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Dining with the King: Jesus Dines with Sinners

How Banquets in the Bible reveal Salvation or Judgment

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"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ***(Matthew 8:11, 12)***

In 2Samuel 9 one finds the account of King David showing kindness to a lame descendant of Saul for the sake of his previous relationship to Jonathan, Saul's son. Both Saul and Jonathan were now dead and this lame man, Methphibosheth, was the only remaining descendant: *"The king said, 'Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?' And Ziba said to the king, 'There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet.'"* **(2Samuel 9:3)** Since Saul had been David's mortal enemy, and a king would typically search out descendants of a rival king for the purpose of killing them to assure they would not make a claim to the throne, a call from David to find Methphibosheth would be considered alarming and likely life-threatening.

David's motive was not to kill the lame descendant of Saul but to show God's *hesed* (covenant love, much like the NT term "grace"). Methphibosheth truly had nothing going for him. The lame had no status, and were not invited to dine with kings (or anyone else important). Descendants of a dead rival king had no hope but could expect certain death. Yet David chose to show God's *hesed* to a man who called himself a dead dog: *"Again he prostrated himself and said, 'What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?'"* **(2Samuel 9:8)** Methphibosheth had reason to fear, but in this case there was unexpected blessing for him: *"David said to him, 'Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly.'"* **(2Samuel 9:7)**

Like Methphibosheth, we as Christians have no reason to think we would have status with the King and would be invited to His table, given that we were by nature His enemies: *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* **(Romans 5:10)** It is of great theological interest that banquets are used in the Bible to show the presence or absence (or both) of salvation or judgment. Methphibosheth dined with the king and was not judged as he feared. It is very interesting that in the gospel of Luke, when the self-righteous are rejected from a banquet, the Lord's servants are sent out to bring in the lame (Luke 14:13, 21). If we come with faith in Christ rather than our own supposed worthiness, we are like Methphibosheth and dine with the king.

As we shall see in many passages, the blessing that attends Messianic banquets can also result in judgment for others. In the case of the house of Saul, the judgment had already happened in that he and his lineage had been wiped out. Only Methphibosheth received the blessing.

The concept of being judged or blessed at a banquet fits a pattern that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The Bible is full of banquets that result in simultaneous blessing or judgment. In this article I will provide a survey of many of these passages to identify the pattern. Having shown a consistent pattern, we will then return to 1Corinthians 11 and see if we can be specific about what Paul was warning against and make application of it.

Mishteh in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word *mishteh* means a feast or banquet associated with a special occasion, often associated with wine. This is from the Dictionary of Biblical Languages under "*mishteh*": "meal, feast, banquet (i.e., an eating event either as a common meal or usually a special festive dinner, often including much drinking of wine").[1] But what has been overlooked by Biblical scholars is the fact that accompanying these events in Scripture are always divisions between people, where some are blessed and others are cursed. These incidents are found throughout the Scriptures and are frequent in the Gospels. This concept of simultaneous blessing and judgment at a banquet or feast is a main Biblical theme, and we will see how central it is to the message of the gospel. The pattern of *mishteh* is amazingly consistent throughout the Old Testament.

For example, consider the first use of *mishteh* in the Bible:

> *Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. And he said, "Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, and*

> *spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." They said however, "No, but we shall spend the night in the square." Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast [mishteh] for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.* **(Genesis 19:1-3)**

Here Lot entertained the angels by throwing a *mishteh*. We know exactly what happened on the occasion of this *mishteh*: Lot and his family were saved, and Sodom was destroyed. These were starkly different outcomes.

The term *mishteh* is used 46 times in the Old Testament, with 19 of those occurring in the book of Esther. In every case we find the same pattern of salvation and judgment dramatically revealed. The entire book of Esther is about the judgment of wicked Haman and the salvation of Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews. Haman's pride and hatred of Mordecai led to his demise on the occasion of a *mishteh*. Conversely, Mordecai received the honor that Haman desired for himself. Much more can be said about Esther, but the book contains stark examples of judgment and salvation happening at its various banquets.

