

Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.



Luke 15:1-2

In Luke 15:1-2 a complaint, ***“this man welcomes sinners and eats with them”*** turns out to be the very heart of the gospel: a God who seeks the lost and sets a table for them. From Zacchaeus in a tree to breakfast on the beach after the resurrection, Jesus meets people as they are, not when they’ve earned it, and his presence transforms them. Because Jesus is alive, the invitation still stands today: come as you are, take a seat at the table, and discover a grace that changes everything.

INTRODUCTION: THE COMPLAINT THAT BECAME THE GOSPEL

Happy Easter Sunday!

It’s great to see you today. I see some of you every single week, and others of you – well, I hope you’ve had a great summer. One of things I love about Christmas and Easter is getting to meet new friends, so if this is one of the Sundays you’ve picked to come to church, you’ve picked a great one, it’s good to keep your mum happy and come along, and you also get to hear about an empty tomb, which is the best topic I get to preach about, because it’s a story that’s so outrageous that if you’re hearing it for the first time, it really is out of this world!

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

I don't actually want to start with the resurrection today, but we'll get there. I want to start by reading a complaint. It's not a complaint from any of you, I mean you're such great people I never get complaints from you (wink wink), but there are complaints in the Bible, so they are a real thing.

The complaint we're going to look at today is found in Luke Chapter 15 Verses 1-2; acknowledging that we're jumping ahead in the Gospel of Luke and this verse may well come up again towards the end of the year as part of the series that we're taking a break from today. However, this verse is relevant for us at Easter. Here it is, **"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered [i.e. complained], 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"**

These are two innocuous verses that are actually filled with BIG significance.

In Verse 1, the tax collectors and sinners were doing that same as what large crowds of people were doing at that time. We've seen in recent weeks that Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, and crowds were surrounding him as he walked and talked. But interestingly in this passage Luke identifies who exactly was in the crowd – tax collectors and sinners. In Verse 2, the Pharisees, who were a sect of super religious Jewish leaders, and the teachers of the law go one step further, identifying that not only are tax collectors and sinners' part of the crowd, but that Jesus welcomes people like them, sinners, and even eats with them.

That comment wasn't meant in a tone of *'What a good bloke Jesus is'*, it's scandalous to them. Their comment was intended as a slur on Jesus. The religious establishment looked at Jesus and said, *"Look at the company he keeps. This man is a disgrace."*

If we were to keep reading through Luke Chapter 15, as we will later in the year, we'd see that Jesus heard that criticism, and responded by telling three of the greatest stories/parables ever told:

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

1. The story of the lost sheep in Verse 3-7.
2. The story of the lost coin in Verses 8-10, and
3. The story of the prodigal son in Verses 11-32.

Three stories about a God who goes looking for what's missing. Three stories that all end in rejoicing and celebrating when what was lost is found and comes home.

Here's a powerful thing:

The complaint of the Pharisees in Verse 2 becomes the outline of the entire gospel.

Jesus eats with sinners and goes after the lost. Really, this is the whole point of the gospel.

For those of you look at wider themes in the Bible (like me!), there are around 13 occasions where Jesus literally sits with people around a table for a meal, the vast majority of guests being people who the Pharisees and the teachers of the law would find disgraceful. I've put a table (excuse the pun) of these meals as an appendix in my notes of this message on our website, cross-referencing all four gospels so you can see at a glance which stories are shared, and which are unique.

An observation worth noting is that Luke is by far the richest gospel for table scenes — he has at least six unique meals not found in the other gospels. This is such a big deal that some call Luke the "*gospel of meals*." This pattern is deliberate because for Luke, the table is where Jesus consistently crosses social boundaries, eating with sinners, the despised, and the outcasts.

THE TABLE IN FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE

To understand why this was such a scandal, you need to understand what a shared meal meant in the ancient world. In first-century Jewish culture, eating with someone was not just a social nicety.

