saying “I promise,” we marry and make vows promising, and then start the cycle all over again by promising our children and grandchildren such things. Yet, we realize we make promises knowing we cannot keep them all. In fact, if we know ourselves, we do not make promises. We agree to do what we say, but we also understand it might not happen simply because we are human.

Well, this idea is not true as it relates to God. What God says/promises will come to pass. And it will come to pass 100% of the time. There is no gap between what God desires to be done and what is done. This brings us to our next place in God’s *Story*.

We are considering an enormous swath of Scripture in just eight studies. We are moving from God’s intent in creating, our rejection of Him, and His quest to bring us back to joy in Him to the embodiment of the promise and picture in a person and His work. The means God will use to bring us

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back to our joy in Him is through His Son. Everything in the *Story* points to Him.

There was a point in time when the promises of God would find ultimate fulfillment. Perhaps more than anyone else John speaks of a specific hour/time when the purpose of God in the *Story* of God would come to its breaking point. Listen to how John captures the thought of Paul and Mark.

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4)

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." (John 4:21)

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:23)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." (John 5:25)

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice," (John 5:28)

So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. (John 7:30)

These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come. (John 8:20)

And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (John 12:23)

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." (John 12:27)

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Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. (John 13:1)

They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. (John 16:2)

But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. (John 16:4)

Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. (John 16:21)

These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. (John 16:25)

Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. (John 16:32)

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You" (John 17:1)

Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" (John 19:14)

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)

It is evident specificity is marked. There is something very special about this time as opposed to other times. And whatever this time points to or addresses, it is finished. For us to understand the fulfillment of a time, it is necessary for us to grasp the biblical *Story*. The time is the fulfillment of the Seed Promise and the completion of the Blood Picture. The purpose of both is to rescue us from our sin and its resultant consequences through redemption and thus restore us in our relationship with God so that we might be with Him and enjoy Him forever. That is what this entire *Story* is all about.

We are slowly zeroing in and bringing each piece into focus. This study looks like a picture that is made up of a million little pictures. When you see the picture you see the whole, but when you zero in you cannot see the whole; you do, however, see the pieces that make up the whole. Right now we have considered the whole as it relates to promise and fulfillment. In our next studies we will consider smaller pieces making up the whole.

This moment in time cannot be easily dismissed. Let us recognize this moment for what it is. The choice before each of us is clear. We will either embrace Him as the Lord of glory and the Savior of our souls or we will dismiss Him as such and side with those who would seek His destruction. Those are the only two options before us. There is no other option.

The Lord of Glory continues His preparation; the Spirit of God calls. May we heed His wooing, "Come and dine."

Mar. 10
2013

Tell John What You See

Matthew 11:1-6

4

The bloody conflict is rapidly rushing toward its ultimate end. The tangible world is about to viciously collide with the intangible. Heaven and earth will embrace violently. Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of ancient promises and the completion of sacrificial pictures.

John the Baptist found himself at the end of his ministry, imprisoned and alone. John had baptized Jesus and he declared him to be the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). John knew Jesus and in an emotionally overwhelming and physically taxing moment he asked an uncomplicated question, “Are you the expected One?” That is the question hanging thick in the air. It was a question woven into the very fabric of every Israelite. Our Lord’s answer speaks to expectation.

It is impossible to capture the emotional surge taking place in ancient Israel for those who were surrounding Jesus Christ and were able to witness and hear all He did and said. Jesus was preceded by John the Baptizer and the air was already thick with anticipation. When Jesus opened the scroll and read from Isaiah the prophet in the Nazarene synagogue, the moment was psychologically charged (Luke 4:14-22). There was nothing unusual about the setting. He followed protocol. Yet what He read and the manner in which it was read was unusual.

¹⁸ "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO

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ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE
YEAR OF THE LORD." (Luke 4:18, 19)

The text tells us "the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him" (v. 20).