Going back to early Genesis we see the second use of the term *mishteh* in the Bible:

> *And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast* [*mishteh*] *on the day that Isaac was weaned. Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac."* **(Genesis 21:8)**

In that incident Isaac was named the heir of the promise, and Ishmael and Hagar were sent away. There is a division, with the blessing going to one and not the other.

In Genesis 40:16-22 Joseph had interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker while all were in prison. Then Pharaoh threw a dinner party. At Pharaoh's *mishteh* the cupbearer was restored to his job as Joseph predicted, and the baker was hanged.

1Samuel 25:2-42 contains the narrative of wicked Nabal and his virtuous wife Abigail. Nabal refused to show hospitality to David's men, and David vowed to destroy Nabal and his men. Abigail heard about this and bearing much food came out to greet David and intercede with him on behalf of her wicked husband. David accepted her request and spared her husband. Then in 1Samuel 25:36, Nabal held a *mishteh*. The next day Abigail told Nabal about David's threat and her intercession. Ten days later the Lord struck Nabal dead, and Abigail became David's wife soon afterward (1Samuel 25:42). Again, on the occasion of a *mishteh* one person was judged and another blessed.

A similar incident in 2Samuel 3:20-30 describes David's *mishteh* with Abner, with Abner being killed soon after it (2Samuel 3:30). This event was the culmination of a process by which David's house was established, and Saul's (represented by Abner) was subjugated.

This theme is consistent throughout the Old Testament. Besides non-literal uses of the term in the wisdom literature of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, whenever there is a *mishteh*, someone (or more) is blessed, saved or exalted, and someone (or more) is cursed, judged, or killed. Sometimes this is more or less obvious, but there are no exceptions. These banquets are occasions where people are separated based on their status entering the banquet—either by their moral character or by their status *vis-à-vis* God's purposes (such as Ishmael). To be invited to a *mishteh* always sounds like a good thing because it is a festive feast with lots of food and wine. But it is only good for some.

The Eschatological *Mishteh*

Given our concern in 1Corinthians about the judgment passages connected to the Lord's Supper, we should study both passages in Isaiah (5:12-17 and 25:6-9) that use the word *mishteh*. We will find that both texts point to a great eschatological *mishteh*. From the Old Testament perspective, eschatological refers to Messianic salvation. From the New Testament perspective, Messianic salvation concerns the first and second advents and the age of grace in which we now live. The Lord's Supper looks back to the work of Christ in the first advent and looks forward to the fullness of salvation at the second coming. There were banquets and parables about banquets during Christ's earthly ministry, and there will be the ultimate banquet at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Communion is a banquet celebrated by the church in the years between those two events. Technically, all of these banquets are "eschatological" from the perspective of Old Testament prophecy.

The first mention of *mishteh* in Isaiah (5:12-17) describes the proud and wealthy holding a *mishteh* for themselves. Massive judgment is the result. In verse 14, Sheol opens its mouth, "*and Jerusalem's splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry and the jubilant within her, descend into it*." The following verses (15-17) describe the contrast; simultaneous judgment and blessing: "*So the common man will be humbled and the man of importance abased, ?the eyes of the proud also will be abased. But the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment, and the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness. Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy*." The outcome of this *mishteh* is that the proud are abased and God is blessed along with His remnant lambs and strangers, the Gentiles. This *mishteh* is eschatological and looks forward to the gospel.

Isaiah 25 contains a profound prophecy that envisions a lavish banquet that the Lord will throw for all people, including Gentiles:

> *And the Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet [mishteh] for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet [mishteh] of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. And on this mountain*

> *He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. 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. And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."* **(Isaiah 25:6-9)**

This passage comes in the midst of a long section about judgment. On the heels of a horrific judgment scene (see Isaiah 24:17-23) comes a promise for a *mishteh* for all people, not just Israel. This passage is pertinent to many of the banquet scenes in the Gospel of Luke. The key issue is that salvation is extended beyond Israel. Gentiles will attend the eschatological banquet.