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

It was not, *'We should catch up for brunch sometime.'* A shared table was a statement. It said, *'We're the same kind of people. I vouch for you. You belong in my world.'*

The Pharisees were meticulous about this. They had extensive rules about who you could eat with, what food was acceptable, how food was prepared, and whose crockery you used. Eating with the wrong people made you ritually impure. It contaminated you.

And then, as Luke does by doing Luke-ish things, along comes Jesus, who eats with people like tax collectors, who weren't just a bit dodgy with their expenses, they were Jewish men who had bought the right from Rome to extract taxes from their own people, and who pocketed the difference. They were traitors. They were corrupt. They were collaborators with an occupying empire. They were the most hated people in first-century Palestine.

- And Jesus has dinner with them. Welcomes them around his table.
- Jesus also eats with prostitutes. I mean, ... he welcomes them around his table.
- Jesus eats with lepers, and lepers were people whose impurity meant they were excluded from society. He dines in the home of Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6) which was about as religiously edgy as it gets.
- He even eats three times with the Pharisees themselves, although those meals tend to get a bit tense because Jesus keeps healing people at the table, on the Sabbath, and telling parables that make the hosts quite uncomfortable.
- He feeds five thousand strangers on a hillside, acting as host to a crowd that he's never met. And then, four thousand more, because ... why stop at one group?
- And at the very end of his life, on the night before he dies, he sits down for a Passover meal with twelve disciples, including one who will betray him, one who will deny him three times, and nine who will basically run for their lives. And he breaks bread and says, ***"This is my body, broken for you."***

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

If you follow Jesus through the gospels, the table is not incidental. The table is the sermon. The table is the theology. Every meal is a statement about who belongs in God's kingdom, and the answer keeps scandalising everyone who thought they knew.

ZACCHAEUS: THE MAN IN THE TREE

Let's zoom in on one meal that we see in Luke Chapter 19 (again you may hear about this in the next year). Jesus is walking through Jericho. It's a busy road, crowds pressing in on all sides. And up in a tree, there's a man named Zacchaeus, who is not just a tax collector, he's the *chief* tax collector. He's the head of the whole operation in Jericho. He's the Boss, the Godfather, the Capofamiglia. He's got rich, very rich, off the misery of his own people. He is, in the eyes of everyone watching, the worst kind of person. He's like ... well, who are you thinking of?

And he's up a tree because he's short. He can't see over the crowd, and here's what gets me every time, he just wants to see Jesus. That's all. He's not asking for anything. He's climbed a sycamore tree just to catch a glimpse. Jesus stops under the tree and looks up. ***"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."*** Not, ***"Zacchaeus, I've heard about you, and if you can demonstrate some genuine remorse and make repayments to the people you've wronged and attend a six-week course on ethical financial practices, we can discuss a meal sometime next month."***

Just simply ... ***"Zacchaeus. Come down. I'm coming around to your house today."***

The crowd mutters [complains!], ***"He's gone to be the guest of a sinner."*** Same complaint, different crowd.

While we don't get the details of the conversation, something happens at that meal, but whatever Jesus said over dinner, it wrecked Zacchaeus. He stands up mid-meal and announces that he's giving half his wealth to the poor and repaying everyone he's cheated at four times the rate. That's

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

not a small thing. That's financial ruin willingly embraced. That's a man who has spent his whole adult life taking, and who, in the presence of Jesus, over a shared meal, discovers that he wants to give everything back.

Jesus says, "**Today salvation has come to this house.**" Jesus doesn't say that salvation will come when he's sorted himself out. He doesn't say that salvation is available once he's proven himself. Jesus said salvation is here. Today. Now. At this table. With this sinner.

Here's the point ... **Jesus didn't wait for Zacchaeus to become worthy of an invitation. He invited himself. He showed up. And the showing up changed everything.**

THE BREAKFAST ON THE SHORE

Now let's get to Easter Sunday and talk about what the disciples have just been through. They've watched Jesus get arrested, tried and convicted. They watched him crucified. They watched him die. And most of them weren't there.