The word "fixed" is used almost exclusively by the writer Luke (Luke 4:20; 22:56; Acts 1:10; 3:4, 12; 6:15; 7:55; 10:4; 11:6; 13:9; 14:9; 23:1). Paul uses the word only twice (2 Cor. 3:7, 13). It is a word filled with energy and intensity. Jesus recognized His mission and purpose in the world. This isn't a moment of epiphany for Him. He always knew. The tone of what He did pulled people in, "All were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" (v. 22)

Jesus' mission is clearly outlined in Luke 4:18, 19. When John's disciples asked Jesus the question, Jesus' response was for them to tell John what they heard and saw (Matt. 11:4). Certain things were happening around the Rabbi Jesus that had never happened before. Demons were exorcised from the possessed, the mute spoke, the deaf heard, the blind saw, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the immoral were loved without condition, the outcast were received without requirement, the guilty were forgiven without limit, prodigals were favored without merit and sinners were served without reward. Word of His movement and message spread like prairie fire on parched open plains.

²³ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. ²⁴ **The news about Him spread throughout all Syria;** and they brought to

Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵ **Large crowds followed Him** from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. (Matt. 4:23-25)

When evening came, **they brought to Him many** who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. (Matt. 8:16)

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Matt. 9:35)

²⁹ Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there. ³⁰ And **large crowds came to Him**, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. ³¹ **So the crowd marveled** as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. (Matt. 15:29-31)

The conclusion for the common observer is recorded (Matt. 9:33).

After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "**Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.**" (Matt. 9:33)

The emotional impact on the audience would be no different than if we in our technologically savvy culture began to see and experience the same. Long before anyone can remember there was a recipe spoken of for the most delicious meal conceivable. Such a meal would satisfy the most demanding appetite and fulfill the most discerning palate. Each ingredient was necessary and knowable. When

each part came into play and appropriately mixed, the outcome would be a meal of unprecedented proportions. In the person and work of Jesus Christ that time has come. All preparations have been made and the bell has been sounded. It is time; "Come and Dine."

Mar. 17
2013

Come and Dine

Matthew 22:1-14



“Tell those who have been invited, ‘Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast’” (Matt. 22:4)

Matthew’s Gospel captures the tension between those who embrace the Seed Promise and those who are in opposition to the Seed Promise. In Matthew 22, the entire biblical *Story* is retold using a wedding metaphor. The author’s intent is to show just how lavish God’s preparations are for His people. They remove the curtain and enable the reader to see just how far God goes in inviting and welcoming His guests into His celebration. Jesus speaks of the *Story* as parable.² We will lay out the comparisons in simple format for the purpose of understanding. The intent is to give the text its correct read.

A King	God the Father
A Wedding Feast	Creation’s purpose for His people to delight in Him
His Son	Jesus Christ
His slaves	Prophets
Those invited	The Jewish nation
Unwilling to come	The fallen nature
Mistreated them and killed them	Martyrdom
The King was enraged	God will judge those who reject Him
As many as you find	The Gentiles
Both evil and good	Jews and Gentiles
The Wedding hall was filled	God wins
Not dressed in wedding clothes	No one comes without God’s righteousness which He provides.
The man was speechless	God is just
Cast him into outer darkness	Future judgment awaits those who refuse the King’s offer
Many called; few chosen	The invitation is wide, but must be heeded

“COME & DINE” – The Long Journey Home - LENT/EASTER 2013

In Matthew, God invites the nation of Israel to dine at the prepared feast, but they refuse. God then brings the invitation to the Gentiles and they come. But not only do they come but both Jew and Gentile are present. Neither one is there because of personal merit. The only way to sit at the table and partake of the feast is to wear the garment of the King, for no one present without the garment is able to stay.

What I desire for us to capture is the metaphor itself. In the beginning, God created the Garden of Eden, a sanctuary, a banquet table if you will, where He enabled those invited to enjoy Him forever.