Key to interpreting the passage is the identity of the "covering" or "veil" that God removes, as well as the timeframe in which it is removed. Here's the problem: If we assume all of this happens simultaneously at His second coming, and the removal of the veil (whatever it is) leads to salvation, then the passage would claim that all Gentiles are saved at His second coming. We know from many other passages that this is not true.

To resolve the problem, some interpreters take the veil to be a shroud that would be placed over a dead body and link its removal to "swallowing" death. Others interpret the veil to be the veil of a mourner who mourns death. Others link it to the veil of the spiritual blindness Paul discusses in 2Corinthians.

I propose that a solution to the problem is to realize that Old Testament prophecy often references aspects of both the first and the second advent in one section. For example, Isaiah 61:1-3 is a messianic prophecy. It includes things that happen at the first advent because Jesus cited part of it in Luke 4:18, 19 and claimed that it was fulfilled at that time (Luke 4:21). But in the middle of the Isaiah prophecy is the phrase, "And the day of the vengeance of our God." Jesus did not cite that part because it will not be fulfilled until the time of the second advent. This sort of composite prophecy is found in many passages, such as the one in Joel that Peter cited on the Day of Pentecost.

That means that the removal of the veil need not apply only to the final end time banquet. It might be something associated with Christ's first coming. We will see that banquets during His days on earth were used to portray salvation and/or judgment that comes based on one's response to Christ. If Gentiles are going to participate in the eschatological banquet at the very end, something has to happen before that so that they would be fit for it. We know that salvation became possible for Gentiles because of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and the proclamation of the gospel to all people.

Some things Paul said in Acts can help us. In Acts 14 he said, "*And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness*" **(Acts 14:16, 17)**. He means that during the time of the Old Covenant, the Gentiles had only general revelation and providence; they did not have God's word given directly to them like the Jews had. In order to be a part of God's people they had to become proselytes and embrace Jewish customs. But later in Acts, Paul tells how this has changed: "*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead*" **(Acts 17:30, 31)**. The "times of ignorance" were the times when they were permitted to go their ways with only general revelation. But when Jesus was raised from the dead (as a sign to all people, Jews and Gentiles), and the message of salvation through faith in Christ was proclaimed to the Gentiles, those times ended. Now the Gentiles have special revelation (the Bible and the gospel proclaimed therein) as well. This is specifically stated in Simeon's Spirit-inspired utterance about Messiah: "*A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel*" **(Luke 2:32)**. It is no longer necessary for them to sit in darkness or become Jewish proselytes.

I believe that this giving of the gospel, the evidence provided by the resurrection of Christ and the possibility of repentance and faith is the removing of the veil spoken of in Isaiah 25:6-9. With Christ's resurrection and its proclamation as part of the gospel message, Gentiles now have a clear and valid invitation to the eschatological banquet. This invitation was foreshadowed in Luke in connection with various banquets and parables about banquets. The actual banquet that Isaiah predicted does not happen until the marriage supper of the Lamb. But the participants of the banquet are being invited throughout the years from Pentecost onward. Those who respond in faith are assured of participating when the final banquet is held. Those who reject the invitation will participate in the horrific events that are predicted in Isaiah 24:7-23 instead. We will see that when we get to the book of Revelation later.

First Advent Eschatological Banquets

In the New Testament, the Hebrew *mishteh* idea is expressed in various terms, often *gamos* (wedding feast) or *deipnon* (dinner or banquet). Sometimes the idea is expressed by phrases such as "reclining at the table" (Luke 5:29; 7:37; 14:15) in passages that have spiritual significance about who is included, blessed, forgiven, or who is portrayed in a bad light (like Pharisees who reject Jesus). Luke has much to say about meals and their spiritual significance. What is not readily apparent to us in our culture, but was obvious to them in theirs, is that whom one ate with revealed their status in society. Luke

provides many statements by Spirit-inspired persons that foreshadowed reversal of status. For example, consider this statement from Mary's Magnificat: "*He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty-handed*" (**Luke 1:52, 53**). Often meals are used to illustrate this as unexpected ones are blessed and those who thought they had status *vis-a-vis* the kingdom are rebuked by Messiah.