The resurrection happens (praise Jesus!). Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, then to the disciples behind locked doors, and then (in Luke Chapter 24) to two people on the road to Emmaus who don't recognise him until, and this is consistent, he sits down and breaks bread with them. And their eyes are opened. **The risen Christ is known in the breaking of bread around the table.**

When we look into the Gospel of John, Chapter 21, we then see that the disciples have gone back to Galilee and back to their career as fishermen, because what else do you do when the world has been turned upside down and you don't know what's next? They fish all night. They catch nothing. At dawn, a figure on the shore calls out, "**Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.**" They do, and the net comes up full. And someone [Peter] says: "**It's the Lord.**" When they get to shore, there is Jesus, standing behind a BBQ of burning coals with fish already cooking

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

and fresh bread standing by. Jesus' [profound] words in Verse 12 resonate with the theme we've been developing, **"Come and have breakfast."** And they sat down to eat breakfast with the resurrected Christ.

The risen Lord of the universe. Victor over death. Death has been defeated. Sin has been dealt with. A new reality has begun. The one in whom all things hold together is alive. And his first move is to cook breakfast for his friends who abandoned him. He doesn't say, **"We need to have a conversation about your behaviour over the last few days."** He doesn't say, **"I notice none of you were at the cross."** He doesn't say, **"I'm going to need some time."** He makes breakfast. He hosts those who had failed him. He feeds those who had fled. He meets the people who were the most ashamed to see him, and he meets them at a table.

The resurrection didn't end Jesus' habit of eating with the wrong people. The first meal of his resurrected life was with people who had denied him, abandoned him, and who hid in a locked room. He cooked for them anyway.

This isn't just a metaphor for new beginnings. The disciples claimed that a man who was publicly executed was physically alive again three days later, and that claim turned frightened, hiding people into witnesses who years later would go on to die for what they were witnessing.

THE POINT (AND WHY YOU'RE HERE TODAY)

There are probably a few people here who don't normally come to church. It's Easter, I get it. Maybe there are some here who are genuinely curious or perhaps a bit sceptical, you may not be sure if any of this is true, as in public forums I get accused of believing in fairy tales.

If you wonder what Jesus is like - here's what the gospels say: He shows up. He seeks out. He invites himself. He doesn't wait for you to get cleaned up or sorted out or become the kind of person who deserves a seat at the table. **The table is the thing. The meal is the offer.**

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

Think about who Jesus ate with:

- *A tax collector who had made himself rich by crushing his own community.*
- *A prostitute who crashed a dinner party and wept on his feet.*
- *A leper who hadn't been allowed inside any respectable home in years.*
- *A woman who had been married five times and was living with a man she wasn't married to.*
- *Twelve disciples who, at the moment of crisis, ran away.*

None of them were in a fit state for dinner with a holy man. None of them had earned the invitation. None of them could justify a seat at the table by what they'd done or who they were.

Jesus invited himself anyway.

At Easter, the resurrection is not an abstract theological claim. It's not just a doctrine to agree with. The resurrection means that this Jesus, this table-inviting, sinner-seeking, breakfast-cooking, show-up-uninvited Jesus, is alive. Not just historically significant. Present. Still extending the same invitation. **"Come and have breakfast." The table welcomes you as you are, but it won't leave you as you are.**

That's the resurrection message. You who are tired, you who are ashamed, you who have been away for a long time, you who don't think you're the right kind of person for this ... come and eat.

CONCLUSION — THE TABLE IS STILL SET

The Pharisees thought they were critiquing Jesus when they said: ***"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*** It turns out they weren't criticising him at all, they were accidentally writing his job description.

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

Every meal in the gospel is a preview of the kingdom, a glimpse of what God's world is supposed to look like. A table where the wrong people are welcome. A host who goes looking for the lost. A party thrown not for the well-behaved, but for the returned.