⁸ The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. ⁹ **Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food;** the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:8, 9)

You will make known to me the path of life; **In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.** (Ps. 16:11)

⁷ How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. ⁸ **They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;** And **You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.** ⁹ For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light. (Ps. 36:7-9)

⁶ The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; **A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine.** ⁷ And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is

stretched over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. (Is. 25:6, 7)

Indeed, the LORD will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places. And her wilderness He will make like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the LORD; **Joy and gladness will be found in her, Thanksgiving and sound of a melody.** (Isa. 51:3)

This *Story* is one of condescending grace where God knows those who He has created can have the fullest of joy. God designed us to have fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). We taste and see such joys in shadow form. All of our lives are played in type. God put all of life into play so that through them we might taste and see that He is good. Think of every imaginable pleasure and joy one might have whether through sensory experience or emotional awe. Think of all the joy and emotion expressed in the simple idea of a wedding feast. There is an abundance of delicacy and gratification. When we think of such joy or pleasure it is tainted by human experience and fallen appetites, yet there are glimpses of these unadulterated experiences at weddings, births, and victory.

It is hard for us to grasp this idea, but God designed us for happiness and He has prepared the place and means for that happiness to be fully expressed and experienced. This place, this wedding feast is Him. He is the place and prepared feast. All that He gives of Himself is for us to know Him. **He knows in knowing Him we are fully satisfied.** He is the bread from heaven whereby His people are satiated with divine euphoria. Everything in us craves for this saturation. Tragically so, we turn to shadow to meet the longing. Every abuse of every kind in every age speaks to this one need and

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our ache for fulfillment. Every soured relationship is the quest to find in the relationship the love and acceptance we are designed to experience only in God. We place on the shadow a burden it was never meant to bear. Shadows can never provide, they can only point. Every type speaks of an antitype, the figure casting the shadow. To stop with shadow is to come up short. The hype of shadow leaves one wanting. God invites us to “come and dine.”

The invitation is broad and inviting. It is sweeping and warm. See Him standing beside the embracing warmth of the home hearth. His gesture points to plenty. The room is filled with inviting aromas speaking of pleasant times and future contentment. He has done everything necessary for you, the invited, to experience a fullness of joy previously known but long forgotten. Your soul knows this. Your heart aches for the return. You have believed the faint echo was only a misty dream of a vanishing mirage.

He is there, “Come and dine.” See it. Hear it. Act on it and COME.

Mar. 24
2013

**Palm Sunday –
Eden Remix**
Matthew 21:1-11



In the beginning God created a Garden where He would dwell with His people and they would enjoy Him forever. Yet they rejected His invitation. Because of their rebellion against Him, He casts them out of the Garden. He then went about doing what was necessary to reverse the curse and bring His people back into His presence.

Palm Sunday, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, is Eden remixed. The triumphal entry condenses the panoramic *Story* of God into a snapshot. Matthew 21 revisits the Garden of Eden, the place where God dwelt with his people. Now Jesus enters the temple, another place where God dwelt with his people. From Matthew 21 there are several salient features.

First, His presence in a fallen world continues to confront the recipients with one of two choices. They can either receive Him as the King of glory or dismiss Him as nothing more than what they already have.

Those who are whole need not a physician, but those who are sick. The Lord did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). It isn't that the whole need not the physician. It is they do not recognize their need of the physician. Jesus is the great physician who heals the hearts of humanity. Dismiss Him should you choose, but who He is and what He does cannot and will not be altered by the likes of us.

This brings us to our present text and its placement as the igniter of Passion Week. Jesus Christ enters the city and comes into His Garden, the Temple, and seeks to meet with His people. They have failed to tend the Garden/Temple. The surroundings are unkempt, weeds have grown up unaddressed. No edible produce is available. He weeps and His heart breaks. It isn't for Himself, but for His people. Their conduct keeps them from the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore that are in His presence and at His right hand. Like Adam and Eve, He once more drives His people from the Garden/Temple. And again the innocent will be offered (cp. Gen. 3:21 w/ John 19:30) in place of the guilty in order to reverse the curse.