Luke sets this theme early in his gospel where Jesus dines with Levi:

> *And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax-gatherers and other people who were reclining at the table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"* (**Luke 5:29-32**)

This event sets the stage for themes that permeate Luke/Acts, such as repentance, forgiveness, and the eschatological banquet where unexpected people eat with the righteous in the kingdom of God.

A similar event happens in Luke 7:36-50 where a Pharisee invited Jesus to recline at the table. A "woman of the city who was a sinner" enters the banquet and anoints Jesus' feet, wets them with her tears, and wipes them with her hair. Her actions serve as a rebuke to the host, who in their culture was expected to greet his guest with a kiss, anoint his head with olive oil (the woman anointed his feet with costly perfume, which was unheard of) and wash his feet.[2] Jesus said that the woman's lavish actions contrasted the Pharisee's lack of hospitality. Jesus said that the woman's sins had been forgiven and then said, "Your faith has saved you" (verse 50). One person is rebuked, the other saved at a meal setting. This is in keeping with the *mishteh* idea from the Old Testament.

In Luke 13:26-30 the idea of the eschatological banquet is combined with the theme of reversal. Some people will claim that they have a relationship (status) with Jesus because they "ate and drank in His presence." But Jesus will not acknowledge that and say, "I do not know where you are from, depart from me" (verse 27). But the shocking thing (to the Jewish leadership of Jesus' day) is who will attend the eschatological banquet: "*There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out. And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God*" (**Luke 13:28, 29**). Unexpected people will be included, and expected ones will be excluded. We will see from Luke 14 that these unexpected people are the outcasts of Israel—and even Gentiles.

Luke 14:1-24 contains a series of teachings that happen during a Sabbath meal with a "ruler of the Pharisees." The dinner [the Greek word *deipnon* is found four times in the section and *gamos* once] serves as an opportunity for Jesus to teach about the proper attitudes that would be pleasing to God; attitudes of humility and willingness to extend invitations to those who cannot repay (verses 10 – 14). The people who think they have status and wish to gain more of it are those likely to lose it.

But Luke returns to his theme of reversals, illustrated by the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-24.[3] Still with the ruler of the Pharisees at the Sabbath meal, someone exclaims, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God" (verse 15). According to Kenneth Bailey, this exclamation has an implied, expected response that would be like this: "O Lord, may we be among the righteous and be counted without blemish, worthy to sit with the men of renown on the great day."[4] But Jesus offers no such invocation, but rather a parable. In the parable, a man invited many to a *deipnon* or banquet. To do this required two invitations: the first to determine the number of guests, and the second when the banquet was ready to be served. The two-part invitation was necessary in order for the host to determine what livestock he needed to slaughter in order to feed the number of guests who responded to the first invitation. Bailey explains: "Once the countdown starts, it cannot be stopped. The appropriate animal is killed and must be eaten that night. The guests who accept the invitation are duty-bound to appear."[5]

So when the guests (literally from the Greek), "from one all," gave excuses at the summons to the banquet (the second invitation), there was an obvious collusion designed to ruin the banquet. Joel Green explains, "Whatever one makes of their excuses, their refusal to join the great dinner is a social strategy the effect of which is the host's defamation."[6] The excuses (examine land already purchased, test yokes of oxen just purchased, and having been married) are obviously false. No one in the Middle East purchases land without having first examined it, no one buys yokes of oxen without first seeing that they can pull together, and after already accepting an invitation to a banquet it is rude to say that one would rather be with his wife.[7]

In the honor/shame society of the time, the expected action of the man who gave the banquet would be to seek retribution against those who conspired to stop the banquet and dishonor the man's name in the village. But instead, in the parable, he does the totally unexpected and unheard of! He invites people who would never be invited to such an event: the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. These are the very people Jesus said that we should invite if we put on a *deipnon* (Luke 14:13). Rather than seeking retribution against those who shamed him, the "master" invites more shame (in the eyes of those in the village) by dining with those of a much lower social status.