Today, at this table, the communion table, the Lord's table, the same thing is happening. The risen Christ will be known, just as he was on the Emmaus Road, in the breaking of bread. And the invitation is the same one Jesus gave to Zacchaeus up that sycamore tree, to Matthew in his tax office, and to his exhausted disciples on a beach at dawn:

“Come. Sit down. I've been expecting you.”

Today, we can say yes to the invitation to sit with the resurrected Christ, maybe for the first time, or maybe for a repeat meal, knowing that Jesus desires intimacy with all who will respond to his invitation to know him, to thrive in him, and to make him known.

This week, practically, might we all sit at a table and see Jesus with us, in the ordinary, in the joys and sorrows, knowing that life and faith, done together, is often around a table over a good red and some choice bread.

The message of Easter is this: because Jesus is alive, the table is still open.

He is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Amen.

Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.

Meals in the Gospels

	Details	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Notes
1	Meal at Matthew / Levi's house	9:10–13	2:15–17	5:29–32		Shared by 3; Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners
2	Feeding of 5,000 (reclining to eat)	14:19	6:39–40	9:14–15	6:10	All 4 gospels; crowd seated/reclined on grass
3	Feeding of 4,000	15:35–36	8:6			Matthew & Mark only
4	Meal at Simon the Pharisee's house			7:36–50*		Luke only; woman anoints Jesus' feet
5	Mary & Martha's home			10:38–42*		Luke only; Martha serves, Mary sits at Jesus' feet
6	Meal at a Pharisee's house (Sabbath)			11:37–54*		Luke only; Jesus rebukes Pharisees at table
7	Meal at a leading Pharisee's house			14:1–24*		Luke only; healing, parable of great banquet
8	Meal at Zacchaeus's house			19:1–10*		Luke only; "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."
9	Anointing at Bethany (Simon the Leper)	26:6–13	14:3–9			Matthew & Mark; woman anoints Jesus' head
10	Anointing at Bethany (Mary of Bethany)				12:1–8	John only; Mary anoints feet; Lazarus present
11	The Last Supper	26:20–29	14:17–25	22:14–38	13:1–30	All 4 gospels; the defining table scene
12	Road to Emmaus: breaking bread			24:28–32*		Luke only; post-resurrection; Jesus recognised at table
13	Breakfast on the beach				21:9–13	John only; post-resurrection; Jesus cooks fish and bread

* Stories unique to the Gospel of Luke

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*



Reflecting on Sunday 29th March 2026:

Last week's message was from Luke 12:35-48. Looking back on your week, where have you noticed yourself "sleeping" or losing alertness in the ways you live out your faith, or how have you embraced the challenge to stay tuned in to what the activity that God has for you in the waiting?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Where do you most relate in this message ... someone at the table, someone hesitant to come, or someone watching from a distance? Why?
2. What stands out to you about Jesus inviting himself to Zacchaeus' house before any change had happened?
3. How does the image of Jesus cooking breakfast for those who failed him reshape how you see grace and forgiveness?
4. What would it look like for you this week to "sit at the table" with Jesus - and who might you invite to the table in your own life?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th April 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*



Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. The below article, **Jesus with Sinners at the Table**, further explores the “dinner” scenes found in the Gospels, especially those in which Jesus eats with “sinners.” This article provides a warm, fascinating, and important portrait of Jesus in his earthly life and mission.
<https://credomag.com/2018/01/jesus-with-sinners-at-the-table-2/>
2. Taken from a Catholic perspective, this article called **One Table**, challenges us to explore the invitation that we can offer to others, just as Jesus did.
<https://www.gospel.link/one-table-radical-inclusivity.html>
3. For something a little different get hold of the book, **Food & Faith: A Theology of Eating**, that provides a theological framework for assessing the significance of eating, employing a trinitarian theological lens to evaluate food production and consumption practices as they are being worked out in today's industrial food systems.
<https://www.amazon.com.au/Food-Faith-Theology-Norman-Wirzba/dp/0521146240>