It is appropriate for such an event to take place. Every encounter with the *Story* bends our knees and bows our heads. God's condescension is marked by humiliation and humbleness. The undeserving and unlovable are received. He has made every necessary preparation for His people to come and dine. The invitation is open and the host stands warmly at the door to receive any who come. Now it is for us to come. Feel the warmth of the moment and let us come and dine.

Mar. 29
2013

**Good Friday –
“But the LORD was
Pleased to Crush Him”**



Isa. 53:10, Matthew 27

Good Friday must always be placed in the larger *Story*. The brutality of this moment is all too common. Countless multitudes have suffered at the hands of political oppressors and spiritual exploiters. Yet, there is something utterly extraordinary in what is about to unfold. All previous betrayals and shuttering violence are but shadows of the voluntary sacrifice brought by and contained in this one sacrifice. Every sordid story pushes to this one *Story* and will forever flow from this *Story*. Although stories can speak of sacrifice and substitution and atonement, none have ever or will ever contain the burden bearing and embracing force of this one sacrifice. It will be final and forever a “once for all” offering.

The stumbling and scandalous nature of this offering is the wrappings enclosing the offering. It is the pleasure the LORD takes in the crushing that is confusing. Unless and until we grasp this singular piece in the larger play we will continue to stumble and dismiss. The crushing is a consequence of God’s singular delight to bring us into His presence so that we might enjoy Him forever. This is the only means to secure such an end.

Yet like Joseph we observe the evil intent of those who bring the offering. What God means for good, others mean for evil (Gen. 50:20, 21). The hands bringing the offering are dirty hands smudging the purity of the offering. We can easily see the soiled thumbprints of the self-righteous religious

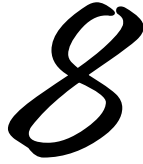
establishment as they plot Jesus' death (Matt. 27:1). Making out the betrayer's indentation is easily recognizable (v. 3). Remorse flows freely as the damage of the adulterous act descends on fevered brow. The self-preservation of the political appeaser, Pilate, taints the sacrifice by feeble attempts to delegate guilt and dismiss duty (vv. 11-15).

The wrappings cannot hide the magnitude of the event. Let us not think for one moment that the serpent's seed (i.e. Satan) does not realize the significance of what is befalling them. "Let us sacrifice, but let us not bring the lamb that is spotless and without blemish." Barabbas is nothing more or less than an attempt to divert the *Story*. Like all elements within this scene each plays a part. On one hand we hear the unified cry of Adam's seed, "crucify Him" (vv. 22, 23). And on the other hand we taste the acidic seasoning of hell's company seeking to push an artificial element unto the menu of God's preparing. Much more can be said of Barabbas, yet this much must be said.

We need not linger in the reading of our text. Between verses 26 and 49 there is nothing but the raw emotion, guilt encased outrage and shard remains of spent passion. In the midst of darkness there is light and in defeat there is victory, but oh the wrenching scene paving this path.

Verse 50 initiates the victory. John captures this moment with, "It is finished" (John 19:30; Rev. 21:6). The means of returning to Edenic conditions has been fully and finally achieved. All who thirst may come; the weak and heavily laden may find their rest in Him. We can sit, because He stood. We can rest, because He worked. We can be filled, because He was emptied. And we can live, because He died.

There is no other conclusion to this graphic image but “Truly this was the Son of God!” (v. 62). Swirling about this muddied scene is a promise, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I am to rise again’” (v. 63). Can it be, is it so? Come and see.



Easter Sunday – “He is not here, For He is Risen!”