But it does not end there! Now the master, having yet room for more, sends his servant out into the highways and hedges to bring to the banquet people

from outside the village. They had to be "compelled" because they would never believe that such an invitation could be for real—it was too good to be true. This never happens. Since the parable does not report the servant actually doing this, it implies in Luke/Acts that this happens in Acts through the mission to the Gentiles.[8] Furthermore, I agree with Bailey that Isaiah 25:6-9 is the proper Old Testament background for understanding the parable of the great banquet.[9] God is going to gather unexpected people for His eschatological *mishteh*.

The parable finishes: "*For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner*" (**Luke 14:24**). The "you" there is plural and is addressed to the guests at the Sabbath meal at which Jesus dined. His message is that those whom they think will be blessed at the end-time Messianic banquet (the people with honored status in their society) will not participate. Clearly Jesus is the one issuing the invitation ("my dinner") and the conspirators who dishonored Him are the Jewish leadership who rejected Him.

Dining with the King

Just before the discussion about meals in this section was Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Luke 13:34, 35). Jesus came to Israel to offer a *mishteh*. At his *mishteh* some were saved (sinners called to repentance) and some were judged (the righteous in their own eyes who thought that they had higher status than the sinners Jesus dined with).

There are other passages that are pertinent and show the same pattern. One is Matthew 22:2-14. In that parable, a king gives a *gamos* (wedding feast) for his son. The invited guests refuse to come and some even killed the king's slaves. So the king destroyed them and set their city on fire. Subsequently the wedding was filled with whoever could be found on the streets. But one guest showed up without proper wedding attire and was cast into outer darkness. Some were judged and others honored by attending the wedding feast of the king.

The last supper is another example of the eschatological meal. This was a Passover meal that Jesus ate with his disciples (Luke 22:13-23). But before it even started, Satan entered Judas (Luke 22:3). Jesus explicitly stated that He would not eat and drink with them like this "until the kingdom of God comes." He refers to the eschatological banquet which is the marriage supper of the Lamb. He also instituted the Lord's Supper: "*And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me*" (**Luke 22:19**). The Lord's Supper is a supper of remembrance and anticipation. In Jesus' bodily absence, disciples remember that He died for their sins, pouring out His blood for their salvation, and that He promised to return to establish the kingdom of God at which time there will be a banquet where those who know Him will feast. But note well that at the last supper some were blessed (the eleven), and another judged (Judas). The *mishteh* pattern continues in this key meal.

The Lord's Supper as a *Mishteh*

In 1Corinthians, Paul discusses the Lord's Supper in chapters 10 and 11. In chapter 10 the issue was improperly assuming that because they partook of the Lord's Supper their status with God was safe—even if they also went to the pagan feasts (meals dedicated to other gods). To counter that false assurance Paul makes an analogy from Israel's history:

> *and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.* (**1Corinthians 10:3-6**)

Paul's point is that having "spiritual food and drink" (his analogy with the Lord's Supper) did not keep the Israelites from God's judgment when they committed idolatry, so neither will participating in the Lord's Supper keep the Corinthian Christians from God's judgment if they continued in idolatry. If I am correct in my thesis that the Lord's Supper is an example of a *mishteh* (*deipnon* is the Greek word translated "supper" in 1Corinthians 11), then we would expect that those who participate will either be blessed or judged depending on their attitudes and spiritual condition going into it.

To confirm that Paul had participating in the Lord's Supper and pagan meals associated with false deities in mind, he makes it specific later in this chapter:

> *No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.* (**1Corinthians 10:20, 21**)

They had a serious problem with false assurance. Earlier in this chapter Paul also made a baptism analogy with the wilderness wanderers who were subsequently judged (1Corinthians 10:1, 2). They are warned that if they think the fact that they are baptized and have the Lord's Supper means they therefore have right standing with God no matter how they behaved—they are deceived and may end up with the same status as those who were judged in the wilderness.

