

Meals with Jesus in Luke¹

“In approximately one-fifth of the sentences in Luke’s Gospel and in Acts, meals play a conspicuous role.”
Markus Barth, Rediscovering the Lord’s Supper, p. 71.

Text	Meal	Participants	Significance	Teaching Moment
5:27-39	Banquet at Levi’s House	Tax Collectors and Sinners	Evangelism	“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”
7:36-50	Dinner at Simon the Pharisee’s House	Pharisees, Guests and the Sinful Woman	Reconciliation	“Your sins are forgiven.”
9:10-17	Breaking Bread at Bethsaida	5000 Males	Mission/Service	“You give them something to eat.”
10:38-42	Hospitality at the House of Martha	Disciples	Discipleship	“Mary has chosen what is better.”
11:37-54	Noon Meal at a Pharisee’s House	Pharisees and Teachers	Inner Life	“You clean the outside of the cup, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.”
14:1-24	Sabbath dinner at a Pharisee’s House	Pharisees and Their Friends	Invitation to All	“When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”
19:1-10	Hospitality at the House of Zacchaeus	Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector, and Others	Salvation for All	“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
22:7-38	Breaking Bread at the Passover Meal	The Twelve, Including Judas	Thanksgiving	“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them.”
24:13-35	Breaking Bread at Emmaus	Two Disciples	The Living One	Jesus was “made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”
24:36-53	Supper with the Disciples	The Eleven and Others with Them	The Missionary Community	“You are witnesses of these things.”

¹ I constructed this chart and adapted much of the material from Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist in the Gospel of Luke* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).

The Meaning of the Meals in Luke

Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, p. 113, summarizes their meaning in four points:

- 1) Jesus is present, taking an active role whether as guest or host. He is concerned about those at table with him and serves them, responding to their need for food, healing, teaching, or correction.
- 2) He welcomes all, sinner or righteous, poor or rich. He does not fear being compromised by the company he keeps; and he overturns human expectations by expressing his own unique values.
- 3) His meals are harbingers of the banquet to be shared in the kingdom of God. Those who share God's gifts now and hope in his promises must not let complacency rob them of the fulfillment.
- 4) The light of Easter helps the Christian community understand Scripture's witness to Jesus; the disciples recognize the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread."

Two themes, though included above, deserve particular stress:²

- 1) Table service is a symbol for community service. Table etiquette demanded that at formal dinners there should be servants to serve. Feet were washed by servants, the table was served by servants, the tables were cleared by the servants, etc. In Luke this service is shared by the community as a whole for the community as a whole. The disciples are fellow-servants, and Jesus himself is a servant at the table (Luke 22:25-27). The servants are served at the table of the Lord by Jesus himself in the eschatological banquet (Luke 12:35-37).
- 2) Table fellowship is a symbol of community fellowship. The table designates a special relationship between those who sit at the same table. Jesus eats with sinners and tax collectors (Luke 5:27-32; 7:34; 15:2). He goes to the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9). The table is for the oppressed, handicapped and disenfranchised (Luke 7:22; 14:12-14). A banquet is thrown for the returning prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Will the elder brother join in the celebration meal? Will the Pharisees have table fellowship with tax collectors in the kingdom of God?

² Dennis E. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106.4 (1987), 613-38.