Mar. 31
2013

Matthew 28:1-10

The end has been achieved, the victory won, the race finished, the structure built, the meal fully and finally prepared. Now we can sit and dine! His kingdom has come; His will has been done on earth even as it is in heaven. Glory to the King of kings and Lord of lords! There is a bursting forth of light pushing back the darkness that must be felt and not simply seen or heard. All of our sensory capacities need to feel the pounding and pushing out of glory in this spectacular moment, “He is not here, for He is Risen!”

The death and dying of the previous day are beaten back and swallowed up by the majesty and mystery of this moment. There is an anxiousness felt in the approach of the two women named Mary. The earth “gets it.” She trembles (Matt. 27:52; 28:2) at the magnitude of this moment where heaven and earth meet and in wrath mercy is remembered (Hab. 3:2) and the justice of God and the peace of God embrace and exchange the “kiss” of reconciliation (Ps. 85:10).³

The pieces of this moment are significant in themselves, but when laid against the larger *Story* of redemption, reconciliation and adoption the force is knee bending and mind blowing. This is where the body quivers and the mind lies in ecstatic ecstasy. There is a shaking taking place, “He is not here, for He is Risen!”

There are a series of words that must not be overlooked: come and see, go and tell, fear and joy. Friend, are you weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28)? Do you find yourself groping in the darkness and confusion of the moment? Do you feel the social ostracizing of one who is ceremonially unclean? Is the entire world shrouded in the white noise of anxious moments? Is every taste one of metallic blandness? Is the residue of leftover relationships more bitter than sweet? Is the hole in which you subsist crumbling in and nowhere is seen any foothold or hand grab through which you might pull yourself up and out? Listen carefully to the angelic words, "Come and See." Come . . . and . . . See.

Let this simple invitation be the faint light at the end of a dark tunnel. See that light, hear the whisper and come. Feel the cool water drip onto the parched lips of your soul. Feel the comforting hand take your feeble hand. Feel His cradling arm encircling your limp head. Come . . . and . . . See. Friend, "He is not here, for He is Risen!" God has secured for you a place where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). It is no secret. You need not linger at death's dusty door. Cannonball into the pool of God's delights. This place where you might plunge in with childlike joy has a name and His name is Jesus.

As you feel the infusion of life, the staying of thirst's persistent assault and the satisfying of hunger's call, continue to come and see. Don't stop, worry not about stumbling, just come and see. As you take up your mat and walk, now "go and tell." Friend, you are not alone in your fallen condition. There is solidarity in the emptiness of life. Tragically, we look to the good for the best, and the good can only point, it can never provide. Many of us, like Adam and Eve, have fashioned leaves of our own making when we must come to the singular provision of God in the person

and work of Jesus Christ. Let your joy and peace and rest and ease be the message of your life. Cease from your self effort and striving and rest in the fullness and finality of His. Now, go . . . and . . . tell. Others are waiting for this same cool cup of God's joy. Many lie outside groping about in a dark soundless room. Reach out and speak, "He is not here, for He is Risen!" Let the word of deliverance speak for itself. He has spoken and it is so.

It is impossible for the fear and joy to be contained. We fear it is too stupendous to be true, BUT IT IS! "He is not here, for He is Risen!" Like the earth, we tremble at the magnitude and mystery of the *Story's* climax. There is a wrenching, a convulsion of emotion as fear and joy crash together and explode as waves beating against the shores of our life. Can we not feel the cooling mist of God's ocean of activity? It is breathtaking. Sigh deeply. Go limp. Let yourself be carried away at the vastness of His mercy and grace. Step back and see the panorama of God.

O friend, there is nothing left for us to do but meet Him and receive His embrace (v. 9). Here we are once more in the Garden with God as He walks with us in the cool of the day. It is here. Look no further. Is He not enough? I no longer need to worry about being rude, of interrupting, of not paying attention, of drifting in my thoughts, of flittering about from one object to the next. I no longer have to measure up or work out. I can gladly go about the business. He is arresting. He grabs us and never let's us go. Exhale and breath the "ah" of relief. This is the Garden, this is the gospel, this is the resurrection from the dead, and this is life in God. Come and dine!