This brings us to the topic at hand: What does Paul mean by "eats and drinks judgment to himself"? To understand that, in light of the *mishteh* idea, let us examine the issues Paul has with the Corinthian misuse of the Lord's Supper. Consider this part of Paul's rebuke to them:

> *But in giving this instruction, I do*

> *not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper,* (**1Corinthians 11:17-20**)

What we will see is that the Corinthian abuse of the Lord's *deipnon* "banquet" is along the very lines of the abuses of the eschatological banquets Jesus attended during His earthly ministry. In Luke there were divisions at the meal along sociological lines where the poor were excluded. But in His role of One who brought reversal, Jesus excluded the social elite (those worthy in their own minds) from what He called "my *deipnon*" (Luke 14:24).

The Corinthians had divisions and factions. In this section, Paul deals with divisions in the church at the Lord's Supper. Paul says "come together" and "come together as a church" in this section to show that Communion is supposed to be a meal that reminds us of our unity as the body of Christ. "Come together as a church" and "divisions" are contradictory. But the reason for these divisions is "so that those who are approved may become evident."

At a *mishteh* there is always a division between those who are blessed, saved and approved and those who are cursed, judged and cast out. We have seen that pattern from the Old Testament and through the gospels. Here we see it in another eschatological banquet—the Lord's Supper. Approved (*dokimos*) has a range of meanings such as "genuine, honored and approved by testing." He says that there must (*dei* which implies a divine necessity) be divisions for the purpose of identifying those who are genuine (*dokimos*). These divisions, according to Gordon Fee, "separate true believers from those who were false."[10] In verse 28 it says that a man should examine (*dokimazo*_ the verb form of "*dokimos*") himself to avoid coming under judgment.

The necessary division of which Paul speaks is that between those who are genuine and those who are not. The means of testing is the examination of attitudes that motivate actions. The result is a division between genuine Christians and those with false assurance. The divisions they (not God) create are between the rich and honored and the poor and dishonored. The result is very much like the parables in Luke: those who think they are worthy and deserving special honor are the ones who will be judged, while those who know themselves to be unworthy are saved and blessed.

We can see the nature of their wrongful division in the next section:

> *for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.* (**1Corinthians 11:21, 22**)

Their divisions were along sociological lines, much like those we saw in the parables. Fee explains how the practices of the time likely contributed to this:

> First, since the church gathered for such meals in the homes of the rich, most likely the host was also the patron of the meal. Second, archeology has shown rather conclusively that the dining room (the triclinium) in such homes would scarcely accommodate many guests; the majority therefore would eat in the atrium (the somewhat larger entry "courtyard"), which would still seat only about 30 to 50 guests on the average. . . . In a class-conscious society such as Roman Corinth would have been, it would be sociologically natural for the host to invite those of his/her own class to eat in the triclinium, while the others would eat in the atrium. Furthermore, it is probable that the language "one's own supper" (v. 21) refers to the eating of "private meals" by the wealthy . . . perhaps privileged portions that were not made available to the "have nots."[11]

Paul's strong indictment is that they "shame those who have nothing." The contrast between "hungry/drunk" is probably to express extremes: "The one extreme is to receive nothing to eat, thus to 'be hungry;' the other extreme is to be gorged on both food and wine, thus to 'be drunk.'"[12] The problem was social polarization in the church.

Paul's terminology reveals that the problem was the same status consciousness and social stratification that Jesus confronted in the Pharisees. The terms "private meal"; "hungry"; "despise"; "shame" and "have nothing" make clear that some were being treated with dishonor and put to shame. In an honor/shame society, to "shame those who have nothing" is a serious blow to the unity of the church. It would be to, on economic grounds, withhold honor from someone Christ has added to the church.

The gravity of this attitude can also be seen when we consider what Jesus taught: "*But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous*" (**Luke 14:13**). This same group is invited to the master's banquet in Luke 14:21. Jesus invited certain people to His dinner (*deipnon* here—eschatological banquet), and the Corinthians who were in charge of the banquet despised and shamed those whom Jesus brought in through His own shed blood.

Let us move on[13] to the judgment section that is so often misunderstood:

> *Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself,*

> *and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.* **(1Corinthians 11:27-29)**

The words of institution (vv. 23-26) reminded the Corinthians that communion is for remembrance of the price Christ paid to make them part of the church. Those words also reminded them that this is an eschatological meal that exists between the two advents that looks forward to eating with the Lord in the kingdom of God. But some Corinthians abused that meal. In so doing, they put themselves in a position where, rather than being saved by the once-for-all shed blood, they are damned by incurring the guilt of those who rejected Christ and demanded His crucifixion. In other words, they have come to a *mishteh* not properly clothed and will be cast into outer darkness if they do not repent. At a *mishteh* some are saved, and some are judged. A *deipnon* in this context is the New Testament equivalent of a *mishteh.*

To avoid this horrible fate, Paul cautions them to examine themselves. This passage has been so misused and misunderstood that many think it means the exact opposite of what Paul has in mind. How many saints, aware of their unworthiness, aware of how terrible sin is and that they still have it, have trembled before the Lord they know to be holy, and have demurred from communion in fear of coming under judgment? They examine themselves and decide they are not worthy. Ironically, others who may very well be the ones in danger of judgment, full of self-assurance—like Haman, assuming that of course they are the ones the Lord would want to honor—with no concern about God's holiness, partake with full confidence.

Here is the irony in this: those who are sure they are unworthy are the ones the Lord Himself has invited to the eschatological banquet. Spiritually, they know themselves to be the crippled, lame and blind or so far out on the highways and hedges that they would never be invited to a Messianic banquet. The offer of grace and forgiveness is so fantastic that they must be urged to understand that it is real. These, the Lord's little flock, are those who are the approved (v. 19). In contrast, those who are sure they are worthy because they (like Simon in Luke 7) think they have something going for them are the ones who are eating and drinking judgment to themselves. The one group constitutes the Mordecai-type persons at the *mishteh* and the other, the Haman types.

The phrase, "does not judge the body rightly" needs comment. Many have linked this to the words of institution rather than the larger context of Paul's correction to this church. By doing so, they come up with the meaning that some do not realize they are "eating the body of Christ in this meal."[14] But the context shows that Paul is not speaking about bread being Christ's body or about the significance of the bread symbolizing Christ's physical body. He is speaking of their failure to discern that the church is the body of Christ and must be treated as such. On the term "judge" in verse 29, Fee comments: "No other forms of this verb would be appropriate for expressing the need properly to take cognizance of the whole church that is seated as one body at this meal."[15] The church is the body of Christ, purchased by His blood. We need to determine whether we are really part of it now, before it is too late, and we are "condemned along with the world" (v. 32).

Seeing the Lord's Supper as an eschatological *mishteh* that fits the pattern found in both the Old and New Testaments makes the judgment passage become clear. When one of these banquets is held some are saved, and some are damned. The status of the person going to the banquet determines the outcome. The ones the Lord has chosen, most often those with little going for them in this world (see 1Corinthians 1:26-29; "the foolish things that shame the wise"), are, much to their surprise, honored, blessed, and saved. The religious elite who think the banquet is their prerogative because of their self-perceived higher status are those who come under judgment.

Peter Stumbles over Table Fellowship

Galatians 2:11-14 Paul openly rebukes Peter for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentile Christians. That is, he began "holding himself aloof" from the Gentile Christians by not eating with them. Paul took this very seriously because refusing to eat with fellow Christians was to dishonor them and imply that they do not belong in the church. Peter shamed the Gentiles whom Christ had accepted into His church and invited to His dinner. They were good enough to eat the eschatological meal with Christ, but not good enough to eat with Peter. Thankfully, Peter repented of this attitude as seen in Acts 15:7-11 where he defended the practice of not requiring Gentile believers to keep the Law of Moses. Earlier, Peter had been criticized for eating with Gentile believers (Acts 11:3). So the incident in Galatians was a lapse and God used Paul to restore Peter to the true implications of the gospel.