Apr. 7
2013

Home at Last

John 14:1-3



The entire journey from start to finish is marked by the design and quest to return to what once was. It is fitting to start where we end in order to begin well. Our text (John 14:1-3) is wrapped in the warmth of an intimate setting filled with overflowing emotion marked by harsh tones and sharp colors. Within this stormy setting are the celebration of the Jewish Passover and the imminent fulfillment of ancient promises.

It would appear a repeat performance is played before the audience. We can reach back to an earlier time when on the Sea of Galilee we find ourselves in the midst of a violent and vicious storm. While the disciples feared for their lives, Jesus slept peacefully in the boat. His words then are equally appropriate here, "Why are you afraid" (Mark 4:40). Much was taught and much needed to be learned.

The same type of tumultuous storm breaks all around the little band of heartbroken and bewildered disciples as they meet in the upper room. This context is no different than the experience on the Sea of Galilee. Now, like then, their circumstances threaten their very lives. And yet the menace to them is even more profound. Rather than mere life, they are fighting for their very souls and the embodiment of their national dreams in a Messiah. Into this context Jesus once again speaks peace, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." Although this event precedes the marking of Good Friday and the celebration of Resurrection Sunday, it is riddled by a past promise.

God created a Garden, a sanctuary, a dwelling place for Himself where He might meet His people in the cool of the day in order that they would enjoy His presence forever (Gen. 3:8). God comforts His people in difficult times by calling them to remember Him. He is the reason why peace is possible in the midst of storms. "You believe in God, believe also in Me." How simple. The idea of a dwelling place where He might meet with His people is clearly marked for us by His following statement, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." His preparation of this place is no different than His creative hand in Genesis 1 and 2. It is the same invitation seen throughout the journey of the Jewish nation through Tabernacle and Temple. And it is no different than the Church being His Temple (1 Cor. 3:6). God has prepared Himself a dwelling place where He might be with His people and they might enjoy His presence forever.

God seeks to still their anxious hearts and quiet their racing minds by reminding them of His persistent pursuit, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." This is His design. This is His quest, for His people to dwell with Him and enjoy Him forever.

This *Story* does not end here. In chronicling the last written word from God in Revelation 21 (@90AD) we hear the Spirit speak once more,

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He

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will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. ⁸ "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." ⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. . . ²² I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; ²⁶ and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; ²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:1-11, 22-27)

And for almost 2,000 years this future hope fills our present perplexity with expectancy. What Jesus said and secured speaks to a certain end. We know where all this is heading and we, like the early disciples, can hear the words of our Lord comforting and encouraging, strengthening and securing, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." May this be the word delivering us

from our past failure, present bondage and future worries.
O friends and fellow pilgrims, let us together encourage one
another with these words, "Come and dine."

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-is-most-glorified-in-us-when-we-are-most-satisfied-in-him> Pastor John Piper celebrates this idea in his sermon. He explains the thought in his book, *Desiring God*.

² "The term is from the Greek *parabole*, meaning "comparison" or "putting beside" which was derived from *paraballein*, meaning 'to throw beside.'" <http://www.enotes.com/literary-terms/parable>

³ "This is a remarkable text, and much has been said on it: but there is a beauty in it which, I think, has not been noticed. Mercy and peace are on one side; truth and righteousness on the other. Truth requires righteousness; mercy calls for peace. They meet together on the way; one going to make inquisition for sin, the other to plead for reconciliation. Having met, their differences on certain considerations, not here particularly mentioned, are adjusted; and their mutual claims are blended together in one common interest; on which peace and righteousness immediately embrace. Thus, righteousness is given to truth, and peace is given to mercy. Now, Where did these meet? In Christ Jesus. When were they reconciled? When he poured out his life on Calvary." *Adam Clarke's Commentary* on Psalm 85:10.