The Final *Mishteh*

The marriage supper of the Lamb is the great eschatological banquet predicted in the passages we examined in Luke. Jesus promised to eat again with the disciples in the kingdom of God. He promised that those He would gather from all over the world would dine with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets. This is the ultimate banquet of Isaiah 25:6-9 that happens in connection with judgment on the world.

The marriage supper of the Lamb is described in this passage:

> "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write,*

> *'Blessed are those who are invited to the* ***marriage supper of the Lamb****.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."* **(Revelation 19:7-9)**

Only those who responded to the invitation to come to Christ for salvation will participate in that great banquet (*deipnon*). Unlike the ones before, where some who came are blessed and others judged, all at this banquet are blessed. But that does not mean there will be no judgment.

There will be another banquet (also called *deipnon* in the Greek) that is described in the same chapter of Revelation:

> *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for* ***the great supper of God****, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."* **(Revelation 19:17, 18)**

In horrible irony, those who either refused the invitation to Jesus' eschatological meal or showed up without wedding clothes end up at the "great supper of God." They are the meal!

In the end two meals are held, separately but simultaneously: the marriage supper of the Lamb and the great supper of God. Our status and spiritual condition determines the outcome. We need to decide now which *deipnon* we wish to attend!

CONCLUSION

The amazing continuity of the *mishteh* theme in the Bible shows, among other things, the inspiration of Scripture. The number of authors over so many centuries, from Moses to John, could hardly have dreamed up the idea of embedding this material from beginning to end with complete continuity. This is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Bible.

There is a gospel message in the Biblical *mishteh*. Being invited to meet God at a *mishteh* could be a good thing or it could be a very horrible thing. God is holy, and if we show up at the *mishteh* with our own clothing rather than proper wedding garments (the imputed righteousness of Christ), we will be cast into outer darkness. It is only good news for those who are right with God when God throws a *mishteh*. The judgment passage connected to the Lord's Supper makes that clear. It is possible that we could be eating and drinking judgment unto ourselves.

So how do we know we are ready? We must see Jesus for who He is: the eternal Logos who existed as God and with God for all eternity who came into this world, born of a virgin. He lived without sin. Christ in His incarnation is fully human and fully God. He died for sins, once for all, and was bodily raised on the third day. He bodily ascended into heaven. We must repent and believe in Him, because if we think we have right status with God because of who we are, we will be excluded from the marriage supper of the Lamb. If we know that we are wretched sinners deserving God's wrath, not deserving to be honored at a banquet with the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, trembling at the fact that we are sinners and unworthy, hardly able to believe that the Lord would even invite us to His banquet, but trusting only in His blood that washed away our sins, then we shall recline in the kingdom with the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and saints from all ages. Otherwise there is the supper of God, which we should avoid at all costs.

End Notes

1. Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLH 5492, #1). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
2. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, combined edition 1983) 1-21; Bailey gives a detailed analysis of this section, describing the customs of the day.
3. Ibid. pp 88-113 contains a tremendous description of the customs of the day that must be understood for this parable to make sense.
4. Ibid. 92.
5. Ibid. 94.
6. Joel B. Green "The Gospel of Luke" in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 559.
7. Bailey, 95-99 gives detailed explanations about why each of these excuses is designed to purposely insult the person who invited them.
8. Bailey 101-109 makes a strong case for this interpretation.
9. Ibid. 89, 90.
10. Gordon Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" in *New International Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 538.
11. Ibid. 533, 534.
12. Ibid. 543.
13. It is outside the scope of this article to discuss the words of institution. Gordon Fee's commentary on that section is excellent. (Fee, 545-558).
14. Fee, 562-564.
15. Ibid. 564.

Critical Issues Commentary

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